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Canada

Phantoms of Old Forms:
The Gothic Mode in the Dramatic Verse of Tennyson and Browning

by

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DISSERTATION

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2009

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Abstract

My dissertation, “Phantoms of Old Forms: The Gothic Mode in the Dramatic Verse of Tennyson and Browning” situates Alfred Lord Tennyson and Robert Browning within a lineage of writers who experimented with the Gothic mode in dramatic and verse forms. This study is, in the first instance, an experiment in applying a specific strain of Gothic critical theory, one that addresses issues of gender, to canonical literary materials not ordinarily approached in that light. Definitions of the Gothic are notoriously elusive, and this project is not an assertion that the Gothic is always, in all of its manifestations, about gender. Rather, my project draws on a substantial critical history of Gothic literature that identifies gender dynamics within familial relationships as one of many themes within a much broader constellation of Gothic signifiers, though, I would argue, a prominent and important one.

In particular this project seeks to illustrate how those critical strategies utilized with Gothic fiction can be adapted and extended to the interpretation of poetry. In fact, the shape and focus of this topic were formed out of a need to redress Gothic scholarship’s conspicuous, almost exclusive, emphasis on the genre of novelistic fiction with its roots in prose Romance. While new work has appeared on Gothic tales, Gothic serial writing, and Gothic drama, poetry remains the neglected genre in the critical re-historicizing of that literary mode. With this in mind, the project proposes as a test case the poetry of Tennyson and Browning, chiefly major dramatic works that were rather unfavorably received in their day and are still somewhat problematic today. In doing so, it proposes that a “Gothic” critical framework draws out implicit features of such texts that represent a critique of patriarchal stabilities in Victorian social ideology.

In general terms, Tennyson and Browning, though otherwise more different than alike, shared at least four common points of interest, all of which fell under the purview of early Gothic fiction. Both poets are curious about abnormal emotional and psychological states, though Tennyson is more often associated with the former and Browning more often with the latter. Both poets investigate the troubled relationship between individual identity and larger social structures. Both also relate this trouble to dissonance between and among genders, and lastly, both poets experiment with poetic forms that could give critical expression to this nexus of interrelated concerns.

More particularly, this dissertation investigates how these concerns, especially as they pertain to a crisis of masculinity, are expressed through the language and themes of the Gothic with an emphasis on characters who are caught between the dissolving matrices of old power structures and newer, more mobile forms of signification. By utilizing dramatic forms and a Gothic mode to depict these sets of relationships, Tennyson and Browning obliquely critique the evolving social codes through which masculinity was established, recognized, asserted and maintained. The poems that interest me most are the ones that investigate the unraveling of this social “text” within a moment of broader cultural crisis.

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Dedication

For L., E. & O

Wandering between two worlds, one dead, the other powerless to be born.

Matthew Arnold

Preface

In the Winter of 2003, a special issue of *Victorian Poetry* edited by Linda K. Hughes posed the question “Whither Victorian Poetry?” The collection of articles that responded to that question began a dialogue that is still taking place. A common concern in several of the articles was the need for scholars in Victorian poetry to incorporate related contexts of inquiry. For example, Erik Gray notes the “critical tendency in Victorian poetry studies [to] focus on a bounded field, often to the exclusion of the other adjacent slopes” (468). Studies of intertextual relationships between Romanticism and Victorian poetry certainly abound but, as Gray acknowledges, even those designations reveal the openness and boundedness of these fields respectively. Where Romanticism refers to a “European-wide movement in thought and art” that ranges widely across the long nineteenth century without any defined start or end point, to study Victorian poetry “limits the field chronologically, generically and even nationally” (470). Echoing Gray’s concerns, Dino Franco Felluga also warns of studies in Victorian poetry becoming too insular and issues a call for “perverse crossings of genres, periods and theories” (517). This dissertation project and its claim that the Gothic is one of the neglected, yet important, adjacent slopes to Victorian poetry has been, in part, a response to such desiderata. Indeed, it might seem a “perverse crossing” of generic, chronological and theoretical material to conceive of reading through a Gothic lens certain extended innovations in verse by two of Victorian poetry’s most canonical figures. Alfred Tennyson and Robert Browning are rarely even mentioned in relation to English literature’s “Gothic” writers. However, one of the things this dissertation illustrates is the

extent to which a Gothic context can illuminate the literary, cultural and theoretical implications of those well-known dramatic poems.

This project situates Tennyson and Browning within a lineage of writers who invoked a Gothic mode in dramatic and verse forms. My study is, in the first instance, an experiment in applying a specific strain of Gothic critical theory, foregrounding issues of gender, to canonical and generic literary materials not ordinarily approached in that light. More particularly, this project investigates how these thematic concerns, especially as they pertain to moments of threatened and unstable masculinity, are expressed through the language and situations of the Gothic. Its emphasis is on characters caught between their longing for the dissolving matrixes of old signifying practices and their desperate attempts to adapt to newer, more mobile forms of signification. By utilizing Gothicized dramatic forms to depict these sets of relationships, and giving dramatic expression to anxieties and frustrations produced by such changes, Tennyson and Browning obliquely critique the evolving social codes through which masculinity was being established, recognized, asserted and maintained.

The project highlights a major long dramatic poem from each author's corpus of verse, as well as three shorter dramatic monologues by Browning. In doing so, it identifies specific elements of Gothicism that are manifested modally in the poems, and draws out the implicit features of such texts that enable them, by combining Gothic convention with dramatic indirectness, to register an otherwise unwelcome critique of patriarchal stabilities and instabilities in Victorian social ideology. In these general terms, Tennyson and Browning, though otherwise more different than alike, share at least four common points of interest, all of them already familiar tendencies in early Gothic

literature. Both poets are frequently drawn to explore abnormal emotional and psychological states, Tennyson associated more often associated with the former, and Browning more often with the latter. Both poets commonly imply a troubled relationship between individual identity and larger social structures. Both also commonly relate this trouble to dissonance between and among genders. Additionally, both experiment with poetic forms that could – by dramatic projection of utterance – enable indirect critical expression of this nexus of interrelated concerns.

Chapter One accordingly addresses important issues of terminology and scholarly practice in past and present Gothic studies. It re-historicizes my subject generically by directing attention not to the Gothic's well known pre-Victorian roots in prose fiction but, rather, to equally implicated precursors in verse and in dramatic (and melodramatic) forms. In this light the Gothic monologues and monodramas of Tennyson and Browning emerge less as anomalies than as experiments in a distinct literary and theatrical continuity. Chapter One also recovers some essentially forgotten critical voices in early twentieth-century Gothic scholarship where the importance of poetry in the tradition was being acknowledged. Chapter Two examines the first of the dissertation's two pivotal texts: Tennyson's *Maud: A Monodrama*. A specific set of Gothic elements in the poem, including its haunted landscape and a presumably maddened speaker, establish a relationship between a fractured Victorian masculinity and the conflicting social structures that are partly responsible for producing it. Chapter Three shifts focus to the second central text of the dissertation: the sections of Robert Browning's *The Ring and the Book* spoken by Count Guido Franceschini, the pre-eminent figure in a coterie of terrifying male villains Browning invents here and elsewhere. In this character, a Gothic

mode is used to dramatize a man whose abjection from patriarchal social structures initiates a crisis of identity and the violence that ensues in his desperate bid to re-assert a shattered sense of proper masculine selfhood. My fourth and final chapter explores a triptych of shorter Browning poems: “My Last Duchess,” “Porphyria’s Lover” and “Mesmerism.” These monologues portray the paradoxical need for hegemonic masculinity to be shored up by preserving a female reflection of male power even as the acknowledgment of that need, and the shame and fear it produces, must be placed under constant erasure. This aspect of the cultural and psychological origin of the violence of Porphyria’s lover, and of the Duke’s elaborately veiled threats, culminates in “Mesmerism” in eerily obsessive desire for absolute mental and physical control of the necessary female Other. This movement reflects the dream of hegemonic masculinity to erase the roots of violence that support patriarchal ideology, and the inescapable guilt that it produces. Finally, in a brief Afterword, I suggest for future work some other poems that utilize the Gothic for comparable ends.

The overarching framework and critical context for this dissertation is the Gothic literary tradition as variously historicized and interpreted over the past century. Given the term’s seemingly illimitable and protean connotations, Chapter One distinguishes between the Gothic *genre*, an assemblage of thematically related works of prose fiction prominent in the marketplace primarily between the years 1764 and 1820, and the Gothic *mode*, a broader category tracing tendencies that contributed to the creation of the genre but have spread afterward into other discursive realms. This approach preserves the term’s specificity even as it accounts for the ongoing proliferation of its application to myriad other cultural fields. The mobility of Gothic mode enables specific concerns from

Gothic fiction to surface in such unexpected places as the Victorian dramatic verse of Tennyson and Browning. Hence, some of the most illuminating critical and theoretical approaches to the interpretation of Gothic fiction can be readily adapted and extended to Victorian poetry. This extremely helpful distinction between the Gothic as a *genre* and a *mode* is indebted to David H. Richter's *The Progress of Romance*. Yet Richter's meticulous study, like so many others in the Gothic, is limited to modal manifestations in prose fiction. My dissertation extends such work beyond fiction to other generic areas such as dramatic verse and to the possibility of a proto-Gothic mode existing prior to the heyday of the Gothic novel proper.

While new work has appeared that identifies the migration of the Gothic into tales (Baldick), chap-books (O'Brien), and drama (Ranger, Franceschina, Cox), poetry remains the neglected field in academic re-historicizings of the literary Gothic. Critical attention to Gothic verse is growing, though most scholarly work on Gothic poetry is partial and has focused solely on Romantic-era texts (Punter, Williams, Gamer). Study of the Victorian Gothic tends to cluster around the Victorian fascination with the supernatural - mainly ghost stories - (Smith and Haas, Wolfreys, Armit) or the resurgence (and reinvention) of the Gothic in prose fiction in the *fin de siècle* (Hurley, Byron). In other words, recognizing a Gothic mode in Tennyson and Browning's poetry has been hindered by both temporal and generic biases. My dissertation shifts that critical focus temporally into the decades once known as the Great Victorian Noon (Tuss 1), roughly 1850-1880, and generically from novels to poetry. In doing so, it addresses the gap in critical studies that has obscured manifestations of the Gothic mode in Victorian verse. This gap opened, and persists, in spite of the fact that the first wave of contemporary scholarly interest in

the Gothic (circa 1920s and 30s) focused on poetry at least as often as it examined Gothic novels. My approach also draws attention to various permutations of dramatic and poetic experiments in the Gothic mode that preceded the Victorian dramatic monologue.

In considering the primary texts of Tennyson and Browning themselves, I begin by making a more specific case for considering the works' relationship to the Gothic. This often includes providing evidence of direct influence from Gothic novels or tales, and identifying the particular constellation of elements that demonstrate the operation of a Gothic mode in the poem. Yet throughout this dissertation my claim is not that Tennyson and Browning are Gothic writers, nor, even that the two long poems that comprise the bulk of this study are continuously Gothic. In fact, the premise of a Gothic mode is predicated on the transference of specific generic features to works that are not ordinarily classified as belonging to the host genre. In this configuration, the perennial debates about an essential "key" for distinguishing the Gothic genre is moot. The use of a Gothic mode could transfer any number of interrelated themes, plots, props, and characters in any number of configurations into another generic form (which, as Richter notes, is precisely what happens in the Victorian era with the Gothic novel). The specific constellation of features that this dissertation is examining, and that threads its way through all of the poems under consideration, is the Gothicized depiction of hegemonic masculinities and patriarchal family structures.

The term "Gothicized" is used to convey a number of possibilities and implications. First, it conveys that the depictions are presented within the context of familiar images, settings and tropes evident in the Gothic genre. These include ancestral houses, maddened lovers, violent aristocrats, haunted and barren landscapes and

immured, abused, or murdered women to name just a few. It is also used to convey the idea that the speakers themselves are Gothicized. Their extreme responses of fear, paranoia, morbidity, and rage help to establish them as Gothic characters. They are, however, also Gothic in the sense that Tennyson and Browning dramatically voice the struggle for hegemonic masculine authority in a context of madness and violence through them, and in doing so, implicitly critique the ideological terms of that process.

From its literary inception, the Gothic and gender have been intertwined, not only in the views expressed by the Gothic's primary writers but also in general critical assumptions about the popular reception of Gothic novels. The early critical attacks on Gothic writers and readers were almost always bound up directly or indirectly in the politics of gender. Important research on how the Gothic genre was often gendered female has contributed to recurring attempts to understand the genre's emergence, critical reception, and original readership. This aspect of how the Gothic and gender intersect, however, is less significant here than the types of gendered power dynamics that are enacted in the content of many Gothic works.

Beginning with Ellen Moers, who coined the term "female Gothic" in 1976, feminist critics have made invaluable contributions to analyzing these power dynamics, such as recognizing the centrality of family relations within the Gothic, sharply critiquing Gothic literature for its overemphasis upon representations of oppression and violence against women, and examining numerous female characters' heroic struggles against such oppression. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1979), Julian Fleenor (1983), Kate Furguson Ellis (1989), Eugenia C. DeLamotte (1990), Alison Milbank (1992), Anne Williams (1995), Diane King Hoeveler (1998), and Helene Meyers (2001) are but a few

of the scholars who bring feminist analyses to theorizing the Gothic. While most of these scholars affirm that “women were (and are) the primary readers, protagonists and creators of the genre” (DeLamotte 9), they also often discuss the “male” Gothic canon, which is dominated by depictions of masculinist forces (familial, social, psychological or political) that thwart the development of a healthy female self. In such studies, Gothic novels are seen as gendered cultural fantasies, such as the female fantasy of eventual escape from torturous domestic confinement (as in a Radcliffe novel), or the male fantasy of unregulated sexual dominance (as in a Lewis novel). They also serve as coded expressions of otherwise socially unacceptable emotions (such as female anger or male hysteria). Lastly, Gothic motifs potentially register implicit critiques of patriarchal social ideology in which women’s mental, physical, sexual and political development are tacitly or forcibly thwarted by patriarchy.

The approach taken in this dissertation is indebted to this valuable body of feminist criticism in that I also endeavor to show how particular configurations of a Gothic mode critique oppressive patriarchal social structures. It varies from such readings, however, in several ways. First and foremost, the focus here is on Victorian dramatic verse, rather than on Romantic-era texts and Victorian novels. This generic and temporal shift is a departure, then, from influential studies typified by Alison Milbank’s *Daughters of the House: Modes of the Gothic in Victorian Fiction*, even though I share her emphasis on the Gothic’s relationship to Victorian representations of patriarchal social structures. This shift to poetry is important because, as we will see, the dramatic monologue is a different (indeed, an ideal) form for exploring the interiority of male figures involved in perpetuating hegemonic masculine authority. The lyric expressiveness

of the dramatic monologue allows a full range of previously taboo masculine psychological and emotional states to be explored and expressed, even as the dramatic aspect of the form shelters the poet from charges of countenancing unpopular sentiments in “autobiographical” poems. Temporally, the shift of attention to Victorian texts is important as it contributes to scholarly debate about the strict accuracy of feminist historiography in that regard. This debate will be addressed in Chapter One.

Another important influence on my study is Anne Williams’ *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic*. Williams’ recognition of the Gothic’s various manifestations in poetry as well as in prose has similarities to the procedural model assumed here. Although she does not use the term, her study could be understood as tracing the manifestations of a Gothic mode. As well, she recognizes the Gothic as an important site for interrogating issues of familial dysfunction and gender roles. She is also one of the first feminist scholars to suggest that, in spite of the tendency of psychoanalytical approaches to the Gothic, the opposite approach might be more appropriate: that is, to include Freud’s works within the Gothic canon. As she says, “Perhaps we have it backward. Instead of using Freud to read Gothic, we should use Gothic to read Freud” (243). Though Williams’ study eschews classical Freudian analysis, she does employ feminist and linguistic reformulations of his theories, through Julia Kristeva and Jacques Lacan respectively.

The predominance of psychoanalytic criticism in the Gothic, including its feminist and linguistic revisions, has been tempered lately by calls for a greater historical specificity to replace what is often seen as Freud’s universalizing schema. While an approach that combines psychoanalytic theory with Gothic literary analysis would

certainly yield interesting results, there are two important reasons for my decision not to employ such a framework for this study. Firstly, my dissertation is focused on literary representations of masculine interiority, not on biographical/authorial analysis. I make no claims about the authors' own states of mind. In spite of the fascinating scholarship on Tennyson's own struggles with madness, and the detailed assessments of Browning's possibly domineering relationship with Elizabeth Barrett, this study's focus is on dramatic representations and on cultural conditions apparently reflected in those representations. As members of that society who happen to be male authors, Tennyson and Browning undoubtedly had particular relationships to those representations, but the possibilities of such dynamics have been expanded on in productive ways by other scholars and need not be reconsidered here.

Secondly, Freud notoriously broke with several of his "disciples," including Sándor Ferenczi and Carl Jung, over issues highly pertinent to this study. In *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* Jung records a conversation with Freud that took place in Vienna in 1910:

I can still recall how vividly Freud said to me, "My dear Jung, promise me never to abandon the sexual theory. That is the most essential thing of all. You see we must make a dogma of it, an unshakable bulwark"...In some astonishment I asked him, "A bulwark – against what?" To which he replied, "Against the black tide of mud" – and here he hesitated for a moment, then added – "of occultism." (150)

In his anxiety about the legitimacy of his own theories, Freud foreclosed whole realms of human experience and thought, under the guise of preserving scientific rigor. The very

areas of “occultism” against which Freud was so anxious to set his theory of sexuality, were precisely the potentially “Gothic” interests that so many Victorians obsessively pursued: animal magnetism, hypnotism, mesmerism, spiritualism, automatic writing and séances to name a few. The formation in 1882 of the Society for Psychical research, of which Tennyson was a member, speaks to the seriousness with which such topics were debated. The monologues of Tennyson and Browning are psychological in nature, and warrant examination in relation to the evolving discourse of the mental sciences that grew so rapidly in Victorian England. Thus, my approach assumes only what they would themselves have regarded as psychological analysis and representation (explorations into minds, symptomatic moods, and individual or social mentalities), and does not employ the more strictly psychoanalytic schema favored in modern Gothic criticism for so long. While, as Robert Mighall points out, “psychology dominates criticism of the Gothic” (1), it is only one facet of my approach, useful to this project insofar as it illuminates the connection between masculine subject formation and dramatic depictions of “aberrant” or “grotesque” psyches in Victorian poetry. Likewise, when examining the relationship between “madness” and Gothic masculinities in Tennyson and Browning, I am primarily concerned with situating those works generally within cotemporaneous cultural debates and developments in the mental sciences that inform (and were informed by) such poems, rather than importing a psychoanalytical approach.

While not expressly feminist in her approach, Ann C. Colley takes a similarly combined approach in *Tennyson and Madness*. Colley reads the discourse of madness and gender in the Victorian era as a loose association of ideas informed by both scientific and literary sources, including the Gothic. She also provocatively implies a place for

Tennyson's dramatic explorations of gender in the history of Gothic literature. For Colley, "madness becomes not only a way of approaching a few obvious pieces like *The Princess* or *Maud*, but also a means of discussing a major portion of his life's work" (3). She justifies this approach because, like Rader before her, she spends a good portion of her book tracing either biographical moments in which Tennyson became personally involved in the broader social debates about madness or discussing the "black blood" of the Tennyson family. Thus, even as it draws on Colley's insightful research, my study differentiates itself from such approaches by focusing on the ways in which Tennyson's dramatic depictions of madness fit into a broader literary history that includes the Gothic rather than on tracing the potential instances of Tennyson's personal projections in his poetry. Focusing on Tennyson's mad characters, Colley states, "They are... a unique blend of scientific fact, literary convention, and personal and national traumas" (90). Of these dimensions, this study is concerned with the strategic literary representation of aberrant or ostensibly maddened voices, and also tangentially to the ways in which those utterances seem to speak both to and about certain gendered aspects of the "national traumas," specifically the increasingly unstable constructions of hegemonic masculinity.

Other important feminist-inflected research focused on issues of masculinity in Victorian fiction includes Beth Kalikoff's *Murder and Moral Decay in Victorian Popular Literature*, Kate Lawson and Lynn Shakinovsky's *The Marked Body: Domestic Violence in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Literature*, and Lisa Surridge's *Bleak Houses: Marital Violence in Victorian Fiction*. The valuable influence of such studies is undoubtedly reflected here, both in their attention to literary representations of domestic violence and in their reminder that marital abuse was part of a larger Victorian debate about power

relations between genders. Applications of Feminist critical practice to the Gothic and Victorian fiction, then, especially when focused on unstable mental states and domestic tyranny, provide my examination of Victorian literary representations of Gothic masculinity with its two organizing principles: madness and violence.

Other studies of Victorian masculinities in fiction are also valuable here, such as Alex J. Tuss' *The Inward Revolution: Troubled Young Men in Victorian Fiction, 1850-1880* and Karen Volland Waters' *The Perfect Gentleman: Masculine Control in Victorian Men's Fiction, 1870-1901*. Like other work of this kind, Volland Waters' text reads Victorian fiction within the broader cultural context of "a society that increasingly undermined traditional forms of male power" (115). Of particular relevance to my study is her emphasis on how Victorian fiction represented the anxieties and responses to a social signifying system in which "the criteria of ancestry became secondary to wealth in determining gentlemanly status" (5). In making such a claim, Volland Waters draws on studies in the social sciences as a means of situating the novels in a broader cultural context. My dissertation work has been invigorated by such approaches to Victorian masculinities, but my choice of texts for examination has been shaped instead by emphasis on dramatic verse and on represented madness and violence. While some seminal general studies contributed to this work, such as Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall's *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class* and John Tosh's work including *Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England*, my own project's primary focus is literary representation rather than social history. More pertinent sociological works include Martin J. Wiener's *Men of Blood: Violence, Manliness and Criminal Justice in Victorian England*, Marlene Tromp's

Private Rod: Marital Violence, Sensation, and the Law in Victorian Britain and Alison Winter's *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* for example. My own study has typically found its critical resonances in research findings that include both literary and cultural analysis, such as Ann C. Colley's *Tennyson and Madness* or Elizabeth DeGroot's "Crime and Punishment in Robert Browning's *The Ring and the Book*." Also helpful is Martin Danahay's *Gender at Work in Victorian Culture* and the even more Gothic emphasis of work on *fin-de-siècle* masculinities in his critical edition of Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. In discussing hegemonic masculinities, Danahay reminds readers of the later term's Gramscian roots, pointing out that "Antonio Gramsci...did not see 'hegemony' as something only imposed from without but also as a way of thinking and behaving that was internalized by the subject (6). Danahay's emphasis on the internalization of hegemonic forces corresponds to my assumption that monodrama and the dramatic monologue lent themselves in unprecedented "interiorizing" ways to the exploration and vocalizing of deeply imbedded masculine subjectivities.

Crossing the generic threshold into poetry, James Eli Adams' *Dandies and Desert Saints* (1995) includes a chapter on Tennyson, and Herbert Sussman's *Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Art and Literature* (1995) includes a chapter on Browning amongst others. These two studies are invaluable contributions to the field, and I draw implicitly on their assessments of multiple masculinities. At the most basic level, Adams' early defense of investigating literary representations of the fragility of masculinity, against what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick called "a vast national wash of masculine self-pity" (*Epistemology* 145), was an

encouragement that this type of inquiry remains vital and necessary. My own assessment of how Tennyson and Browning utilize a Gothic mode not only in the creation of maddened and violent men but also in their implicit indictment of the social forces that help to produce them, aligns with assessments in both Adams' and Sussman's studies. It also takes heed of Sussman's insightful reminder that:

...the problem of power and patriarchy calls for a double awareness, a sensitivity both to the ways in which these social formations of the masculine created conflict, anxiety, tension in men while acknowledging that, in spite of the stress, men accepted these social formations as a form of self-policing crucial to patriarchal domination. (9)

Likewise, my study finds that Tennyson's and Browning's indictment of social forces that produce these problematic Gothic masculinities is balanced by a strong emphasis on personal agency and individual responsibility. Some of the poems' most Gothic moments, in fact, dramatically reveal the torturous mental processes of characters attempting to decipher where individual responsibility begins and social responsibility ends. These studies are also useful for their emphasis on a notion of Victorian manhood that is dependent on regimens of severe self-control – a code haunted by its own internal contradictions.

Those two studies, however, often focus on the poets themselves. Where they are investigating a masculine poetic, I am primarily involved with showing how troubled masculinities are voiced – dramatically represented – in poetry. In other words, I am less interested in Tennyson's and Browning's personal attempts to establish a sense of manhood, and focus instead on their dramatized speakers' troubled negotiations of

masculine codes. Where Sussman deftly articulates the multiple types of masculinity available to Victorian men, and investigates categories such as the “gentleman,” the “prophet-sage,” the “professional man” and the ‘Bohemian” (14), my dissertation examines the dramatic utterances of men either bewildered by the multiplicity of those seemingly undecipherable codes or reacting to having failed in some way to meet their demands.

My discussion of this process occasionally utilizes terms such as “homosocial” to denote the influential role of male-male (and class) bonds and related cultural assumptions about the exchange of women. As such, it is indebted to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985). I do not, however, incorporate here the schema set out in her provocative chapter entitled “Toward the Gothic: Terrorism and Homosexual Panic.” There are two interrelated reasons for this decision, one having to do with the Gothic, the other having to do with gender. Sedgwick’s account of the relationship between Gothic and homosexual panic can be understood in terms of a Gothic mode. She identifies a “subgroup” of novels from the genre whose “plots [are] about one or more males who not only is persecuted by, but considers himself transparent to, and often under the compulsion of, another male” (91). She strengthens her reading by noting a “cluster of associations” that include “effeminacy, connoisseurship, high religion and an interest in Catholic Europe” that are “all links to the Gothic” and to notions of aristocratic homosexuality (93). In doing so, Sedgwick has selected a specific configuration of elements from the Gothic genre, including a recurring plot line, a cluster of associations, and the more generalized, but clearly identifiable, trope of the “unspeakable” (94), and identified them (in a process I

would call “modally”) in texts which would not be considered generically Gothic. I am engaging in a similar process. However, I have chosen a different recurring plot line (that of the failed patrilinear line) and a different set of associations (including maddened and violent or murderous lovers, desolate landscapes and lost or crumbling paternal estates) and identified them in a different generic context (Victorian dramatic verse) in order to illuminate other representations of equally marginalized masculinities. In doing so, my work is more like Andrew Dowling’s approach in *Manliness and the Male Novelist in Victorian Literature* (2001), a study which also acknowledges the valuable contribution of queer theory to studies of Victorian masculinities (and Sedgwick’s in particular) but also contends that “men are disciplined through many avenues that include, but are not confined to, homophobia.” (3). Likewise Sussman “does not see [male-male] desire as the single or necessarily primary constitutive force in the formation of and conflicts within Victorian masculinities” (10). My study, then, bears more specifically on the Gothic expression of hegemonic masculinities within a heterosexual matrix that is in the process of collapsing and rebuilding itself under the increasing pressure of social change.

Sedgwick’s assessment of how the Gothic and masculinity intersect was groundbreaking, and recently, the cultural constructions and various crises of masculinities have surfaced as important elements within theorizations of the Gothic. These readings of the Gothic are a vital contribution to the exploration of forms of masculinity that struggled to articulate themselves in a society intensely invested in codifying and regulating both gender roles and sexual behavior. Again, however, most of this scholarship focuses on Romantic-era texts, or on texts at the *fin de siècle*, and almost exclusively on the novel.

Cyndy Hendershot's *The Animal Within: Masculinity and the Gothic* (1998)

shifted the focus within Gothic criticism from female victimization to male fragmentation, noting that “the Gothic exposes the others within and without that give the lie to the notion of such a category as stable masculinity” (1). Hendershot’s study emphasizes non-realist elements within the Gothic, even presuming that the Gothic must be an anti-realist mode for it to have any power to critique society or effect social “disturbances.” However, the Gothic elements in both Tennyson’s and Browning’s works derive their power and terror not from various imaginary spectres or phantasmagoric castles, but from the haunted language and voices of “realistic” characters at their moral, emotional and psychological limit. For Hendershot, “the Gothic impasse [...] is the inability to imagine an alternative to traditional masculinity” (4). Both Tennyson and Browning dramatically express the intense and sometimes violent struggles of men struggling with precisely this problem. A subsequent major study, Ellen Brinks’ *Gothic Masculinity: Effeminacy and the Supernatural in English and German Romanticism*, explored “richer, more complex stagings of *Otranto*’s ‘distressed masculinity’ in the works of Hegel, Keats, Byron, Coleridge, and, in a leap forward, in the early work of Freud” (11). While Brinks does focus on the Gothic elements in Romantic poets, her conspicuous elision of the Victorian period leaves an important gap in the history of the Gothic’s depiction of “distressed masculinity.”

An even more recent study, Andrew Smith’s *Victorian Demons: Medicine, Masculinity and the Gothic at the Fin de Siècle* (2004) recognizes how the discourses of science (and quasi-scientific thought) cross-pollinated with literature during the *fin de siècle* as part of the larger cultural debate about gender roles. Smith asserts that “the final

decades of the nineteenth century provide a particularly complex set of examples of how the dominant masculine scripts came to be associated with disease, degeneration and perversity” (1), and his work is linked with other studies of the Gothic at the *fin de siècle* such as Kelly Hurley’s *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin de siècle* (1996). This notion of cross-pollination can apply equally to the mid-Victorian period. Tennyson’s poetry reflects not only an engagement with his culture’s most relevant geological and biological discoveries, but also with ongoing Victorian investigations into madness: its causes, its cures and its seemingly inescapable curse within familial lineages. Likewise, Browning’s fascination with expressing dramatically the interior of the criminal mind echoes a broader cultural fascination with theories of social deviance.

This cross-pollination is important for understanding the various ways in which constructions of gender were being examined, challenged, and reconfigured in Victorian England. As Susan Brown notes, “[the] debate over what we would now call gender definitions, roles, and practices was one of the Victorian period’s most multifaceted, pervasive and sustained series of contestations, affecting practically every aspect of public and private life and impacting profoundly on both literary and non-literary discourses” (660). Glennis Byron’s work in the Gothic joins Smith’s and Hurley’s in reiterating the common assertions and assumptions regarding the *fin de siècle*, identifying both the proliferation of gender(s) and sexuality(s) of the period and the culture’s attempt to normalize a taxonomy that would organize, and maintain more distinct categories for such identities. The level of contemporary debate, the complexity and inter-continental scope of such systems, and the ferocity with which they were defended speak to how

foundational gender was to other systems of cultural intelligibility, and the sense of horror that was experienced when those norms are challenged. The veracity with which Lombroso, Morel, and Nordau, among others, worked to transform the body into a text to be read through the new theories of degeneration and atavism also speaks to the importance of textualities and textual interpretation in the period. Yet the *fin de siècle* –its dread, and its contestations about producing culturally recognizable bodies – was, as its name implies, a perceived ending to a process already under way throughout the Victorian period, a process represented as Gothic in these dramatic monologues of Tennyson and Browning.

Finally, the necessarily self-defining scope of my subject has determined the selection of poems chosen for consideration – and for exclusion. For example, Tennyson’s great elegy *In Memoriam A.H.H.* (1850) is not examined here despite its phantasmagoric allusions to ghosts, shadows, unburied skeletal human remains, tombs, crypts, “wizard music,” and “sepulchral halls” and its yearning for the return of the dead. But the poem is essentially autobiographical, not dramatic, in form, and its concerns with Victorian masculinities do not manifest in Gothic terror, fear, or revulsion. That crucial difference is perhaps exemplified in the line “Reach out dead hands to comfort me” (80.16). Tennyson’s *The Princess* (1848), the only poem in which he actually uses the word “Gothic” (to refer to palace windows), is of course important for representations of gender, but is not a dramatic monologue or a monodrama. Nor does it feature madness or violence as a response to the social changes and masculine anxieties it depicts. The early lyric “Mariana” (1830) certainly fosters a Gothic atmosphere and aligns a morbidly described landscape with the speaker’s emotional and mental state, but it is not dramatic

in form and does not address Victorian manhood except by indirect critique of the cruelty of the woman's abandonment. Like "Mariana," "The Lady of Shalott" (1832) employs the motif of the immured woman, but again it is not a dramatic poem and is not explicitly focused on masculinities or gendered cruelty. The Arthurian epic *Idylls of the King* (1856-1885) is certainly "Gothic," in a sense synonymous with "medieval," and has been a major focus for studies of Tennyson and gender (and villainy), whether it be "Elliot L. Gilbert's *The Female King: Tennyson's Arthurian Apocalypse*" (1983) or, perhaps more pertinently, Clinton Machann's "Tennyson's King Arthur and the Violence of Manliness" (2000). But except perhaps in set speeches, it is not dramatic in form.

Likewise, some possible choices for Browning might have included "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister" (1824), which is dramatic in form and does mirror the common Gothic setting of a monastery and the anti-Catholic sentiment that usually accompanies it. The focus on a community of men resonates with Sussman's assessments of such communities in Victorian formations of manhood. My focus however, is on how the subjugation of the female Other and the production of a family line function as necessary signifiers in the male imagination. "The Laboratory" (1844) has Gothic potential, but its speaker is female. "The Heretic's Tragedy" (1855) is both bizarre and macabre enough to be considered Gothic, and again, its anti-Catholic sentiment echoes the early Gothic novels, but it is not concerned with the formation of Victorian masculinities. As regards Browning's verse plays, Michael D. Moore has identified Gothic elements in *A Blot in the Scutcheon* (1843), including a duel fought to erase the shame of an "ancestral house" and "family name" (293), and the "ghastly effects" and "inhumanity of what is perversely done for the sake of personal, social and dynastic honor" (293). More generally, Moore

finds in many Browning voices an implied indictment of “characters who let themselves and others be destroyed by the paradoxes inherent in artificial codes or standards” (291). Certainly “Gothic” in a different way is Browning’s grim ballad “Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came” (1855). Its alignment with the Gothic was suggested by Leslie M. Thompson’s “‘Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came’ and the Gothic Tradition in Literature” (1973). The poem’s surreal, dream-like, and diseased landscape invokes an atmosphere of doom and dread. As well, the “childe” of the title – meaning an untested knight – signals both, ancient codes and the formation of manhood. It also situates a male speaker who is alienated from previously held male-male bonds. Yet this poem is not dramatic, nor does it exhibit the dynamic of a manhood shored up by a female Other.

The significance of my dissertation finally resides, then, not in “coverage” of all possibly Gothic aspects of the canonical verse of two major Victorian writers. Rather, I identify in the veiled voices of some of their most important dramatic poetry a particular matrix of Gothic tropes and “plots” that newly directs the implications of those texts towards a shared strategic engagement with contemporary cultural issues of gendered power. Whether such a literary treatment of those social mechanisms was, or is, any more “Gothic” than the ideological and institutional realities to which they refer must remain an open question.

Chapter One

Gothicism, Genre, and Gender: The Critical Nexus

Incorporating several important works by Tennyson and Browning into the history of Gothic literature necessitates a preparatory revisiting of many long-standing theoretical and generic issues in Gothic studies. The significance of claiming that these Victorian poets strategically combined a Gothic framework with oblique dramatic form for the treatment of specific cultural concerns, depends, in part, on a clarified critical understanding of the mid-nineteenth-century inheritance of both Gothic and dramatic contexts. For the former context, the issues include the notorious resistance of the term Gothic to any unified sense of terminological determinacy; the paradoxical manner in which the Gothic appears to constantly rework the same material in formulaic ways while also re-inventing itself in each succeeding generation; the fluid generic and temporal boundaries of the Gothic; and an increasingly complex, multifaceted interplay between the Gothic and particular issues of gender. This chapter will address those important preliminary questions. For the latter context, this chapter will reconsider the Gothic's highly pertinent early association with forms of dramatic presentation, notably its shared origins with melodrama and its now almost forgotten importance in poetry.

As such, the two major contexts of this study – Victorian dramatic verse and the Gothic – are mutually informative. Examining, in subsequent chapters, several dramatic poems by Tennyson and Browning through a Gothic lens can illuminate some interpretive challenges already surrounding those texts, even as the inclusion of those

texts initiates a re-evaluation of how and where the Gothic operates. This first chapter surveys the critical ground for such reassessments, but also confronts in a new way some relevant problems in Gothic theory itself. In particular, there is the need to recover from virtual oblivion several valuable early-twentieth-century academic studies of the Gothic. Re-engaging with those approaches, overshadowed as they are by later critical influences that have ignored vital dimensions of that early phase of scholarship, restores for the study of nineteenth-century English poetry a more appropriate and illuminating historicity. My aim in this chapter, then, is to re-frame significantly inter-related features of Tennyson's and Browning's inheritance of literary (and dramatic) Gothicism by integrating the emphases of earlier and more recent academic perspectives. The following sections of the chapter deal, successively, with problematic matters of definition, genre, and dramatic form.

Gothic Mode: The Problem of Definition

After the emergence of modern critical interest in the Gothic in the 1920s, the explosion of scholarly work in the 1970s, and the critical reassessments of the genre in the 1980s, one might have assumed that longstanding debates concerning the subject (application of the term, criteria for definition, and use in defining works within the genre, or even whether *genre* is the appropriate term at all) had been put to rest. However, the expanding fields of cultural critique that began to be applied to Gothic texts in the 1980s – such as Marxist criticism, psychoanalytic criticism, and feminist re-evaluations of the tradition – made it increasingly clear that the applicability of the term “Gothic” remained a divergent and contested terrain. While these critical approaches

continue to provide valuable perspectives for a later generation of scholars examining the Gothic, they have also been nuanced by Derridian, Deleuzian and other post-structuralist schools of thought well established by the late 1990s and early 2000s. Indeed, in one sense, the very language of literary criticism and cultural critique has itself become a Gothicized enterprise. Whether one is invoking Jacques Derrida's *Spectres of Marx*, Slavoj Žižek's "spectre of ideology," or Julian Wolfreys' assertion that "all stories are, more or less, ghost stories [...] and all forms of narrative are, in one way or another, haunted" (3), literary criticism and cultural analysis have become increasingly infused with the concepts and language of the Gothic, indicating that the applicability of the term continues to expand into newly evolving discourses.

It is no easy feat to name what shared "essence" connects Derrida's cultural theories, for example, to Anne Radcliffe's eighteenth-century narrative techniques. In attempts at definition, Gothic scholarship appears to have polarized itself into two camps. One dominant approach advocates the preservation of various specialized uses of the term in order to maintain its usefulness as a generic descriptor. In fact, assumptions about genre classification distinguish this scholarly perspective. The other main approach seeks a broader conception of the term in an attempt to trace its complex evolution and its ability to mutate into new cultural forms. As we shall see, this emphasis may be said to conceive of the Gothic as a mode. The first approach (generic) aims at specificity, yet can be seen as unduly limiting the field and excluding diversified manifestations of the Gothic that make significant contributions to the tradition. The second approach (mode) is more inclusive, yet may tend to proliferate *ad absurdum* the usage of the term, to the point where it becomes hard to imagine what might not be encompassed by the

designation. For the classification “Gothic” to be critically useful in its application here to important works by Tennyson and Browning, some controlling context for the term’s protean significations is necessary. In setting up such a context, this dissertation reconfigures both approaches, taking up and extending to canonical dramatic poetry an understanding of the Gothic as both genre and mode.

Scholarship attempting to define the Gothic is haunted by two centuries of terminological indeterminacy - an instability that does not typically attend the study of other literary terms. The varying connotations of the term, from its first appearance in England to the continual re-evaluations of its applicability today, pose for any new study the perennial challenge of identifying one’s critical relation to such an inclusive, yet elusive, literary category.¹ The most reductive attempts, including what E.J. Cleary calls the “laundry list” approach (recurring plots, scenes, props, character types, locales, etc.) began as early as the appearance of the first Gothic novel in England. For example, an anonymous contributor to the “Spirit of the Public Journals for 1779” produced such a list in an article that equated Gothic texts with “Terrorist Novel Writing,” sarcastically itemizing the ingredients necessary to make a story “Gothic” (Cleary, *Documents* 182). Distinguishing specific formulae in the Gothic has remained one favored approach among some scholars, although they rarely share that author’s disparaging conclusions. Its continuity as an approach is exemplified by Maurice Levy’s early work on the Gothic, *Le Roman 'Gothique' Anglais, 1764-1824* (1968). Levy’s historical approach appears to set the strictest parameters for use of the word as it is applied to literature, insisting that its meaning is bounded by national and temporal limitations, specifically denoting works produced by English authors between the years 1764-1824. As Robert D. Hume reminds

us in his review of Levy's work, for Levy, the Gothic is defined in terms of "architecture and the sublime" (2). In an article published almost 25 years later, Levy eventually, and reluctantly, sympathizes with those who apply the term more broadly to describe Emily Brontë's "*Wuthering Heights*, Charlotte Brontë's fiction, or certain novels by Dickens" ("Idiom" 3), but he still questions if he must also be "equally tolerant when this unique epithet is used in relation to the works of Stevenson, Wilde, Conrad, Saki, Graham Green, Somerset Maugham and a few others" (3). In spite of Levy's somewhat conciliatory gestures towards scholars utilizing the idea of the Gothic in more inclusive ways, his frankly acknowledged purpose in writing the article is to "mourn the radical evolution ... of a word dear to [his] heart" which he considers to have been "seriously damaged by the blind, ruthless, chaotic proliferation of meaning" (1).

Levy's restrictive approach is attractive in its desire for specificity, but it excludes many texts that are now almost invariably recognized as belonging within the Gothic canon. For example, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is omitted by Levy because it fails to meet his stringent criterion of featuring a castle setting. Similarly, Levy does not acknowledge an American Gothic tradition, because the texts customarily so designated do not meet his architectural requirement and are also written under, and in response to, a radically different political and national ethos than that of Britain's. Given Teresa A. Goddu's astute observation that "once imported to America, the Gothic's key elements were translated into American terms, and its formulas [...] unfixed" (266), Levy's position may be less surprising. But where Goddu is willing to see an American Gothic tradition as part of a traceable evolution in literary form, Levy refuses to recognize such

writings as belonging to the Gothic tradition, thereby excluding, astonishingly, the works of Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Charles Brockden Brown.

Ten years after the publication of Levy's article, his fear of an ever-widening invocation of the term is perhaps confirmed by the *New York Times*' labeling of the dark gendered secrets of the popular television series "Desperate Housewives" as an example of "suburban Gothic" (November 28, 2004). Yet that program's plots, characters, and dramatic tensions do have discernable similarities to situations in the traditional Gothic romance. In any event, if we are to admit both a television show from 2004 and the dramatic verse of Tennyson and Browning into the lineage of the Gothic, the need to review useful meanings of the term becomes even clearer.

Thus, in spite of the appeal for stringent generic specificity, there are more profitable critical definitions of Gothic literature, ones broad enough to include similarly horrific themes, atmospheres, plots, and characters regardless of their national origin or architectural elisions. Exemplifying several very inclusive approaches is Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (1980). Sedgwick's important text attempted to shift scholarly emphasis within the Gothic, whether as a literary genre or as a broader cultural phenomenon. Sedgwick identifies several "key" Gothic conventions that configure cultural anxieties regarding breakdowns of organizational taxonomies that help to establish and maintain confidence in cultural order. Yet where prescriptive approaches like Levy's may be too narrow, wide-ranging conceptions like Sedgwick's may be too broad. In generalizing a "spatial" model for Gothic studies, she posits that "it is the position of the self to be massively blocked off from something to which it ought to have access ... the three main elements (what's inside, what's outside, and what separates

them) take on the most varied guises, [but] the terms of the relationship are immutable” (12, 13). Of course, for Sedgwick, this basic formula must accommodate some other elements, such as feelings of horror or dread about the situation of this “self,” but such a scheme still does not afford enough criteria to keep the term Gothic from losing most of its denotative usefulness. If definition is indeed the objective, such an approach has little utility for distinguishing “Gothic” from “non-Gothic” treatments of such subjects and concerns.

Numerous other approaches to defining the Gothic have pursued variations of these two main critical paths. Historical and political accounts attempting Levy’s specificity include those of Miles, Duncan, and Watt. Much broader theories mirroring the scope of Sedgwick’s inclusivity are typified by Wolfreys and Castricano. In her article “Gothic Anxieties: Struggling with a Definition,” Suzanne Rintoul details her own struggles with the critical fecundity of Gothic scholarship, noting that “the sheer amount of Gothic criticism appears to make critics nervous about studying it” (707). Such anxiety, however, is mitigated by the continuing necessity to provide a scheme of the Gothic that is able to take into account both its generic specificity and its seemingly endless mobility.

Particularly promising in that regard are several approaches to identifying the Gothic in ways that illuminate the cluster of Gothic or “Gothicized” dramatic poems of Tennyson and Browning. Most notably, David H. Richter’s *The Progress of Romance: Literary Historiography and the Gothic Novel* negotiates the precarious waters between Levy’s and Sedgwick’s attempts at definition by explaining that the Gothic existed as a *genre* from 1764 to 1820, but “has continued to lead a subterranean counter-life as a

‘mode’ to the present day” (125). By *mode*, Richter means that “once the Gothic had become part of literary history, it became accessible as a source, not merely of spare parts – characters, plot elements, and devices of disclosure – that could be borrowed and used at will, but also of emotional resonances that could be used to other ends” (125). This critical strategy allows for Levy’s specificity while also acknowledging the disparate ways in which the Gothic continued to manifest itself long after the initial vogue of the Gothic novel proper had ended. Thus, while the original Gothic genre is usually thought to terminate around 1820 (or 1824 for Levy), its literary influence seeps into almost all of the forms of writing that emerge in its Victorian wake, including the historical romance, the sensation novel and the detective novel. Richter’s meticulous mapping of generic evolution and mutation provides historical specificity to the more general claims by earlier scholars such as Fred Botting who had noted that the Gothic becomes “less identifiable as a separate genre in the nineteenth century” (*Gothic* 11)² and confirms that traces of it also seem to emerge in almost every form of fiction writing after the genre proper dissipates.

My approach to incorporating important poems by Tennyson and Browning into the canon of Gothic literature will be deeply indebted to Richter’s distinctions between mode and genre. He valuably establishes both the diminished line of Gothic sub-genres, and the dispersed influence of Gothicism on newly emerging forms of fiction. Even so, like most Gothic studies, Richter’s orientation confines the study to prose fiction, and does not include the dramatic and poetic seedbed from which the Gothic sprang, nor the on-going intersections between Gothic novels and the major poets of the Romantic and Victorian periods. Richter’s exclusive emphasis on novelistic fiction with its roots in

prose romance is of course not surprising, nor a conceptual defect, given the generally accepted “story” of the Gothic’s origins and development as a fictional form. Yet, when this familiar history of the Gothic is re-told in a different way, the texts and origins within its purview also inevitably change. As the next section of this Chapter will illustrate, my dissertation’s contribution to identifying as Gothic a broader range of dramatic and poetic texts includes reincorporating the silenced voices of early Gothic criticism, re-combining such lost perspectives with the tendencies of current scholarship on gender and the Gothic, and extending them in new ways into the Victorian era. Useful as Richter’s distillation is, some important issues of definition remain unresolved, such as what constitutes the key features of the Gothic, what essential elements of the Gothic mode are incorporated, or what textual apparatuses and characters constitute distinctly Gothic markers within a literary context.

Amid the diversity of critical approaches, there are, in fact, new studies attempting to develop models that take into account the various manifestations of the Gothic tradition outside the constrictive context of fiction while still maintaining a useful specificity. For example, Robert Miles asserts that “we should not understand the Gothic as a set of prose conventions, however flexible, but as a discursive site across genres” (176). Michael Gamer picks up on Miles’ notion of fluidity in classifying Gothic, and pushes it even further by stating that “[i]f the gothic is a site crossing the genres, it is a site that moves, and that must be defined in part by its ability to transplant itself *across* form and media: from narrative into dramatic and poetic modes, and from textual into visual and aural media” (4). His comment is particularly pertinent to this study of Tennyson and Browning as he recognizes that the Gothic operates in both dramatic and

poetic forms, as well as in fiction. Although his study is focused on the major Romantic poets, Gamer's perspective on the ongoing intersections between poetry and the Gothic enables, and even invites, a Gothic reappraisal of pertinent texts in Tennyson's and Browning's oeuvres.

Gamer refers, then, to a mobile and fluid conception of the Gothic, arguing that Gothic novels participate in a wider aesthetic, defining itself by a complex interplay of exchanges between Gothic writers, reviewers and readers. He also appreciates the historical basis for Miles' reluctance to engage in the type of criticism that produces yet more "laundry lists" of defining ingredients within the Gothic. He declares that "Miles' determination to bypass traditional lists of gothic conventions stems in part from his awareness that such lists hearken back to late-1790's dismissals of Gothic writing, which represented it as entirely formulaic, a kind of mass-produced fiction-by-numbers" (9). Yet if one is to examine the mobility of the Gothic mode, one must consider what elements make up Gamer's own Gothic "aesthetic", and what actual types of discourse constitute Miles's "discursive site." Richter too recognizes the challenges, in that there is no uniform pattern of "precisely which aspect of the Gothic it is that gets transferred" (161) from the Gothic genre to a Gothic mode. Within a Gothic mode, individual elements of the Gothic genre are altered, new (but related) elements are added, and some erstwhile (seemingly indispensable) elements, such as the castle, are dropped altogether. The Gothic is unique, then, in that it appears to (re)use themes, images and plots while also appearing to migrate, shape-shift and mutate into ever new textual chimeras, making it notoriously difficult to delimit and define.

To conceptualize that process in relation to the significant occasions of Gothicism in Tennyson and Browning, this project generally aligns itself with implications of a theoretical model offered by Jerrold E. Hogle. In a series of articles, Hogle characterizes this literary phenomenon as the Gothic ghost of the counterfeit. Taking Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* as his starting point, Hogle provocatively argues that the Walpolean Gothic was "pointedly playing out, at the start, the growing Western understanding of signs and artifacts as ultimately counterfeits, as references to but more and more falsifications of the social and personal substances once associated with them in the Middle Ages that the neo-Gothic seems to recall" ("Genesis" 24). For Hogle, the Walpolean Gothic, in its plot structure as well as its mode of production, is a prototype for a mode of writing that hauntingly announces "the increasing economic, ideological, and psychological gap – the gap of the counterfeit – between visible signs and their buried cultural foundations" (33). Drawing theoretically on Jean Baudrillard, and historically on studies by Lawrence Stone, Stephen Greenblatt, and David Quint, Hogle illustrates that underpinning the Gothic is a "set of assumptions about representation from the Renaissance through the dawn of the industrial revolution" (30). This set of assumptions is "imbued with the contradictions and possibilities of a scheme that both longs for real referents and sees all referents as potentially false or changeable" (31). Hogle's theoretical framing of the Gothic contributes to the term's definition by shifting the focus away from individual elements and towards the idea of process. Even more importantly, for my purposes, Hogle sees a Gothic mode as characterized less by its most recognizable features and more by how those features are used and re-used to signify cultural anxieties about the constructedness and mobility of signifying practices.

Hogle recognizes that from Walpole on, the Gothic (re)uses the semi-emptied-out signs of an older cultural order. This recognition facilitates a sharpened understanding of the origin of the maddened and violent language and behavior of male figures in Tennyson and Browning. For Hogle, the ideological sign is never entirely empty, always retaining within it a longing for its original “bounded” state (now admittedly mythical). The constant re-use of such signs invokes a past when the illusion was still intact that signifiers (in this case, social signifiers) were securely tied to a signified. The traces of social meaning, and their attendant ideological assumptions, persist even as those very signs are being fragmented, recollected and amalgamated within emerging systems of mobile signification. In precisely this sense, the individual experience of such cultural destabilization may be heard in the troubled voices, and seen in the even more troubling actions, of Tennyson’s and Browning’s Gothic monologues.

David Punter joins Hogle, among others, in focusing on how this process is exemplified in the connection between the Gothic and the British middle class. Indeed, for scholars like Punter and Hogle, the definition of the Gothic itself is inexorably tied to the changing social culture of an evolving middle class. Miles provides a convenient synopsis of Punter’s key points:

Punter's analysis conceives the middle-classes suspended between an old and a new order, between the steady hierarchies of the past and the confused ones of a consumerist, capitalist present. Caught in this irresolute gap, in fear and longing, the detritus of feudalism presented itself as the fit medium for encrypted narratives of repressed wishes and fears, as revenants of a confused class consciousness. (37)

This type of analysis describes at least one important way in which the familiar motifs in the Gothic function obliquely as tropes. Although Romantic-era prose fiction is the nucleus of both Punter's and Hogle's analysis, their assessments resonate with ostensibly non-Gothic critical assessments of poetry of the Victorian era.

For example, Isobel Armstrong's *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics* notes how "Victorian modernism, as it emerges in its poets, describes itself as belonging to a condition of crisis which has emerged directly from economic and social change"

(3). In the midst of this crisis of "redefinition" the poets were radically affected by

...post-Kantian accounts of representation, which adapted Kant to make both the status and mode of art problematical by seeing representations as the constructs of consciousness which will always be at a remove from what it represents. Thus the possibility of a process of endless redefinition and an ungrounded, unstable series of representations was opened out. (4)

What Armstrong identifies as the Victorian poets' post-Kantian model of representation, Hogle identifies as a Gothic mode. He focuses on the alarm produced by the "endless redefinition" and "ungrounded, unstable series of representations." The nascent awareness of the separation between signifier and signified that Hogle sees emerging in the Renaissance, as typified in *Hamlet* (i.e., the counterfeit), changes in the Romantic era, as typified by Walpole's *Otranto*, in that the gap is widened between the referent and that which it signifies (the ghost of the counterfeit), until, by the Victorian era, signs become pure simulacra— what one might then call the ghost of the ghost. Armstrong succinctly reflects on this dynamic when she states that the persistent problem for Victorian poets is "the problem of representation and the alienated sign" (6). A main argument of my own

thesis is that these ghosts of the ghost, these spectral residues of previous illusions that persist, do not manifest themselves exclusively in terms of class but are provocatively exemplified in the most Gothic of Tennyson's and Browning's dramatic verse and function there instead as expressions of destabilized gender norms. Because new constructions of masculinity were, to many Victorians, increasingly transparent *as* constructions, there was a longing for the lost illusion of stability. This became combined with a complex process of disavowing such a longing, since it unacceptably represented a tacit acknowledgement that such stability was not only inaccessible to the present, but also that it never really existed in the past.

Thus, where Punter and Hogle's theories of the Gothic emphasize financial and social shifts within earlier class conflicts, my analysis will be based on the disjunction between the idealized stability of gender and its fragmented reality. Armstrong roots her ostensibly non-Gothic analysis of the same disjunction in a more relational model:

Gender becomes a primary focus of anxiety and investigation in Victorian poetry which is unparalleled in its preoccupation with sexuality and what it is to love...and since the terms of both self and other in all these acts of relationship are unstable, the poet constantly works to create their content anew and constantly revises representations of them, making the act of representation a focus of anxiety. (7)

Armstrong does not link this important insight to the Gothic, but, as we will see later, the areas of cultural contestation that Armstrong links to Victorian anxieties about gender have long been a central focus within the Gothic. My own sense of the ways in which Armstrong's and Hogle's ideas overlap does not mean that I see all Victorian texts as

Gothic. Rather, the similarity of their observations simply confirms for me the pervasiveness of this instability. The use of a Gothic mode to represent this dynamic is to reveal one response among many to the broader cultural situation. The other significance of this overlap is that in both Victorian poetry and the Gothic novel, “gender becomes a primary focus of anxiety and investigation” (7).

Even as influential scholars have tied definitions of the Gothic to issues of class mobility, other important work has examined the Gothic’s relationship to gender. While the bulk of such work has focused on female authors and female characters, a closer study is needed to identify the complex relationship of hegemonic masculinities and representations of manhood to a Gothic mode. The loss of ostensibly inherent and immovable signifying practices such as social rank, property, heirs and domestic authority meant that the practice and articulation of masculinity in Victorian England came under increasing strain.³ This strain is articulated by other evolving discourses at the time. These include the medical discourses of madness and melancholy, the quasi-scientific discourses of mesmerism and animal magnetism, and the legal discourses surrounding domestic life and the rights and roles of women.

What is unique about the texts of Tennyson and Browning being considered in this dissertation is that their plots and projected utterances recurrently reflect the struggle of masculinity to re-affirm itself even as the signs that once signified its status as “natural” are being revealed as constructed (and therefore as contestable) rather than absolute. In this context, the disturbed and disturbing male figures that are given dramatic voice by Tennyson and Browning function as one of the most Gothic features of the poems. These characters enact the failure of patriarchal modes of social organization to

solidify the identity that they had seemed to promise to men participating in the homosocial power dynamic: an identity that equates manhood with wholeness, mastery, and stable, autonomous selfhood. To read Tennyson and Browning's disturbed men in this light is consistent with Cyndy Hendershot's observation that, "the Gothic continually reveals the gulf between the actual male subject and the myth of masculinity" (4). In the Victorian era there was a growing awareness that masculinity was a palimpsest of these multiple systems of representations. As Victorians became increasingly and anxiously aware of the constructedness of all representations and their instability, there were inevitable attempts at stabilizing that system. The dramatic monologues of Tennyson and Browning are emblematic in this respect. The dramatic form draws attention to its own utterance as a constructed and rhetorical artifice. Likewise, the voices of the poems selected here variously express an obsessive preoccupation with the constructedness of heterosexual gender roles and the instabilities of those systems. Crucially, when Tennyson and Browning critique these roles, the language used to express the effects of these instabilities on men becomes increasingly Gothicized.

The third section of this chapter will deal more comprehensively with the intersections between the Gothic and the failure of various social mechanisms to reify gender norms. What remains important here is that Hogle's conception of the Gothic – as a repository for the multitude of anxieties that arise out of the awareness that the relationship between signifiers and their signified is constructed and contestable – encapsulates a variety of discourses that facilitate subject formation. While other scholars have insisted that their application of such a theory to a particular discursive enunciation of selfhood, be it class or gender, is the definitive aspect of the Gothic, my project

recognizes the value of rooting a concept of the Gothic in Hogle's more generalizing frame-work. Thus, even as my own project focuses on the Gothic representations of gendered identity formation in Victorian men, it is not asserting that such representations are necessary in defining the Gothic *per se*, but rather that gender is one of the many areas of subject formation that is open to a Gothic treatment precisely because the knowledge of its constructedness, and the increasing anxiety produced by such knowledge, fit within Hogle's broader definition of the Gothic.

II. Rhizomic Structures of a Gothic mode: Novels, Poetry and Plays

As the previous section outlined, the problems of defining the Gothic are complicated beyond subject matter and figurative speculation, by questions of genre. This may in part explain why the poetry of neither Tennyson nor Browning has been considered as operating in or contributing meaningfully to the larger Gothic tradition. While a few scholars have made occasional use of the term Gothic in relation to some aspect of a Tennyson or Browning poem, such comments have been more suggestive than exploratory. One probable reason for this inattention is that previous scholarship on the Gothic has established certain temporal and generic assumptions that obscure other channels of the radical mobility of a Gothic mode in the Victorian era. Within such histories of the Gothic, the dramatic poetry of Tennyson and Browning is at a disadvantage both temporally and generically. Hence the need to incorporate the study of dramatic and poetic works into a matrix of criticism that tends to emphasize fiction as a preeminent form. At the same time, this chapter illustrates the self-reproducing process of

modern critical selectivity that has led to an unnecessarily limiting generic conception of the Gothic.

Early Victorian Gothic Continuities

Although nineteenth-century literature becomes increasingly saturated with the language of the supernatural and the esoteric, the early form of the Gothic novel itself expires and disperses before the Victorian period, reviving only after 1886.⁴ However, it is worth noting that some writers produced direct descendents of the form during the transitional years to high Victorianism. Recalling this continuum helps to provide the Gothic context for Tennyson's and Browning's literary depictions of masculine domination within heterosexual relationships.

Though mostly known for writing sensation and Newgate novels, William Harrison Ainsworth's early work "The Spectre Bride" (1822) and, later, *The Lancashire Witches* (1848) kept various strains of the Gothic alive. Ghosts and witches were kept before the public eye at the opening of the Victorian era by texts such as Sir Walter Scott's non-fiction work *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* (1830). Wilkie Collins' and Charles Dickens' works helped maintain the popularity of the ghost story, and Edward Bulwer-Lytton made his noteworthy contribution in "The Haunter and the Haunted, or The House and the Brain" (1859) along with his now infamous opening line to *Paul Clifford* (1830): "It was a dark and stormy night..." The Gothic had already been famously parodied in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1818), and its male villains were reinvented in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), but these are texts in which the Gothic surfaces as a mode rather than as a continuation of the genre proper. Significantly,

one aspect of the Gothic that does migrate from genre to mode and strongly sustains itself through these variations is the emphasis on horrific familial situations, to be addressed in this Chapter's next section. But it is worth noting here that a continuity links the aristocratic usurpers of the Walpolean Gothic novel to the figures of domestic unrest that feature so prominently in Victorian depictions of family relations.

A similar emphasis is found in one of the most influential Victorian writers who often produced works in a Gothic mode, the prolific Joseph Sheridan LeFanu. His early texts, *The Fortunes of Sir Robert Ardagh* (1838), *Strange Event in the Life of Schalken the Painter* (1839), and *Ghost Stories and Tales of Mystery* (1851) bear stronger resemblance to the previous century's Gothic novels than the later, more dispersed manifestations of the mode. Best known for *Uncle Silas* (1864), LeFanu also provided riveting depictions of the female vampiress in *Spalatro* (1843), and, of course, in his short story *Carmilla* (1872). In terms of monsters, and Fredrick Marryat's *The Phantom Ship* (1839) includes a chapter titled "The Werewolf." Even though G.W.M Reynolds is part of the larger trend of sensation fiction in which the architecture of the Gothic was exchanged for the *mis-en-scène* of an increasingly industrialized England, he still managed to produce *Wagner the Wehr-Wolf* (1847).

Even so, few novels from the mid-century produce anything equal to the troupe of characters who would subsequently come to haunt the annals of literary history from the end of the century, such as *Dracula*, *Dorian Gray*, and *Jekyll/Hyde*, when neo-Gothic fiction resurges, in a somewhat mutated form, in the market place. It is generally accepted that that the more direct descendents of Gothic fiction, such as the horror story, diminish considerably after 1824, until the neo-Gothic texts of the late 1880s appear.⁵

However, the radical contestations of gendered norms, the debates concerning the limits of the “human,” and myriad other social flashpoints that are taken up by the neo-Gothic texts of the *fin de siècle* should instead be seen as the products of a much larger process at work throughout the early and mid-Victorian period. Through their depictions of masculine madness and monstrous males, for example, Tennyson and Browning contribute to bridging the gap, and marking the transition, between earlier versions of Gothic plots, in which the dreadful actions of the villains are emphasized, and the later, socially challenging, manifestations of a Gothic mode in which the mental and emotional process underlying such actions is explored.

In this regard, David H. Richter’s otherwise invaluable work typifies an over-selectivity in even the finest Gothic criticism. His analysis of how the Gothic migrates and changes is focused exclusively on forms of prose fiction. In the Victorian period, however, the Gothic was mutating in more ways (and in more forms) than one. Not only was its corpus being dissected and its various parts being resurrected and transformed into other prose forms like the detective story and the sensation novel, but its conventions were also reflected in poetry as well. It accordingly becomes necessary here to restore verse to its place in the Victorian inheritance of and contribution to Gothicism, and to recover from virtual oblivion a vein of early twentieth-century scholarly testimony to that effect.

Poetry and the Gothic

Until the late twentieth century, critical interest in relating poetry (or drama) to the Gothic was rare, and the few exceptions have been relatively ignored. This neglect is,

in part, a result of the priority given to fiction in certain influential critical materials dating back to a “first wave” of serious academic scholarship on Gothic literature. The endlessly repeated authority of four major critical works from that period has continued to shape not only ongoing scholarship in the field, but also the very parameters of the field itself. Almost every new study of the Gothic committed, and explicitly indebted, itself to this particular inherited view of the subject. Almost without fail, the critical texts mentioned from the 1920s and 1930s are Eino Railo’s *The Haunted Castle* (1927), J.M.S. Tompkins’s *The Popular Novel in England 1770-1800* (1932), and Montague Summers’ *The Gothic Quest* (1938). None of these studies include poetry in their assessments. Edith Birkhead’s *The Tale of Terror* (1921), did include a 12-page introduction that acknowledged various aspects of the Gothic in poetry and drama, but later critics who draw on her study virtually ignore this section and cite the work to help establish instead the development of Gothic in fiction. The focus on the novel continued in the next major study, Devendra Varma’s *The Gothic Flame* (1957), and the exclusive focus on fiction as the preeminent form of the Gothic has persisted and continues to dominate, with very little deviation, current scholarly interest in and approaches to the field.

As a result, the assumption grew that the first wave of modern scholarly interest in the Gothic must have been dominated by attention to prose fiction. On the contrary, however, that period also produced studies recognizing that the Gothic has its literary roots in, and manifests itself in, places other than the novel – particularly in places such as poetry. Dan J. McNutt’s annotated bibliography of eighteenth-century Gothic novels mentions at least a few of these, and it is worth listing a few notable examples here. McNutt identifies Amy Louise Reed’s *The Background of Gray’s Elegy: A Study in the*

Taste for Melancholy Poetry 1700-1751 (1924), which laid a foundation for future scholars to identify the links between poetic melancholy and the Gothic. C.A. Moore's article, "John Dutton: Pietist and Imposter" (1925), places Dutton as "an important link of connection between the poets of death in the pre-Restoration period and their graveyard successors in the 18th century" (40). Kenneth Clark's *The Gothic Revival: An Essay in the History of Taste* (1928) while its primary focus is on architecture, declares that "the Gothic novelists were the natural successors of the graveyard poets" (Clark 19). As well, John W. Draper's *The Funeral Elegy and the Rise of English Romanticism* (1929) "contends that Gothicism has roots in the funeral elegy" (McNutt 40); Eleanor M. Sickles' *The Gloomy Egoist: Moods and Themes of Melancholy from Gray to Keats* (1932) "traces the melancholy theme into the 19th century, deals extensively with the Graveyard school, and notes a very early attachment between melancholy poetry and the infant Gothic revival" (41); and Robert Arnold Aubin produced two articles aimed at extending the realms of both graveyard poetry and the Gothic, entitled, "Three notes on 'Graveyard' Poetry" (1935) and "Some Augustan Gothicists" (1935).

Attention to such forgotten studies provides a more balanced impression of the initial twentieth-century scholarly interest in the Gothic – namely, that poetry was in fact initially acknowledged as a crucial element in the formation and continuity of the Gothic even during the novel's reign in the marketplace. These studies also recognize, at least in passing, that, in addition to influencing German terror-writing (which, in turn, crosses back into England via Cambridge to influence Gothic novelists), graveyard poetry marked not a cul-de-sac, but a point on a continuum of poetry exhibiting Gothic sensibilities. Individually, some of these studies provide the ground-work for a more

sustained examination of Gothic sensibilities at work within the poetry of subsequent decades. For example, Sickles' meticulous research and insight into the links between melancholy and a Gothic mode is in the background of more recent studies of melancholic verse such as Andrew Elfenbein's *Byron and the Victorians* (1995) and Dino Franco Felluga's *The Perversity of Poetry: Romantic Ideology and the Popular Male Poet of Genius* (2005).

Succeeding generations of critics occasionally produced studies pertaining to poetry and the Gothic. For example, Patricia Meyer Spacks's *The Insistence of Horror: Aspects of the Supernatural in Eighteenth-Century Poetry* (1962), identifies Lewis, Blake, Burns and Coleridge as participating in an "aesthetics of terror/horror sublimity" (42), and James Reeves's *Five Late Romantic Poets* (1972) notes that George Darley, Hartley Coleridge, Thomas Hood, Thomas Love Beddoes and Emily Brontë share various "nineteenth-century strains...such as the influence of the Gothic, the obsession with death, the sense of personal isolation, [and] discontent with current poetic fashions" (introduction *x*). Likewise, Patricia L. Skarda and Nora Crow Jaffe edited an uneven but ambitious collection titled, *The Evil Image: Two Centuries of Gothic Short Fiction and Poetry* (1981). However, the relevance of such writings is almost never referenced in subsequent general studies of the Gothic.

Yet even in these relatively ignored studies connecting poetry and the Gothic, Tennyson and Browning are rarely mentioned. When a connection is made between Tennyson or Browning and the Gothic, it is almost always in passing, with explicit or implicit disparagement, and with no definite sense of how the term is being applied, nor of how applying the term should affect interpretation of the poems mentioned. For

example, the eminent F.E.L. Priestley notes that, in Tennyson's early poems, "[t]he sublime, as the ode *On Sublimity* makes clear with its allusion to Burke, tends to the Gothic" (22), concluding that there is "much Gothic in subject matter and treatment" (22) in Tennyson's early work. This is Priestley's only mention of the Gothic in relation to Tennyson. By confining this connection to the section entitled "Adolescent Poems," Priestley implies what is so often said about poets who utilized a Gothic mode – that it was a youthful indiscretion to be looked on with mild embarrassment in light of the writers' later, more adult, and hence more serious, works. Priestley confirms the young Tennyson's attraction to Gothic settings such as "the ghastly charnel-house of death" (22) but, again, cites it as a tendency the poet fortunately outgrew.

Resistance to this tradition of critical disparagement is exemplified in John V. Murphy's *Dark Angel: Gothic Elements in Shelley's Works* (1975). By tracing "[Percy] Shelley's gradual, often subtle, blending of Gothic conventions with personal, social, political, aesthetic, and philosophic interests as his poetic powers increase" (101), Murphy argues against the common assumption that Shelley borrowed from the Gothic quite freely in his juvenilia but abandoned such adolescent preoccupations in his more mature work as a serious poet. Murphy's explication of Shelley's works in relation to the Gothic can serve, in part, as a model for my own reassessment of certain mature works by Tennyson and Browning. Murphy does not claim that "Shelley's mature poetry is Gothic" (9) but, rather, that "Gothic elements work in many of the major poems to enhance the poet's intention. Whether in crude or refined form, the Gothic tradition repeatedly furnishes Shelley with a framework to express his sensibility" (10). Just as Murphy sees the Gothic as a framework with which to read Shelley, so too my study of

Tennyson and Browning explores the ways in which their deployment of a Gothic mode serves not to express their own “sensibility” *per se*, but rather to explore by dramatically projected symptomatic utterance the mentalities of characters in the throes of a crisis of masculinity.

Poetry was essentially neglected by typical Gothic studies until David Punter’s watershed study, *The Literature of Terror* (1980) which revives the ongoing intersections between poetry and the Gothic.⁶ Along with his important observations about the development of the novel and the role of the Gothic Romance, he reminds us that a crucial poetic source for Gothic fiction (though roundabout in its actual influence) was graveyard poetry. The influential authors and texts here are, for example, Thomas Parnell’s “Night-Piece on Death” (1722), Edward Young’s *Night Thoughts* (1742-45), Robert Blair’s *The Grave* (1743), James Hervey’s *Meditations Among the Tombs* (1745-47), Thomas Wharton’s *On the Pleasures of Melancholy* (1747) and Thomas Gray’s *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* (1751) (*Literature* 33,34). Punter reads such verse as a reaction against an “Augustan critical attitude [that] despised spontaneity and wildness and argued instead for a controlled, reasonable poetry marked by balance and closed structure” (32). Punter foregrounds the numerous ways in which graveyard poetry contributed to the Gothic: its involvement with death and suffering, its renewal of the desire for “literary ‘novelty’ which characterized the later part of the century” (33), its challenge of rationalism with extremity of feeling, and its enormous influence on German writers of terror-fiction, through which they retained an influence in England well into the 1790s and beyond” (33). The first three of these points are particularly relevant for the study of Tennyson and Browning who, though not mentioned by Punter,

likewise sought new forms of poetic expression to display extremes of feeling associated with terror, suffering or death.

Punter, however, neither aligns his own insistence on the importance of poetry with early twentieth-century scholarship emphasizing the poetic manifestations of the Gothic, nor mentions the existence of such scholarship. *The Literature of Terror* does, however, include chapters identifying the poetic ground from which the Gothic sprang, and it cites numerous Romantic poets who dipped their pens into Gothic ink even as they decried through public reviews its inferior status. Most of the scholarship that has come after Punter has nonetheless responded to his thematic Marxist-Psychoanalytic analysis rather than to his generic identification of an important poetic vein within the Gothic. Granted, it has become common after Punter for introductory books on the Gothic to identify the influence of the graveyard poets, and for critics to publish individual articles on the Gothic elements in the poetry of the Romantic period. Even so, almost none of these approaches draws on, or even acknowledges, the vein of early twentieth-century criticism recognizing Gothic verse, and almost no attention has been paid to later eruptions of a Gothic mode in Victorian poetry.

We come, then, to two crucial full-length studies that do usefully expand on Punter's reconnection of Gothic and poetry: Anne Williams' *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* (1995), and Michael Gamer's *Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception, and Canon Formation* (2000). Williams asserts that poetry is the seedbed of the Gothic, even going so far as to state that the "Gothic is a poetic tradition" (1). She substantiates her claim by tracing the intersections between the early writers of Gothic "romance" and the first generation of Romantic poets. Coleridge not only read and reviewed several of

Radcliffe's romances, but employs a distinctly Gothic mode in several of his own poems, such as "Christabel," *The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner*, and his "Mystery Poems." Similarly, while Wordsworth may have disparaged the public's growing taste for "stupid and sickly German tragedies" his "Salisbury Plain," the "Lucy" lyrics and several of his "Lyrical Ballads" nevertheless make use of Gothic conventions and tropes. Byron's *The Giaour*, *The Corsair*, and *Lara* all evidence Gothic themes and scenery, and few would disagree that Shelley's *The Cenci* is Gothic drama *par excellence*. As Williams points out, even the Gothic novels of Radcliffe and Lewis "repeatedly include actual verse: [including] ballads, elegies and sonnets" (4). William's insightful study of the interrelationship in early nineteenth-century writing between these poetic texts and issues of gender warrants extension into Victorian literature.

Michael Gamer is one of the few other scholars since Punter to fully incorporate poetry into an assessment of the cultural influence of the Gothic. His meticulous and insightful research, however, has limited itself, like Punter's, and like Williams,' to assessing the Gothic within the context of Romanticism. Given the relative scarcity of scholarship that recognizes the use of Gothic mode in poetic and dramatic contexts after 1820, one might be tempted to assume that Gothic elements in verse had all but vanished before the Victorian period really began. As we have seen, if the Gothic is mentioned as surviving at all in mid-Victorian England, it is in the public's fascination with the ghost story, or the Gothic elements within the novels of Charles Dickens, Sheridan LeFanu, and G. W. M. Reynolds. A study such as Edwin F. Block's *Rituals of Disintegration: Romance and Madness in the Victorian Psychomythic Tale* (1993) is typical in that it

identifies important influences on, and shifts in, Victorian Gothic texts – but only in novels, and only from 1886-1905.

Promisingly, a process of adjustment is under way. In the 1990s, projects emerged which were interested in anthologizing the Gothic as it appeared in literary forms other than the novel. Chris Baldick's anthology *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales* (1992) traces the evolution of the Gothic tale from 1773 to 1991 and his later work, *Tales of Terror from Blackwood's Magazine* (1995), which chronicles the serialization of Gothic fiction, reminds us of how influential these manifestations of the Gothic are in terms of their continual presence in the marketplace.

Drama and the Gothic

Almost equally pertinent to my own study is scholarship that began to take more serious note of Gothic drama, most notably Paul Ranger in “‘*Terror and Pity Reign in Every Breast*’: Gothic Drama in the London Patent Theaters, 1750-1820” (1991). Several primary texts were also identified and anthologized in works such as Steven Cox's *Seven Gothic Dramas 1789-1825* (1992) and John Franceschina's *Sisters of Gore: Seven Gothic Melodramas by British Women, 1790-1843* (1997). Just as some critical assessments of Gothicism in poetry have been ignored, however, early twentieth-century recognitions of Gothic intersections with drama are also in need of further critical recuperation. Like their poetic counterparts, the scholarly work performed in the 1920-30s on the Gothic and drama has had relatively little impact on current conceptions of the mode, still overwhelmingly focused on novels. One of the earliest, and most significant, of these “lost” contributions to this area of Gothic studies is Clara F. McIntyre's article

“Were the ‘Gothic Novels’ Gothic?” (1921). As her title indicates, McIntyre is focusing on Gothic novels, primarily by Ann Radcliffe, but her article both questions why the term is applied to that particular strain of fiction and meticulously traces the central influence of such texts to Elizabethan and Jacobean drama. McIntyre briefly discusses the differing uses of the term “Gothic” in the eighteenth century⁷ concluding that

if...we take the term as implying excess of ornament, divergence from a prevailing style, the inclusion of certain abnormal and even grotesque aspects of life, the we may, perhaps, reasonably apply the term to Mrs Radcliffe’s works. If, on the other hand, we consider Gothicism as a genuine expression of the life of the Middle Ages, the term is most obviously misapplied. (645)

In ways that interestingly predate (by six and a half decades) Hogle’s notions of the “counterfeit,” McIntyre – drawing on Vernon Lee’s late Victorian assessment of the Gothic⁸ – sees Romantic-era texts not as representations of the Middle Ages, but as copies of Elizabethan dramatic representations of Renaissance Italy. In documenting how the rise of the Gothic novel coincides with a revival in Elizabethan drama, both published and performed (646), McIntyre goes beyond the usual references (*Hamlet*, *Macbeth*) to include a number of other dramatists including Dekker, Ford, Middleton, Tourneur, Kyd and Webster. Like the early Gothic novels, many Elizabethan and Jacobean plays “pictured with singular horror the sinister side of Italian life” (649). Their inclusion of a “tendency toward violent and bloody scenes” (652), the “use of the revenge motive” (652), “depictions of madness” (654), “violent death” (656), “morbid thoughts of death, or upon the accompaniments and trappings of death” (656), and “ghostly appearances”

(658) provided a rich pool of settings, themes, characters and plots from which the Gothic novelists would often draw.⁹

McIntyre's analysis of specific elements reveals embryonic aspects of what would later be called "Gothic" in the drama and poetry that predated the rise of the Gothic novel. Yet the importance of her work is not just in identifying borrowed elements from previous dramatic forms that influenced a Gothic mode as it was utilized by novelists like Anne Radcliffe, but also in examining why those elements were used. For example, McIntyre correctly sees Radcliffe's emphasis on ostensibly foreign settings, notably Italy, as a strategic maneuver. Radcliffe's characters and plots are distinctly English, beneath their Italian veneer, just as Browning's and Tennyson's displacements veil the fact that they are speaking to and about tendencies in the social ideologies of Victorian England.

Of these early dramatic influences from the "minor" playwrights, perhaps Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* is the most significant for the Victorian Gothic. Some of its elements, such as the substitution of wax figures for corpses, were directly lifted by authors like Radcliffe (660). More importantly, after Lewis Theobald's attempt to mitigate the play's more offensive elements by rewriting it as *The Fatal Secret* (1735), and long after the Romantics had finished with its violence and its spectres, and after almost a century of estrangement from the English stage, Webster's play was staged again on November 20, 1850 by Samuel Phelps at Sadler's Wells. While it was reviewed favorably by *The Athenaeum*, George Henry Lewes claimed that "instead of holding up the 'mirror to nature' this drama holds up the mirror to Madame Tussaud's" (38). Until 1967, it was a matter of critical consensus that Lewes' disapproving critique of the play's violence was representative of the play's reception. However, in that year, Frank W.

Wadsworth's article, "Some Nineteenth Century Revivals of *The Duchess of Malfi*" corrected this mis-representation of the play's impact on mid- and late- Victorian England.

Wadsworth's article not only identifies the vast number of performances of the play in the twenty five years after Phelps' initial three-month run, but also draws on reviews of the play to show the popularity of Webster's dark and violent work. The play was so popular in Victorian England that it launched, and sustained, the careers of Isabella Glyn and Alice Marriot. Its influence expanded beyond the London stage into the provinces, and eventually achieved some international success within the English-speaking theatre.¹⁰ At first glance, the success of the play seems at odds with other mid-Victorian assessments of similar subject matter, including, as we shall see, the apparently objectionable parts of Tennyson's and Browning's more Gothic dramatic poems, several of which share themes with the play.¹¹ Comparable features include: the incestuous love of twins, the brutal consequences of unequal marriage, the obsession with bloodlines, the madness that ensues in men when female autonomy is asserted, the violent repercussions for women who attempt to disobey patriarchal norms, the homosocial code that links Church, state and familial structures in a concerted effort to enforce such norms, and even the "lycanthropy" of Webster's Ferdinand. Yet where comparable elements appear in the dramatic monologues of Tennyson and Browning, they were met with resistance if not outright disparagement.

One possible reason for this discrepancy in reception is discernible in Wadsworth's observation that the text Phelps used to stage the revival of *The Duchess of Malfi* was actually an abridgement prepared by Richard Hengist Horne (77). Horne's text

deleted or shortened some of the potentially offending scenes, including the fifth act, of which George Saintsbury in 1887 once remarked: “even of the greatest admirers of the play, the fifth act is a kind of gratuitous appendix of horrors stuck on without art or reason” (qtd. in Ellis 1). These changes rendered Webster’s play “altered but not unrecognizable” (Wadsworth 78) to mid-Victorian audiences. In spite of these alterations, and the play’s critical and popular success, reviews almost always register some objection to the play’s dramatization of familial violence. One nineteenth-century reviewer thought Webster to be simply too “barbarous” for public taste (qtd. in Wadsworth 67). More common, however, were positive reactions mingled with fastidious reservations about the play’s disturbing subject matter. For example, the reviewer for *The Athenaeum* (November 23, 1850) comments: “ ‘though evidently somewhat puzzled by the horror of the situations, the beauties of the dialogue seemed to be appreciated by the pit; - and at the conclusion the applause was loud’ ” (qtd. in Wadsworth 68). In other words, even in its “altered” (i.e., somewhat censored) version, the play was seen as somewhat transgressive. These objections help to contextualize the disapproval with which both Tennyson and Browning were met regarding works that not only included similar plots and characters, but also sought to explore psychologically, and express dramatically, such characters’ mental and emotional fluctuation.

Webster’s works were originally produced within a cultural milieu in which class mobility and shifting gender roles within the family were causing tremendous social unease. It is no accident that when the Gothic novelists wanted to address contemporaneous anxieties produced by similar social reconfigurations, they raided the storehouse of Elizabethan drama. Nor is it a coincidence that such plays regained their

popularity in mid-Victorian England when both men and women's roles were, once again, being contested and redefined.¹²

Gothicism and Dramatic Forms: Melodrama, Monodrama and the Dramatic Monologue

Because many of the instances of Gothicism in Tennyson and Browning are framed dramatically, as monodramas or dramatic monologues, it is important to consider here some implications of the nineteenth-century emergence and the strategic distinctiveness of those literary forms. The typical situations, mentalities, conduct and language of Gothicism are particularly good examples of material which authors treat dramatically, deflecting its unpleasant or forbidden perspectives into the voices of villains, victims, or observers.

Tennyson and Browning popularized, out of much older forms, types of poetic expression which are sometimes called dramatic monologues or psychological monologues, at other times dramatic lyrics and at still other times monodramas. A. Dwight Culler notes that while “[the Romantic lyric of experience] may have provided [dramatic monologues] with much of what is valuable in their substance, [they] formally arose out of [...] the monodrama and prosopopoeia” (368). In the same way that the Gothic shifts in status from distinct genre to mode, with elements that become incorporated into other genres to a greater or lesser degree, the history of monodrama also has an initial period of distinct generic identity. But its elements quickly dissipate and are absorbed (in varying combinations and to varying degrees) by other forms. Culler notes that, “after the beginning of the nineteenth century the principal importance of monodrama is not as a separate genre but as a stylistic element or technique which enters

other works” (372).¹³ He also notes that poems in the Victorian period that developed from these forms “were almost as often called melodramas” (372). When they had initially emerged, both forms were evidence of the growing fascination at the end of the eighteenth century with externalizing a spectrum of emotional and mental processes previously unrepresented in literature.¹⁴

The development of the Gothic as a mode followed a similar adaptive pattern. In his remarks on Horace Walpole’s literary innovation, George Haggerty states that, “in attempting to alter substantially the expressive potential of imaginative fiction [...] Walpole faced a disjunction between the novel form and the Gothic material” (3). In his preface to *The Castle of Otranto*, Walpole states that his story is an “attempt to blend the two types of Romance, the ancient and the modern” (65) in part to ensure that “the [reader’s] mind is kept up in a constant vicissitude of interesting passions” (60). Just as Walpole needed to combine two kinds of Romance in order to find a form of writing that would intensify the type of effect and affect he wanted to produce, so too were Tennyson and Browning later faced with the challenge of borrowing from past forms and blending them with new ones in a series of experiments in dramatic utterance that, we shall see, were ultimately aimed at voicing a spectrum of emotionally extreme responses to the shifting codes of masculine subjectivity that marked the era. Given the interest Tennyson and Browning shared in emotional and psychological states and the fact that melodrama, monodrama and their related forms arose out of attempts to “represent the motions of the soul” and the related questions of “how to gain access to this inner world of psychic motion and how to express it externally” (Culler 381), it is not surprising that they

adopted these inherited forms and practices for the imaginative projection of character, voice and personality.

Gothic Melodrama

I have described how the Gothic, as a mode, migrates and evolves through various literary forms, resulting in a diminishing of strict generic distinctions. Similarly, Kristen Holmstrom has pointed out that one of the defining characteristics of the theatre between 1750 and 1815 was the “dissolution of the boundaries between genres” (40). Nowhere is this more evident than in the ongoing evolution of melodrama. Like the Gothic novel, the mixing of forms was one of the reasons critics relegated the melodrama to the lower regions of the generic hierarchy. In spite of (or perhaps because of) the form’s popularity, the general critical sentiment towards melodrama in England is summed up in an 1807 cartoon in the *Satirist*. It depicts a multi-headed chimera tramping on “regular drama” while nursing a swarming host of writers at her teats, with the sub-heading “The Monster Melo-Drama” (Hadley 63). While Hadley never makes such an association, his critical descriptors of melodrama are resoundingly Gothic: “Frequently labeled ‘monster melodrama’ because it was a form of ‘illegitimate drama,’ it was the result of mixed breeding, the contested bastard of ‘legitimate drama’” (63). Likewise, the development of the form reads like a Gothic plot in which “the aristocratic and nationalistic bloodlines of genre, were ... ‘promiscuously jumbled together’” (63) with all of England’s abjected others. Just as critics of the Gothic novel attempted to dissuade the reading public from reading such books by rhetorically linking the text’s generic hybridity with nationalistic impurity,¹⁵ melodrama’s monstrous status is likewise founded on the paralleling of sexual

and textual promiscuity that leads to a hideous and malformed unnatural offspring that is a blight and an embarrassment to those attempting to establish and legitimate a pure and respectable genealogy of national drama. Likewise, Anne Williams identifies a long critical tradition that tried to politely ignore any “ ‘family resemblance’ between Gothic prose and Romantic poetry” (4), because of the Gothic’s generic “illegitimacy” (4).

The cartoon’s criticism of melodrama, like previous criticism of the Gothic, also rhetorically fuses gender and genre. Depicting melodrama as if it had sprung from the pages of *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, the cartoon in the *Satirist* shockingly asserts that “melodrama is neither male nor female, human nor animal, but a monstrous combination, the offspring of ‘exotic association’ between Shakespeare and Harlequin and between English and French dramatists” (Hadley 63). In the same way, disparagement of the Gothic has often resorted to equating the genre with the perverse comingling of genders, species, genres and nationalities in order to render it anathema to the reading public. Even critics who value the Gothic find it hard to resist such associations. For example, Maggie Kilgore draws from the Gothic tradition itself to describe how this generic monstrosity was created from unnatural mixtures: “[the Gothic] feeds upon and mixes the wide range of literary sources out of which it emerges but never fully disentangles itself...the form is thus itself a Frankenstein’s monster, assembled out of bits and pieces of the past” (4). As these metaphors conflate anxieties about maintaining generic, national and familial purity, they reveal how the mixture of forms such as Gothic and melodrama became ways of addressing exclusionary practices in literary, political and gendered realms. This generic “impurity” is further reflected in the critics’ taxonomic struggle to identify properly each new manifestation. Steven Cox also observes that Gothic drama shares the

“tactics and rhythms of early melodrama” (41) noting that the three distinctive traits of melodrama are “sensationalist theatrical technique, overwhelming and generally violent plots, and an overriding sense of morality” (41).¹⁶

In reflecting on the thematic and structural similarities between melodrama and the Gothic novel, Peter Brooks emphasizes the ways in which both the Gothic and the melodramatic preoccupy themselves “with nightmare states, with clausturation and thwarted escape, [and] with innocence buried alive and unable to voice its claim to recognition” (20). This can be understood as another instance in which a Gothic mode is at work. Brooks’ list is quite different from Sedgwick’s and my own, but he does identify a constellation of themes from the Gothic genre and recognize their migration into another form. Equally significant is his passing remark about the “the subjects that were traded back and forth between the two genres” (20). Brooks’ use of the term “subjects” is important as it speaks not only to similarity in “subject” matter, including scenes of relational madness and domestic violence, but also to the similar attempts to represent the interiority of the “subject” positions within those situations. Brooks’ comment that “melodrama starts from and expresses the anxiety brought by a frightening new world in which traditional patterns of moral order no longer provide the necessary social glue” (21) will be highly pertinent in considering Tennyson’s and Browning’s most Gothic dramatic monologues. Both poets dramatically voice their speakers’ responses to a bewildering new world in which traditional patterns of identifying and consolidating a coherent vision of masculine identity are shifting. These poems participate in both the Gothic tradition and the development of Victorian dramatic literature because they investigate the mentalities of men in whom this very “anxiety” has taken hold. They

significantly reveal the specific aspects of patriarchal masculinity that had functioned to provide precisely what Brooks calls the “necessary social glue” as well as what happens when that bond is jeopardized or gives way. While the shared characteristics between melodrama and the Gothic are an important aspect of identifying the function of a Gothic mode within Tennyson and Browning’s work, it is also important to identify some of the historical intersections between the Gothic and other dramatic forms that serve as the generic precursors to these poets’ dramatic experiments.

Gothic Monodrama

Of Tennyson’s and Browning’s Gothic poems examined in this dissertation, one – Tennyson’s *Maud* – is actually subtitled “a monodrama.” Sharing some of the features of melodrama, a monodrama has been defined as a play for one actor in which “short speeches alternate with passages of pantomime accompanied by music that reinforces the emotional impact of the text. The goal is to reveal immediately and powerfully a range of extreme emotional states” (Cox 42). The form was immensely popular in continental Europe in the eighteenth century and examples were being eagerly translated in England by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Cox notes that

The appeal of such scenes arises in part from the period’s interest in psychological portraiture and the investigation into the inner life; but beyond that, the monodrama seems to tap a deep fear in the audience, a fear of extreme subjectivity, of the inward turn beyond the reach of social mores and religious codes. (44)

This focus on extreme subjectivity and the transgressing of social mores and religious codes is yet another aspect of how this form of verse drama is aligned with a Gothic mode. But as Tennyson and Browning adapt the form, their focus on revealing motivations, insecurities and the labyrinthine psyches of their maddened lovers and violent men also reflects the general shift in monodrama beyond the simple representation of various passions “ [to] what linked them together...personal identity” (Culler 380). In other words, Browning and Tennyson are in a process of poetic excavation – not simply digging beneath the surface of Victorian manners to give voice to the multitude of excessive emotions, but also digging beneath the emotions to explore the type of subjectivity that might produce such passions.

Like its attendant form, melodrama, monodrama was developed, in part, out of a desire to express a broader range of emotions than previous forms of drama had allowed. Monodrama continually sought to find, and transcend, the traditional limits of representation and the extremes of the emotional register, so much so that “when passion had reached such an intensity that the words no longer sufficed...the violent emotion [was] expressed pantomimically to the accompaniment of expressive music” (Holmstrom 40). Nor was this outpouring of excessive emotion limited to the actors. Audience members were not only empathetically led to similar emotional extremes, but they also attended such productions specifically seeking “stimulation for their already over-stimulated emotions and nerves” (Holmstrom 52). The form’s popularity inevitably led to equally passionate objections from the literary circles of the day.

For example, Wordsworth condemns both Gothic novels and monodramatic performances in his “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads*, as he complains about the “frantic

novels” and “sickly and stupid German tragedies” that were consumed by a population that had been reduced to state of “savage torpor” by the “great national events which are daily taking place, and the increasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident” (*Collected Poems* 936). Where Wordsworth’s condemnation is rooted in his distaste for the addictive nature of such forms (one presumably needs an ever-increasing level of stimulation to produce the desired effect), Coleridge condemns such forms because they violate class-bound expectations, and promote sympathetic views of the morally bereft. In *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge notes that the “secret” of these forms’ popularity

consists in the confusion and subversion of the natural order of things in their causes and effects: namely, in the excitement of surprise by representing the quality of liberality, refined feeling, and a nice sense of honour...in persons and in classes where experience teaches us least to expect them; and by rewarding with all the sympathies which are due of virtue, those criminals whom law, reason, and religion have excommunicated from our esteem. (17)¹⁶

It is likewise precisely this invitation to understand and imaginatively “sympathize” – or identify – with the maddened lovers, and male “criminals” in Tennyson and Browning’s Gothic poems that made the works so objectionable to many their contemporaries.

However, it is not only monodrama’s display of excessive emotionalism, and the concomitant danger that such a form might produce a similar state in the viewer (or reader), that links monodrama with the Gothic. The two forms also share an emphasis on gendered power dynamics. The form originated in France with Rousseau’s *Pygmalion*,

written in 1763 and produced in 1770 (Holmstrom 40). Rousseau's monodrama is one man's account of a dissatisfaction with all living female forms, and of his determination to chisel out of rock one that conforms to his ideal.¹⁷ The primary proponents of monodrama in Germany were George Benda, and later Goethe. Benda's *Ariadne aux Naxos* dramatizes the portion of the ancient myth in which Ariadne, after helping Theseus defeat the Minotaur and escape the labyrinth, is abandoned by Theseus on the island of Naxos. She expresses tremendous emotional turmoil until the climax of the scene in which she is struck dead by lightning as a punishment from the god Dionysus, whose sexual advances she was desperately attempting to escape. In England, thematically similar monodrama was introduced by Frank Sayers who was drawn to the form, as Culler points out, along with William Taylor and Robert Southey, because of a love for and study of German literature (375). Sayers' *Pandora* (1790) was the first monodrama written in England. The Pandora myth is, of course, the ancient tale of a woman who is punished for her curiosity. Though *Pandora* was written earlier, the first published monodrama was Sayers' *Oswald* (1792). While none of these famous monodramas are considered Gothic, they do share with a Gothic mode an emphasis on representing the ongoing struggles of men to maintain relational control over women. While it could be argued that the narratives of these performances allow for an empowering reading of the female characters,¹⁸ at the center of these monodramas are women whose extreme emotional displays function to provide the necessary spectacle to the form. As such, their violent loss of emotional restraint serves to justify the attempts of patriarchal authority either to control or abandon them.

Significantly, the one exception to this trend is Sayers' *Oswald*. Because of its entire focus upon troubled masculine identity, *Oswald* is an important precursor to Tennyson's *Maud*. Sayers introduces the monodramatic subject as " [...] a Gothic Chieftain, oppressed at once by old age and a painful disease, [who] exerts his remaining strength to die in a manner which was esteemed highly honorable by his countrymen, and was also believed to entitle him to a seat in Valhalla" (92). The brief monodrama is actually the utterance of a man who fears the loss of a masculine identity established and maintained by militaristic violence. Instead of dying in the midst of a glorious battle, he has survived into old age and is now threatened with the feminizing passivity of surrendering, helplessly, to a quiet death. In the face of his own frailty, he seeks to reassuringly remind himself of his past deeds in times of war, but fears that his heroic deeds will be forgotten and that his legacy will be that he was merely "the prey of age and sickness" (94). In these lines, the predatory violence that has been the foundation for his sense of a masculine self threatens to be exchanged for the feminizing victimhood of becoming himself the "prey" of someone, or something, else. In the midst of this panic, a brief moment of tenderness is voiced when the speaker thinks of leaving his daughter, but he quickly stops the "unmanly drops" (96) and prays to the gods to give his son a "happy death in fields of blood" (96). His decision to commit suicide marks an attempt to preserve his diminishing sense of masculinity through refusing this sense of feminine victimhood, exerting control over his own death, and ending his life with one final act of violence, rather than waiting for it with passive acquiescence.

Sayers' monodrama is an important contribution to the tradition, not only because it was the first monodrama published in England, but also because it explicitly explored a

crisis of masculinity. Whether or not Tennyson or Browning knew these dramatic treatments of aberrant masculine anxiety is uncertain; however, the resemblance of this work to their projected voicings of violent psychological and physical reactions to a threatened cultural basis of “manliness” is strong and suggestive. The strategic distancing in time and place of such crises is also analogous, as is the recurrent motif of the reassuringly compliant, regulated or even invented female subject.

The most striking link between a Gothic mode and monodrama, however, is a little-known piece that Culler suggests Tennyson did, in fact, know: Matthew “Monk” Lewis’ *The Captive*.¹⁹ Gothic drama had been in existence since Horace Walpole’s *The Mysterious Mother* (1768), if not earlier, but Lewis’ *The Captive* is considered to be the first Gothic monodrama. Lewis wrote the play in 1803, and the “captive” of the title refers to a submissive wife who is imprisoned in an asylum by a vicious husband who falsely accuses her of insanity. In a type of self-fulfilling prophecy, the experience of isolation within the dismal surroundings eventually produces in the woman the very effect that the incarceration was supposedly meant to cure, and the woman eventually expresses all of the emotional states one would expect when madness has taken hold. The performance is concluded when, in pantomime, the husband, brother, and son come to “rescue” her (Cox 42).

The Captive was eventually staged at Covent Garden in 1807. It played for one night. Culler describes the reasons for the play’s short stage life by quoting from Lewis’s *Life and Correspondence*:

[Mrs. Litchfield’s] character was that of a maniac, and her imbodiment [sic] of the author’s horrible imaginings, combined with the scenic effect,

and other startling appearances...threw a portion of the audience – whose nerves were unable to withstand the dreadful truth of the language and the scene – into hysterics, and the whole theatre into confusion and horror...ladies bathed in tears– often fainting – and some shrieking with terror - while such of the audience as were able to avoid demonstrations like these, sat aghast, with pale horror painted on their countenances. (qtd. in Culler 377)

Apparently, the contrived happy resolution to the play failed to mitigate the horrors that preceded it. In addition to the acting of Mrs. Litchfield, which was passionate enough to exhaust both actress and audience, there were other reasons for the audience reaction – reasons more ideological than aesthetic.

The cotemporaneous review of *The Captive* in the *Monthly Mirror* linked Lewis's play to Mary Wollstonecraft's political writing by pointing out that "Maria is precisely in the situation of [Lewis'] *Captive*," even suggesting that Lewis may have "borrowed the idea for his *monodrame* from Mrs. Wollstonecraft's *Wrongs of Woman*" (44). The *Mirror*'s observation is yet another recognition of how a Gothic mode is (or is suspected of being) deployed specifically for the purposes of oblique cultural critique. In his overview of Gothic drama, Cox notes that "The link between *The Captive* and Wollstonecraft's *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman* highlights the fact that Lewis' play is not merely an investigation into an extreme emotional individual psychological state, but an indictment of a gendered social condition" (44, 45). Significantly, Cox observes that "Lewis' monodrama is not the only play of its kind that depicts women in oppressive situations or through displays of excessive emotions" (44) and goes on to cite Benda's

monodramas *Ariadne aux Naxos* and *Medea*, and Southey's *Lucretia* and *Sappho* as other instance in which monodrama and the Gothic intersect in an "oppressive male libertinage that preys upon the isolated female" (44). In other words, the emotionally-charged monodramatic veiling of critiques of patriarchal power seems to have some precedent before Tennyson and Browning. Tennyson's and Browning's contribution to this series of intersections would belong to the evolution of the form itself. While monodramas were often performed, and still focused on narrative, the dramatic monologue is designed to be textual, even to foreground its status as text. As we have already seen in *The Duchess of Malfi* and will see in *The Captive*, printed, un-acted drama has more potential to be radical in its social critique, making an indirect form like the dramatic monologue an ideal vehicle to dramatize social commentary.

Not only will Tennyson and Browning later employ remote times and exotic locales to distract readers from taking offense at the fact that they are talking to, and about, English society, but they also doubly deflect "blame" for such views by the distancing effect of dramatic voice. The lack of such distancing in *The Captive* is another explanation for the audience's extreme reaction to the "excesses" of that monodrama. *The Captive* was not the only, nor the most graphic, of these Gothic monodramas, but Lewis had not distanced the audience either through a type of mediating judgment within the drama, or by locating it in a distant time or foreign country. The audience was confronted with a play that embodied an immediate contemporary English reality that was, as the *Mirror* indicated, "too nearly allied with *horror* for public exhibition" (44 emphasis in original). While Lewis acknowledged that the piece "proved too terrible for representation" (377), he later published an altered form of the monodrama titled *The*

Captive: A Scene in a Private Madhouse in his 1812 collection titled *Poems*. As is typical of the form, this printed version was crafted to make a bolder social critique than its performed counterpart. For example, Cox notes that the extended title makes “clear the institutional link between money and patriarchal control” (46). The Gothic tradition is full of immured women, but here the incarceration is not a secret and aberrant act to be performed in the hidden recesses of a castle dungeon, but a public act apparently sanctioned and enforced by the larger social institution (the law).

The published version omits the victim’s restoration from madness through the recognition of her true “self” in the recovered roles of wife, mother, and sister. There is no normalizing domestication and no familial reconciliation, and the scene ends with the woman’s inexpressible anguish. In highlighting this aspect of the poem’s social commentary, Cox notes that “the performance version thus returns the woman to a place in a patriarchal order, unlike the printed version where the conclusion is dropped and the wrongs of woman are allowed to stand in all their full horror” (46). The printed text is the more radical, unmistakably relating female “madness” to the effects of confining patriarchal family structures.

Browning’s Gothicized dramatic monologues do more than echo the all-too-familiar plot structure of the jealous, aristocratic husband who immures, commodifies, or eliminates a spouse who wittingly or unwittingly threatens his fragile sense of masculine identity. Browning’s monologues also echo Lewis’s strategy to utilize a Gothic mode as a form of social critique. Whereas critics such as Elizabeth Napier have criticized the Gothic novel for being pure surface, meaning that the mode is marked by effects with no character development, Browning’s dramatic monologues take the characters and

situations of the Gothic but utilize the dramatic form to explore and express the psychic and emotional interior of such characters. In terms of terrifying and terrified male figures, if the Gothic novel provided the narrative “what”, the Gothic elements in the dramatic monologue were invested in dramatizing the “why.” As such, Browning and Tennyson create monologues that, like Lewis’s, are more horrifying in being “not merely an exploration of an abnormal psychological state but an investigation of an all-too-normal social state” (45).

While Browning’s monologues have more narrative similarities to these early Gothic monodramas than do Tennyson’s poems, it is Tennyson who uses the term *monodrama* as the subtitle of *Maud*. That poem’s dramatic voicing of a rejected lover’s madness – and that lover’s violently shifting moods and emotions – aligns Tennyson’s appellation with previous uses of the term. However, unlike previous monodramas that often choose famous women from history as their subjects, in *Maud* the poem’s title directs attention not to the speaking main character but, rather, to the voiceless object of his obsession. As well, in Tennyson’s poem, it is a man, not an immured woman, who loses emotional control at the centre of the drama. Yet even here, Tennyson may have been borrowing from previous Gothic precedents. Emily Tennyson’s journal entry (1 February 1855) records the night that Alfred read selections from the Griswold edition of Edgar Allan Poe’s stories that F.G. Tuckerman had given them, along with sections of *Maud* (Shatto 208). Susan Shatto’s annotation to madhouse scene, though purely speculative, is interesting here, “With Poe’s tale fresh in his mind, and perhaps right in front of him, the speed at which Tennyson composed the section²⁰ ...hardly seems remarkable” (209).

Shatto also suggests the possibilities of a second source which holds provocative implications for Tennyson's use of genre and mode. Shatto notes that Tennyson may have known "The Maniac," a song with music by Henry Russell, and lyrics co-written by Matthew Lewis. Russell, while not exactly Gothic, "specialized in dramatic narratives, often based on social issues" (210). In terms of genre, what is interesting about this potential source is how it bridges monodramatic and melodramatic forms by combining with music a dramatized single speaker, whose focus is on social issues. In terms of mode, the significance lies in how closely the musical monologue mirrors Lewis' "The Captive." "The Maniac" follows almost the same dramatic structure and plot as "The Captive" - the speaker/singer relates the horrors of being confined in a madhouse cell, placed there because of a lost love, protesting continuously against accusations of madness, and eventually being driven mad by the very treatment intended to provide a cure. Significantly, however, unlike the emotionally distraught woman who is the central character in "The Captive," the speaker/singer in "The Maniac" is a man. Even if Tennyson did not know the song, "The Maniac" provides an early instance of the attempt to combine dramatic form in a Gothic mode for the purpose of critiquing specifically gendered social issues.

This shift from female to male subjectivity is shared by Browning in the dramatic monologues that most closely resemble Lewis' *The Captive*. When first published, twin madhouse-cells are the setting for Browning's first pair of dramatic explorations into the abnormal psyche. In *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842) Browning published "Porphyria's Lover" and "Johannes Agricola" under the general title "Madhouse Cells I & II." Yet, as with Tennyson, the "captives" in Browning's cells are not women placed there by tyrannical

husbands, but, in the first instance, an insecure would-be tyrant whose failed attempts to assert control over his female lover has led to her murder and his madness, and in the second, a deranged male religious zealot. The reversal of gendered roles in these works is significant in that Tennyson and Browning both began modifying a form that arose out of an earlier “period’s interest in psychological portraiture and the investigation of the inner life” (44), and that they often choose to explore the emotional register and psychic labyrinths of maddened or violent men, rather than passive and victimized women, in order to further deploy the form’s established capacity for social critique in the realm of gender. These modifications blended melodrama, monodrama, and the Gothic to create not only a new form of poetic expression but also a new way of critiquing patriarchal social structures by simultaneously emphasizing their negative effects on men as well as on women. In other instances, such as Tennyson’s “Mariana” and Browning’s “My Last Duchess,” the more conventional plight of the immured female that features so strongly in both the melodramatic and Gothic traditions is the situational trope. In these cases, however, the situation is represented as the consequence of disturbed masculinist exertions of privilege and cruelty. These dramatic monologues draw on the Gothic for its familiar settings, its familial plots and its emotionally or physically violent situations, even as the form itself reveals the extent to which each speaker is always already attempting to place under erasure the performative aspects of gender that threaten to lose their power without the external validation of social interaction to bolster them.

The Gothic Dramatic Monologue: Social Context, Self, Gender

Even as this new hybrid literary form of the dramatic monologue emerged, many Gothic elements were discernable. Glennis Byron has noted that from the moment that Browning's "Madhouse Cells" (1842), and Tennyson's "St. Simeon Stylites" (1842) were published, "deviance and abnormality would become a significant part of the tradition as the form developed; the poets moved into the darker areas of the mind, hovering, in the words of Browning's Bishop Blougram, 'on the dangerous edge of things'" (44). Of course, many Victorian dramatic monologues contain no Gothic elements, but it is curious that the exploration of "deviance and abnormality" by Tennyson and Browning in the most aberrant of those dramatic utterances has not yet been critically associated with Gothicism, the literary mode that conspicuously specializes in depicting the "darker areas of the mind" identified by Glennis Byron.

It is also important to bear in mind that most recent scholarship on dramatic form assumes that explorations of subjectivity are "utterly immersed in the cultural conditions" of their time (Slinn 319). Developments in geology, theories of evolution, theological uncertainties, increasingly rapid industrialization, global expansions of the British empire, drastic shifts in the way economies functioned, and challenges to patriarchal conceptions of gender roles produced a perception of the world marked by "radical unpredictable transformation" (Byron 33). In reaction to Romantic notions of an ahistorical, transcendent self, many Victorians were becoming increasingly aware of the constructedness of the human subject. To the extent that science, theology, employment, notions of empire, broader economic systems, and gender roles helped shape individual identity, these forces, as they underwent their own transformations, became increasingly

unstable bases from which one could derive a coherent sense of sense of self.

Consequently, the dramatic monologue, as it emerges by the 1830s, is a form invested in displaying the construction of “a self that is not autonomous, unified or stable, but rather the unfixed, fragmented product of various social and historical forces” (43).

This dramatic voicing of subject fragmentation in literature was accompanied by a contemporary scientific interest in examining such mental states. Ekbert Faas, for example, shows that the earliest critical discourses that surrounded Tennyson’s and Browning’s poetic experiments linked the development of the mental sciences in Victorian England to the dramatic monologue as a poetic form. He cites W.J. Fox’s 1831 critique for the *Westminster Review*, in which Fox claims not only that “the analysis of particular states of mind [is] the most important department in which metaphysical science has been a pioneer for poetry,” but also that Tennyson “is a poet specializing in precisely that kind of analysis” (qtd. in Faas 4). He also notes that H.B. Forman was but one of many literary critics that responded to the new poetic forms of Tennyson and Browning by announcing that such works were part of a new “Psychological School of Poetry” (3). Victorians referred to these poems as “dramas of mental conflict, dramas of the interior, mental monologues, psychological monologues, portraits in mental photography, and poems of a new dramatic-psychological kind” (Faas 20). My contention is that it was this type of literary strategy, and the almost clinical distance that it provided for both reader and critics, that helped shelter even the most Gothic of dramatic monologues from the scorn and moral objections that adhered to both the earlier Gothic novels and the later neo-Gothic novels of the *fin de siècle*. “However gruesome in content,” Faas claims, “[such poems] found full approval of the Victorians” (14). In fact,

this was not always the case. Browning was often chastised for dramatizing cruel, petty and often violent men, and Tennyson's masterpiece, *Maud*, which was discussed in psychological journals of the time, was still harshly criticized as indulgently morbid.

While such objections were often directed towards unorthodox poetic style or the morbidity of the individual persona, such criticism implies a deeper reservation about the poems' possible social implications. These poems seem to have been recognized as unsettling poetic explorations into the new models of the self that were coming into being in conjunction with and in response to radical social changes in the Victorian era. Such poems were not just dramatically presenting the troubled psyches of individual characters, they were also aligning those interiors with the society that helped to produce them. Armstrong's valuable notion of the dramatic monologue as a "double poem" makes this connection explicit. In the dramatic monologue, she says, "language reveals the speaker to be formed by the very society she [sic] critiques" (19). Once again, Armstrong's perspective resonates with the critical stance taken by feminist Gothic scholars such as Eugenia C. Delamotte, who reminds us that,

the Gothic vision has from the beginning been focused steadily on social relations and social institutions and that its simultaneous focus on the most private demons of the psyche can never be separated from this persistent preoccupation with the social realities from which those demons always, in some measure, take their shape. (Preface vi)

This emphasis on unfixed or fragmented gender roles, and the social ideologies that produce them, has been a central focus of scholarship on both the dramatic monologue and the Gothic novel. In other words, it was not simply the "self" that was under such

diagnostic scrutiny in the dramatic monologue; it was, quite often, the gendered self. As Byron notes,

In dealing with sexual relationships between men and women, therefore, dramatic monologues moved far beyond the tradition of expressiveness associated with conventional love lyrics to explore and analyze underlying motivations and the imbalances of sexual power. (Byron 73)

Consistent with this tendency, Tennyson and Browning combine the plots and themes of a Gothic mode with newly emerging forms of dramatic utterance in order to take up issues of gendered social control. The dramatic monologue not only provides the expressiveness of the lyric, but in its exploration of interiorities also penetrates far beyond the depictions of tyrannical male figures in Gothic novels. By exhibiting the subjectivity and feelings of such characters in crisis, the monologue form attempts to decipher what Richter has called the Gothic villain's incomprehensible and seemingly unmotivated cruelty (87) to female protagonists in Gothic novels, and suggests possible underlying motivations that both originate in and fuel imbalances of sexual power.

In re-examining *Maud*, *The Ring and the Book* and some selected dramatic monologues of Robert Browning, this dissertation combines recent literary analysis of how manhood was represented and interrogated through forms like the dramatic monologue with some broader sociological studies focusing on Victorian constructions of masculinities. Contextualizing these poems within the Gothic and looking at them as contributing to that field provides a more selective focus for such studies. For example, Dorothy Mermin has examined Matthew Arnold's "The Forsaken Merman" (1849), and Swinburne's "Laus Veneris" (1866) as dramatic monologues invested in interrogating the

interior struggles of men attempting to solidify threatened masculinity. Similarly, Tennyson's non-Gothic monologues "Ulysses" and "Tithonus" are interesting examples of the poet's attempt to give dramatic utterance to conflicts and fissures in the seemingly coherent masculine self. While such poems have been examined for the rich and varied ways that they reflect the emphasis on gender that marks so many dramatic monologues, it is in the Gothic monologues of Tennyson and Browning that the authors' projections of those fissures, conflicts and struggles take on a more sinister tone that enables social critique.

While neither uses the term Gothic, both Byron and Armstrong link the depiction of masculine values in many dramatic monologues to cruelty, violence, and a strange obsession with medieval modes of social organization in ways that resonate with the depiction of male villains in Gothic novels.²¹ For example, Byron notes that in William Morris's monologues, "the brutal masculine values of the medieval world repeatedly lead to psychological breakdown and the disintegration of identity" (Byron 71). Both Armstrong and Byron focus not only on how previous forms of solidifying masculine identity haunt Victorian men, but also on how those previous systems ultimately failed and led to the disintegration of identity. Such observations inform the kind of analysis taken up in this dissertation. Mermin articulates the basis of this threat in her analysis of Tennyson's and Browning's dramatic monologues when she identifies the "desire to escape the dependence of the male subject on the female object, and also the dissolution of the self that escape would entail" (152). In Mermin's view, the unique function of the dramatic monologue is to allow the speakers to display not only awareness of cultural circumstances but also varying degrees of rationalized self-awareness. With Mermin's

brief but crucial insight as a starting point, later chapters will demonstrate how each dramatic speaker of the selected poems recognizes at some point that, in addition to all of the other social mechanisms that inform his sense of masculine identity, this identity is at least partially enacted through and dependent on, its precarious relationship to a female Other. This sense of dependence exposes the masculine self as contingent, and as vulnerable to shifting estimations of “true” masculinity. Whereas other studies of the dramatic monologue focus on what the speakers do not know about themselves but unwittingly reveal, this study investigates the speakers’ attempts to compensate for the self-knowledge of their own fragility. As they do so, their performative interactions with the implied listener constitute a reiterating social transaction mirroring the performance that they enact for themselves, even as they attempt to place such a process under erasure so that the performed self is naturalized as identity.

In addition to examining the process of internal emotional and psychological judgments, these monologues show how masculinity is judged, often publicly, by other men in the social realm while simultaneously being subject to the estimation of, and possible rejection by, a female Other in the more private domestic realm. These two sets of judgments often intersect, in that a private rejection by a woman, or her non-compliance in the domestic realm, can often lead to more public critical judgments by male peers who are invested in maintaining hegemonic masculinity. This dynamic produces an anxiety that is compounded by the discontinuities between the public Victorian codes regulating masculinity, whether those are informed by Kingsley’s notion of muscular Christianity or Mill’s notions of self-control, and what was privately acknowledged as “acceptable” if it meant maintaining authority within one’s household.

As well, each of Tennyson's and Browning's Gothicized speakers is faced with the second implication of Mermin's point- that any "escape" from that dependence on a female object threatens to dissolve his very sense of self. The male speakers respond in various ways to the anxiety posed by this "threat." Their varied responses mirror the competing codes for solidifying masculine identity, and reveal the tension amongst the adherents of such codes as they struggle to reassure themselves that their particular configuration of masculine signifiers constitutes the "real." As Byron too has noted: "In many of the men's dramatic monologues, it is not just the structure of difference created by the masculine and the feminine which is at issue, but also structures of difference created by the emergence of competing masculinities" (Byron 70). Tennyson's and Browning's Gothicized speakers give dramatic voice to a number of these competing masculinities. Both poets' use of a Gothic mode further dramatizes the extreme psychological reactions of a masculinity haunted by its own fragility. The authors differ, however, in the type of reactions their male speakers embody and, correspondingly, in the Gothic elements each author chooses to employ.

J.F.A Pyre comments on this distinction by making specific reference to the emotionally unstable speaker in *Maud*, noting that one difference between Tennyson and Browning is that Tennyson's depictions of men "do not endure comparison...with Browning's manlier heroes" (190). Pyre is remarking, partly, on Tennyson's penchant for dramatizing the dissolution of manhood that accompanies female rejection by strategically configuring it as a form of madness. The dramatic voicing of over-emotional, unstable men whose descent, as in *Maud*, into various kinds of apparent insanity or morbid derangement is precipitated, in part, by recognizing their own ongoing

dependence on a female Other, lends itself to the Gothic in two ways. First, its emphasis on melancholic men echoes the long history of introspective, gloomy verse, such as the so-called graveyard school, that originated the conventionally dark moods, atmosphere, temperaments and settings, upon which the Gothic novel initially drew. Second, its ostensible depiction of male “madness” reverses the gender dynamics of the early Gothic novels. Where many Gothic novels and melodramas depict overwrought women whose relational chaos leads to madness, often Tennyson’s speakers are men who seem to suffer the same fate. While Browning also creates a series of male figures who find themselves in a position that has reversed patriarchal gender roles and threatens the dissolution of their sense of a masculine self, he more often than not explores the mentality generating an alternate response to threatened masculinity. His Gothic figures do not try to escape their “dependence [...] on the female object” so much as they attempt to annihilate the evidence of that dependence, and violently reassert their own mastery in the situation. In this sense, Browning’s male speakers align with more traditional depictions of Gothic villains, in being threatening rather than debilitated.

Gender & the Gothic

The first section of this contextualizing chapter addressed issues of terminology and questions regarding the scope of the Gothic. In particular, it foregrounded the distinction between the Gothic genre and a Gothic mode as a basis for understanding how various elements of the Gothic spread out, tendril-like, and manifested themselves in varying degrees throughout the literature of the Victorian period. The chapter’s second section established the specific elements of the Gothic that were being taken up and

expanded in new and productive ways by pointing out how Tennyson's and Browning's precedents in dramatic form (melodrama, monodrama and the dramatic monologue) involved representations of gender, power, madness and violence that correspond to a particular constellation of elements within the Gothic. The third crucial context, historically and critically, is gender. The intersections of Gothic literature with essential cultural constructions of masculinity have already been surveyed in my preface, especially as addressed by feminist scholars. It is not, however, a subject without divergent assumptions and assessments among specialists. A representative example of such debate will accordingly be examined in this chapter's short final section. The aim is to locate and illustrate even more clearly the dissertation's position in relation to various debates in existing theory about nineteenth-century Gothicism.

At the center of a debate regarding feminist historiographies in Gothic texts is Kate Ferguson Ellis' *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology* (1989). Ellis' book is a valuable precursor to my project, yet her central argument, that "the Gothic novel [is] an increasingly insistent critique of the ideology of separate spheres" (Introduction xv), has been challenged by later critics, especially David Richter. Richter does not object to reading the Gothic as a form of social critique,²² but finds a number of Ellis' specific claims anachronistic and mistaken:

To the extent that it is a response to a social problem in domestic life, the Gothic novel of Radcliffe (and of the Brontës) is a reflection of the power relations within a residual patriarchal form of family arrangement...in which the father rules and no one else really has a voice except to agree...its values may have been expounded after the Restoration...but

those values were under attack throughout the eighteenth century, and by the period of the Gothic novel they are being ridiculed by conservative satirists. (62)

Richter's point is that the family situation being depicted in such novels had long since been altered by what Lawrence Stone has called "affective individualism" (655). Yet, in my assessment, that these values were subject to ridicule by the time of the Gothic novel's popularity does not mean that a residual fantasy of masculine domestic authority had ceased to operate. One possibility is that such ridicule simply obscured other, deeper responses – such as nostalgia, anxiety or resentment – to these shifts of gender relations. Richter argues that "it would take some new Lawrence Stone...to research the social history of gender in the nineteenth century" (62) to make connections between the Gothic and shifts in familial dynamics. Thankfully, such research has since been undertaken and in the preface I have outlined a number of important studies that have attempted exactly that.

Second, Richter questions Ellis' contention that Gothic texts "are concerned with violence done to familial bonds that is frequently directed against women" (3). In particular, Richter objects to Ellis' contention that the Gothic was, in part, a response to formulations such as Patmore's infamous "angel in the house." Richter contends that

the entrapment in the home implicit in the myth of the angel in the house had nothing to do with the Gothic as such, and in fact occurred too late to affect the vogue of the Gothic proper. But it probably had a lot to do with the most popular of the successor forms taken by romance in the 1860s, the sensation novel. (64)

In spite of Richter's objection on the grounds of historical error, Ellis' identification of familial violence as a key aspect of a Gothic mode holds, and has particular relevance for my study's examination of how a Gothic mode continues, in the Victorian era, to express and explore the pressures and anxieties of evolving familial tensions. In Tennyson's and Browning's lifetime, the diminishing of paternal authority within the domestic sphere is also marked by an increasingly public debate about domestic abuse. As Marlene Tromp points out, "Frances Power Cobbe's campaign against wife torture was in full swing by the late 1870s, and several papers were published that addressed marital violence" (244). Tromp, like Richter, sees sensation fiction, not the Gothic, as the primary literary form through which domestic violence was both explored and challenged, noting that it was "a genre characterized by its scandalous narratives and emotionally and socially provocative dialogue and plots, [and] had its heyday in the 1860s and early 1870s, in the midst of growing concern about the codes of behavior in marriage" (3). I will show that certain Gothic dramatic poems of Tennyson and Browning from earlier in the same period equally feature maddened lovers and jealous husbands who often resort to violence in order to establish domestic and relational control. New scholarship, including pertinent articles by Melissa Valiska Gregory, is beginning to assess these features in Tennyson's and Browning's dramatic monologues, but none have connected the recurring theme of dysfunctional family violence to the Gothic. In other words, Ellis' point is valid if applied to the ways a Gothic mode was manifesting in the *Victorian* period, even if Richter is right that it may be mistaken if applied to Romantic-era texts.

Another important aspect of Ellis' study is her insight into how patriarchal social structures can have negative effects on both women and men. Ellis states, "[i]f we look at

the Gothic novel as an increasingly insistent critique of the ideology of separate spheres, it is clear that the male exile is no more empowered, ultimately, by the division than the female prisoner” (introduction xv). Her investigation into this dynamic is limited to speculative chapters at the end of her book, but it is an important aspect of feminist criticism because it acknowledges the damaging effects of patriarchy on men. The primary focus of my study is not female characters oppressed and abused by patriarchal social structures. Rather, Browning’s Gothic monologues emphasize instead the psychological interiorities of those men who desperately seek to stabilize what they experience as a fluctuating sense of self by embodying and enforcing such structures, even as Tennyson’s monodrama explores the emotional interiority of a man whose sense of self collapses under them.

Within these dramatic monologues and monodramas lies the implicit contention that even men who advantageously participate in behaviors permitted by such structures are also often trapped or bewildered by them. In Tennyson, their voices reveal that Victorian attempts to create an alternative to the subject-producing machinations of patriarchy, or even acknowledgments to oneself about the constructedness of the system, were often experienced as a type of self-annihilation. In Browning, the poems reveal the bewilderment and rage of men facing the failed promise of those ideological systems, built as they were in part on the radical and immutable divisions of gender and naturalized power relations within a heteronormative matrix. The indirect dramatic form, with its complex invitation to both sympathy and judgment, is ideal for such explorations. The invitation for sympathy challenges readers to recognize within their own minds similar motivations to those dramatized by such characters. The invitation for judgment

includes, but moves beyond, censure, and challenges the reader with questions about how such a being comes to exist, and what type of society produces and tolerates such a man. This approach is aligned somewhat with Eugenia C. DeLamotte's observation that,

The personal concentration of the forces of violence [i.e. the Gothic villain] tends also to be an embodiment of larger social forces...

mammoth social institutions whose power transcends that of any individual. The church, the courts, the Inquisition, and the family are such institutions. (17)

As we shall see, invocations of precisely such institutional contexts not only frame but also often generate the crisis of masculinity expressed by Tennyson's and Browning's Gothicized villains.

Lastly, Ellis reads William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* in the same way that my study reads Tennyson's and Browning's Gothic works: "as a dramatization of conflicts between opposing ideals of masculinity" (151). Ellis' emphasis on the various nineteenth-century "codes of masculinity" (151) is invaluable, although her focus is limited to representations in prose fiction of men's behavioral responses to exile from the domestic sphere. My approach focuses instead on the ways in which the dramatic monologues of Tennyson and Browning shed light on the competing emotions, thoughts and motivations of men caught within a comparable series of social shifts regarding the organization and recognition of such gender roles. As well, I examine those moments in Tennyson's and Browning's Gothic monologues when male homosocial ties are themselves jeopardized or severed because those ideological codes have been neglected or violated in some way.

Chapter Two

“All the world is ghost to me”: Tennyson and the Gothic Mode

It may be no coincidence that the pivotal text in any consideration of significant Gothic tendencies in Tennyson is the rather poorly received *Maud: A Monodrama*. Published at the pinnacle of his career, just five years after the immensely popular elegy *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, it was nevertheless regarded by critics as an anomalous, if for some forgivable, lapse in the Laureate's poetic or even moral judgment. Yet an examination of Tennyson's *oeuvre* foregrounds the extent to which the central themes, characters, and plot of *Maud* are materials that he continually re-worked throughout most of his poetic career. Tennyson's extended experimenting focused on the dramatic voicing of men who struggle to reassert their manhood after the emasculating effects of losing a love interest, either to a rival, through poor decision making, or because broader social challenges have threatened the match. As early as 1832, Tennyson composes, though he does not publish, “The Lover's Tale.” By 1879 he joins that poem to “The Golden Supper” and presents to the public this youthful investigation into the mind of a morbid and dejected lover. In the intervening years, he publishes “Locksley Hall” (1842), a poem that extensively anticipates Tennyson's most daring foray into the dark labyrinths of a tortured male mind: *Maud*. *Maud* is Tennyson's most sustained, and most developed, examination of a masculine subjectivity that is deep in the throes of a crisis perpetuated by unexpected social change (a loss of familial fortune and status) and a related debilitating personal defeat (failed rivalry in love). It is also Tennyson's most interesting experiment with a Gothic mode in dramatic verse.

Tennyson and the Gothic Plot

From its first appearance in 1855, Alfred Lord Tennyson's "monodrama," *Maud*, has met with a resistant readership. Various members of the critical community who had welcomed Tennyson as Wordsworth's successor in the Laureateship and as England's "greatest living poet" (qtd. in Pinion 52) only five years earlier, now declared him to be "at the end of his poetic vein" (53). William Gladstone was one of several reviewers who singled out *Maud* as the exception to Tennyson's typically accomplished poetic skills calling the poem Tennyson's "least popular work and least worthy of popularity" (qtd. in Glanville 98). Those reviewers who were not offended by the poem's morbid social critique were alienated by the poem's dramatic projection of voice and by Tennyson's "unsatisfying and disjointed" (Glanville 121) conglomeration of "perverted" and "base" thoughts.²³ There were some defenders of Tennyson's literary experiment,²⁴ but the feeling of most Victorian reviewers was that *Maud* represented an emotional chaos and poetic excess, that it was unmanly in terms of treatment and subject matter, and that it was unfit for a Laureate's attention.

I want to briefly elaborate on the implications of some of these reviews in order to demonstrate that the interrelated set of dynamics among dramatic form, social critique, masculine subjectivity and the collection of behaviors, moods, imagery, props and plots that I am now identifying as a Gothic mode have been recognized in varying degrees since the monodrama first appeared. For example, coterminous reviews almost always commented on the poem's form. In 1856, Robert James Mann, one of the few defenders of *Maud*, was the first to use the term "monodrama" to describe the poem. His attribution of this generic appellation to *Maud* apparently had less to do with the content

that Tennyson's poem shared with past monodramas, and more to do with the need to insist that "*Maud* is a drama" and more importantly, that the haunted speaker of the poem was "the *dramatis persona* of the action" (qtd. in Jump 198) and did not represent Tennyson himself. That Mann entitled his book *Tennyson's Maud Vindicated* speaks volumes to the contention aroused by the poem's appearance. Indeed, the issue of dramatic form is directly tied, in most of the early responses, to debate about whether the poem was poorly concealed autobiography. Walter Bagehot saw only a tenuous affinity between Tennyson and the emotional instability of the speaker in *Maud*, stating that "[Tennyson] seemed to sympathize with the feverish railings, the moody nonsense, the very entangled philosophy, which he put into the mouth of his hero" (219), whereas other reviewers accused Tennyson of being as mad as his poetic character. Bagehot did, however, draw a more direct correspondence between Tennyson's ideological beliefs and the speaker's social critique, observing that "there were some odd invectives against peace, against industry, against making your livelihood, which seemed by no means to be dramatic exhibitions of represented character, but, on the contrary, confidential expositions of the poet's own belief" (219).

In addition to Mann's public defense of Tennyson on the grounds of poetic form, Tennyson also defended himself in several letters. For example, on Dec 6, 1855, Tennyson writes to Archer Gurney about the public misinterpretation of the poem as an autobiographical project and questions: "[h]ow could you or anyone suppose that if I had to speak in my own person my own opinion of this war or war generally I should have spoken with so little moderation. The whole was intended to be a new form of dramatic composition" (*Letters* ii 137). Even as late as 1892, Tennyson is defending the poem on

the basis of poetic form stating, “you must remember always, in reading it, what it is meant to be – a drama in lyrics” (qtd. in Ricks 517). Disavowals like this were complicated, however, by other remarks about *Maud* from the Laureate, such as “I do not mean that my madman does not speak truths too” (*Letters* ii 137), and by the fact that Tennyson gave more public and private recitations of *Maud* than any other poem.²⁵ Bagehot was not the only critic to conflate a poet and a poetic persona, nor was Tennyson the only poet to try and refute such claims. Pleading the objective distancing of dramatic form is of course a standard strategy by writers for dissociating themselves from potentially subversive utterances by their characters. This type of accusation plagued many poets of the era, including, as we will see in subsequent chapters, Robert Browning. In most cases, the use of dramatic form was the disclaimer raised as the poet’s defense against such charges.

These strategic maneuvers were often necessitated by the potentially unpopular content of the poems. In the case of Tennyson’s *Maud*, the poem contained an overt, and unwelcome, criticism of cotemporaneous social issues, many of which read like a catalog of Gothic plots themselves. In addition to the speaker’s morbid perspective, Gothicizing everything from the landscapes to the emerging culture of market capitalism, *Maud* incorporates references to incidents in the public eye that were not only particularly gruesome, but also, from the speaker’s perspective at least, indicative of the contemptible state of British culture at the time. While it is common, in that regard, to cite the poem’s depiction of the Crimean War as the central current event addressed in the poem, there are other significant social and cultural events mentioned that speak directly to the prevalence of distressed and disturbed masculinities. For example, the speaker recalls

how “the filthy by-lane rings to the yell of the trampled wife” (1.38). While the spectre of domestic violence surfaces far more often in Browning than Tennyson, this line is reference to male violence within the home that, within the wider context of the poem, reflects one type of response to the shifting grounds of masculine identity.

Paul Turner has traced that particular reference to the trampled wife to three very public incidents of “savage assault” that were reported in *The Times* in 1854 (1.42). In the same section, the speaker also recalls how “the vitriol madness flushes up in the ruffian’s head” (1.37), a reference that is the result of a combination of sources: “*Alton Locke*, where gin is called ‘vitriol’ and...a *Times* report (8 December 1854) of a ‘Vitriol Man’ with ‘a monomania’ for squirting vitriol on ladies’ dresses” (Turner 142). As well, while in *Maud* it is a “Mammonite *mother* [who] kills her babe for a burial fee” (1.45 emphasis mine), the over-seer of this transaction is not only Gothicized, but, more importantly, gendered male: “And Timour-Mammon grins on a pile of children’s bones” (1.46). The figure of Timour may even provide a literary link between Tennyson and other Gothic writers, in that M.G. Lewis produced a drama, *Timour the Tartan* in 1811.

G.O. Marshall links this passage to a scandalous case in which a husband and wife are found guilty of killing three of their children in order to collect funds from a “burial society” (qtd. in Ricks 523). Significantly, he also notes that the case is notorious, not only because of the horrific actions of the parents, but also because it was widely suspected that such cases were more common than official authorities were willing to admit. Turner notes that “the horrors of peace described by the speaker are all based on fact” (142), yet what is often overlooked in these passages is the extent to which they mirror the familial atrocities found in most early Gothic works, and the manner in which

they speak obliquely to a broader social reality – that Victorian men were struggling, often in violent ways, to come to terms with experiences of gender instability.

That such telling observations in *Maud* about mammonism and its effect on English manhood could presumably be conveniently dismissed as the ravings of a “madman” was evidently of little comfort to the Victorian reviewers and readers. This may be, in part, due to the fact that the madness of the speaker and the madness of society are too plainly mirrors of one another in the poem. The troubling implication of this mirroring, as Gerald Brimley immediately noted in his 1855 essay “Alfred Tennyson’s Poems,” is that the speaker or character is “related dynamically to the society of the time ...thus displaying the characteristics of the society by showing its influence, under particular circumstances, upon the character selected” (196). The idea that a madman is the logical, inevitable result of British culture rather than an aberration of it, surfaces again in the violent men of Browning’s dramatic monologues.

The apparent insanity of the speaker in *Maud* was itself a concern that many reviewers addressed. John Charles Bucknill took a clinical view, praising Tennyson for the accuracy of this dramatized madness (in a review that was published in the *Asylum Journal of Mental Science* in 1855). Four years later, however, Bagehot claimed that the poem “was calculated to call out the unhealthier sort of youthful imaginations” (218), even calling the poem a form of “mental malaria” (218). Bagehot felt that “such a story is evidently very likely to bring into prominence exaggerated feelings and distorted notions which we call unhealthy” and that Tennyson’s treatment of it, “so far from lessening the danger, seemed studiously selected to increase it” (218). In ways that pre-date Max Nordau’s application of degeneration to literary theory by almost 40 years, Bagehot saw

Tennyson's monodrama as a contagion capable of social infection and something that brings dis-ease to the social body. This fear is perhaps understandable in light of the way in which the Victorian public had sympathetically identified with the feelings explored in Tennyson's previous long poem – *In Memoriam*.²⁶

If the madness itself were not controversial enough, Tennyson's gendering of madness as part of the masculine realm certainly aroused indignation. The poem's depiction of masculinity was lamented in several reviews. For R.J. Mann, the poem admirably reveals the process by which the "moping and querulous *misanthrope*" (206), after being reduced to near-nothingness by financial, familial and relational devastation, is baptized by the influence of love and thereby "transformed by it into *a man*" (206 emphasis in original). Yet Bagehot's concerns are again relevant here. He extends the dramatic presentation of the speaker's madness to what he claims is Tennyson's primary audience at this point in his poetic career – young men. Bagehot spends pages detailing how the early poetry of Tennyson creates an audience almost exclusively made up of feverish young men with "rather heated...and susceptible imaginations" (217-18), and contrasting this early poetry to the works of Shakespeare and Homer in which a more mature audience will find "a deep knowledge of *manly* and busy life" (217 emphasis mine). While Bagehot fears that the monodrama may contaminate the youth who read it, he is equally concerned that "the influence of this class of admirers [young men] was deteriorating [Tennyson's] powers" (218). This emphasis on the poetic role (both reading and writing) in establishing and maintaining manliness is focused, for Bagehot, on both the poetic content and its form. The morbidity, extreme emotional outpourings, and violence that mark the speaker's struggle are yet one more place where the Gothic mode

can be seen at work in the poem, specifically in relation to a dramatic voicing that critiques Victorian masculinities.

More recent critics of *Maud* are still grappling with these interrelated issues, including the ways in which Tennyson merged form and content within the work, and have sought to identify the poem's generic lineage in order to better understand its social significance. As Priscilla Glanville notes, for example, "from 1855 onward, critics have maligned *Maud* for adopting the language, form, and theme of its supposed Spasmodic ancestors" (1). Glanville's reassessment of the "supposed" Spasmodic strains in *Maud* is important because it calls attention to the complex problem of identifying the shifting modes and generic hybridity of the work. While Glanville's scholarship debunks the myth that the strangeness of *Maud* is primarily the literary offspring of Spasmodic closet dramas, she attributes those macabre elements of the poem to Pre-Raphaelite rather than to Gothic tendencies. Glanville's argument is cogent insofar as it examines some common ground between Tennyson's verse and that of the Pre-Raphaelite group, and her attribution of what I identify as a Gothic mode in *Maud* to Pre-Raphaelite aesthetics logically stems from her emphasis on Tennyson's relationship to visual art rather than to the literary forms that informed the poem. But Glanville's analysis also serves as a case study of the critical reluctance to view Tennyson's poetry in relation to the Gothic literature and drama that dominated the literary scene in the years preceding his reign as Laureate.

Glanville records the "phantasmagoric effect" (30) of the Pre-Raphaelite's paintings, as well as their "fascination with death and death-like states, such as sleep, being mesmerized or entranced" (31). Yet these themes, and the language used to

describe them, are also found in numerous critical theorizations of the Gothic, including Terry Castle's *The Female Thermometer: The Eighteenth Century and the Invention of the Uncanny*, which specifically explores the centrality of the Gothic in the production of "phantasmagoria." Few scholars of the Gothic fail to mention how Gothic texts participate in an exploration of liminal subjectivity expressed in a morbid fascination with death, dreams and (when the rise of the mental sciences made these concepts available) mesmerism, somnambulism, animal magnetism and a whole host of other mental, emotional, spiritual and physical states that blur the boundaries that usually define the limits of the human self.

When Glanville turns to Tennyson's poetry, Glanville describes "Mariana" as "a phantasmagoric vision created to illuminate the plight of a eroticized female subject who alternates between sleep, trance, daydream and other death-like states" (34). While the description could link Tennyson's poem to Pre-Raphaelitism, it also overlaps with typical descriptions of a Gothic novel's plot. In spite of her perception that the black moss, the bats fluttering through the darkness and the blackened waters all signal that the confined Mariana "endures a living death" (35), there is still no recognition of those elements as, at the very least, shared elements with the Gothic. When comparing Millais' 1851 painting, *Mariana*, to the Tennyson text, Glanville does quote Andrew Leng on the poem's "gothic environment" (36), but both Glanville and Leng use the term as a synonym for invoked medievalism rather than suggesting any connection with the morbid characteristics that the Gothic accumulated after Walpole. Thus, even critics who are perceptive enough to identify elements within Tennyson's works that could or should be categorized as belonging to a Gothic mode, are reluctant to do so.²⁷

Similarly, when Glanville turns her attention to Tennyson's "Lady of Shalott" her analysis utilizes what appears to be a Gothic idiom in mentioning the "world of shadow" (37) that is inhabited by a "ghastly figure" (37) and whose "immediate setting is the material epitome of living death" (36). But she stops short of identifying such characteristics with the Gothic. Her quotation from Susan Gilbert and Sandra Gubar, that the Lady of Shalott is "a memento mori of female helplessness, aesthetic isolation and virginal vulnerability carried to deadly extremes" (37), should likewise recall the embowered females and their "deadly extremes" that so permeate the Gothic genre. Certainly it is fruitless to critique someone's analysis of a poem based on what they did *not* focus on. In this case, however, Glanville consistently identifies the Gothic elements of the monodrama, and even utilizes a Gothic idiom for some of her analysis, but does not or will not name those elements as manifestations of a Gothic mode.

Glanville's approach to *Maud* is accordingly a representative example of that general hesitation. She recognizes that Tennyson's "darkest phantasmagoric landscape" (38) surfaces in this monodrama, but not that this landscape might have Gothic implications, or belong in a trajectory of Gothic verse that includes the Graveyard poets through to the early Romantics where Gothicized landscapes were a typical means of exploring and expressing a morbid subjectivity. Glanville not only mentions but focuses almost exclusively on the "terror" of the narrator (38), "the horrors of his unscrupulous age" (38), the work's "morbid mirroring of social ills" (39), the speaker's "horrific" home (39) that is "a shadowy tomb through which reverberate the moans of the dead" (39) without any suggestion that such features constitute a Gothic mode at work in the poem. She notices the raven that ever croaks at the speaker's side (39) and the speaker's

time in an asylum where he “imagines himself buried alive in a shallow grave” (42), but does not attribute these two clear allusions by Tennyson to the works of Edgar Allan Poe. Glanville ends her critique of the poem referring to Maud’s implied “ghost” (42), to the speaking “corpses” (42), and to the “spectral bride” (42), but again with no explicit mention of the Gothic at work.

Given these observations, and the use of this kind of critical discourse, it is curious, and yet typical in Tennyson studies, that the Gothic is not mentioned as a mode that is functioning in the poems, or at least that Gothic seems to have had an influence on the production of such works. This tendency in scholarly and critical practice speaks to a number of theoretical issues surveyed in the previous chapter. More importantly, it may reveal a virtual blind spot regarding the dramatic verse of one of Victorian England’s most popular male poets. The reason may be the entrenched habit of scholars to associate the Gothic almost exclusively with narrative (chiefly prose fiction), and perhaps also the lingering stigma of the Gothic as a low cultural form.

Like Glanville’s, most current scholarship on *Maud* acknowledges the text’s intriguing hybridity, but few identify the Gothic contribution to this confluence. When the term is invoked with regard to Tennyson’s poetry, as it was by Leng, it is usually meant as a synonym for “medieval,” rather than as indicating the supernatural, the monstrous, the gruesome, an obsession with death or as pertaining to issues of inheritance, primogeniture, and the dissolution of family lines. Yet there are some suggestive hints. For example, Saverio Tomaiuolo’s article, “Tennyson and the Crisis of Narrative Voice in *Maud*,” recognizes that this monodrama “is a fragmentary narrative sequence of lyrics, marked by heterogeneous literary codes: Romantic, Gothic,

‘spasmodic’, even propagandistic” (33). While Tomaiuolo’s recognition of a Gothic code in *Maud* is an encouraging predecessor remark to my work, there is no other mention of the Gothic in his article. He notes that it is “impossible to find a coherent pattern in the presence of the same recurring paradigms related to *loss, death and negation*” (33 emphasis in original), but it is not clear if these three themes comprise the Gothic code that he sees at work here – nor if the apparent incoherence discerned in *Maud* may relate to claims by Robert Miles and others about the Gothic actually being “a coherent code for the representation of fragmented subjectivity” (Miles 2).

Again, this chapter does not assert that *Maud* belongs in its entirety to the realm of Gothic verse, but, rather, that it is possible to identify the monodrama as having verse sections that are written in a distinctly Gothic mode, particularly, though not exclusively, sections 1-3 and 7 of Part I and sections 1, 3, and 5 of Part II, and Part III. Having defined “mode” as a particular confluence of images, themes and plots that are transplanted from one genre into another, I would like to briefly foreground other images, themes and plots that have been identified as “Gothic” in order to show how Tennyson incorporates those elements within his poem, and to suggest some possibilities as to why they are there.

Tracy’s index of Gothic motifs contains numerous themes and images that also appear in Tennyson’s *Maud*. For example, Tracy’s list includes “corpse” (97), “death” (98), “dueling” (99), and “suicide” (106) all of which appear as either central concerns of the speaker, or as events actually happening within the poem. As well, *Maud* contains such stock Gothic props as spectres and a “gewgaw castle” (1.347). Tennyson’s proliferation of these themes and images evidently aligns his work with other forms of Gothic literature and drama. However, the links between Tennyson’s monodrama and the

more complex implications of the Gothic move beyond the collection of certain well-worn props, and involve Tennyson's unique dramatization of the central themes of the Gothic as well. One such theme within *Maud*'s Gothic mode is madness – after all, the poem's original title was *Maud, or the Madness*, a conceivably disingenuous or apologetic gesture by Tennyson that in any case anticipates possible objections to the speaker's disturbing perspectives and foregrounds the text's dramatic representation of an abnormal mentality. Ann C. Colley's book, *Tennyson and Madness*, like Tomaiuolo's article, is another rare exception that mentions the Gothic in relation to Tennyson. Colley investigates the interwoven discourses that Tennyson drew upon for the dramatic ravings of his mad characters yet a shift in emphasis also sketches out one of the ways that literary depictions of madness link Tennyson's dramatizations to the Gothic.

In speaking about Tennyson's early poetry, specifically between 1822 and 1830, Colley notes that these poems "are indebted to Tennyson's enthusiasm for Romantic verse, particularly to Lord Byron's, and to his enthusiasm for anything Gothic" (66). Colley's source for this recognition of Tennyson's early literary taste is a comment in Sir Charles Tennyson's biography that "[Alfred Tennyson] had all his life been an assiduous student of Elizabethan and Ancient Greek theatre and of the romantic drama of Goethe and Schiller" (143). While the invocation of Schiller invites some interesting speculation about Tennyson's relationship to the Gothic, I would like to focus here instead on Tennyson's interest in Elizabethan drama.

Chapter One's attempt at recovering some of the lost critical insights about the Gothic included a call to reconsider Clara F. McIntyre's linkages between Elizabethan drama and the Gothic novel. Though seemingly unaware of McIntyre's article, Colley

sees madness as a thread linking multiple genres and forms that were all influential in shaping the Victorian notions of insanity. With its classical association with “unbridled passion” Victorian depictions of madness embodied “crazed” lovers or people driven insane by a lust for power or by religious fervor (28). Colley goes on to note,

...such lovers and mad tyrants inhabit the mad world of Jacobean drama; they live on into the writing of Pope, Swift, and Johnson; they reappear in the gloomy recesses of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century poetry and roam the dark, delusive passages of Gothic fiction (28).

Colley’s observation not only speaks acutely to the way in which such a “thread” can cross both temporal and generic boundaries, thus linking the Gothic to Elizabethan drama, but it also sketches out a type of literary lineage for the transmission of certain multivalent concerns. Tracing such a lineage down to Tennyson, Colley notes that “The Jacobean drama, for instance, to which Tennyson was attracted, is full of examples of intertwined personal and national madness. Tennyson only had to recall the madness and mad masques in *The Duchess of Malfi*, *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore*, and *The Changeling* to find examples” (92), texts that Chapter one has already identified as a fertile seedbed of inspiration for the Gothic novelists. Significantly, Colley also states that Anne Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is “the heir of the Jacobean drama’s tragic and comic victims but also the child of the eighteenth century’s overwhelming fear of the fancy or the imagination” (28). In pointing out that Tennyson prefaced an early poem, “The Passions,” with an epigraph from Ann Radcliffe, Colley provides some evidence to encourage the notion that a familiarity with Gothic novelists is reflected in his dramatic verses too, primarily ones focused on madness and its effect on matters of heterosexual

romantic relations. The connection, however, need not rely on an epigraph. As we will see, each of the Victorian assumptions about the main causes of madness - excessive and unregulated passion, familial inheritance, and the belief that “the conditions of the age are guilty of producing a nation of nervous dispositions” (Colley 78) - has its place within the Gothic. As well, exploration of the dramatic lyrics of *Maud* will confirm the extent to which these three areas of anxiety shaped and unsettled conceptions of manhood in Victorian England.

Of course, not all literary depictions of madness are Gothic. In this case, however, Tennyson has linked the dramatic voicing of a madman with two other interrelated themes of the Gothic genre, the dissolution of the family line, and the depiction of the polluted and barren wasteland. Fred Botting has noted that the “Gothic has emerged as an effect of and an engagement with a crisis in the legitimacy and authority of the structured circulation of social exchanges and meanings over which the father figure presides” (“Aftergothic” 282). Likewise, Anne Williams’ identification of Gothic poetry’s historical trajectory is tied to what she sees as the *mythos* or overarching structure informing the Gothic – the patriarchal family. Williams argues that from Horace Walpole’s *Castle of Otranto*, through Percy Bysshe Shelley’s *The Cenci*, and on to Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher,” the plots that focus on a father who consumes or destroys his own “house” traverse generic boundaries and establishes themselves as one of the defining characteristics the Gothic. Not only does Tennyson employ a Gothic mode in his dramatic voicing of a maddened lover, he also situates that speaker in a narrative that is consistent with Botting and Williams’ conception of the Gothic plot.

Williams states that “Gothic, in contrast to other forms literary expression, is determined – indeed ‘overdetermined’ – by the rules of the family” (22). Noting that the word *mythos* in Aristotle’s *Poetics* means “plot,” she goes on to remind us of the word’s multiple usage as: “ a series of events that constitute a narrative” but also, of course, “an area of ground (and this is also the term used to denote one’s space in a graveyard)” (23). Thus, the “Gothic myth” “demonstrates that particular kinds of settings (settings that [she] argue[s], reify family structure) generate particular kinds of actions” (23), or to put it another way, how plots of ground are linked to the types of plots that occur there. My own interest lies in how this connection between masculine identity and land comes to be represented as social, familial and economic structures shift within the Victorian period.²⁸ Yet manifestations of paternal anxieties are at the heart of Tennyson’s *Maud* and the poem interrogates how the constructions of masculinity in the Victorian era are haunted by a phantasmagoric *pater familia* that has been immured (alive) within the emerging familial and economic structures in mid-Victorian England.

Language, Landscapes and Family Lines

From the first lines of Tennyson’s *Maud*, the reader is led into a nightmarish landscape replete with a “dreadful hollow” (1.1) whose “lips” are “dabbled with blood-red heath” (1.2). The imagery of consumption, bespeaking both the paternal devouring of the family fortune and the ravenous market forces that helped, is strengthened through an immediate repetition and elaboration of the scene: “The red-ribb’d ledges drip with a silent horror of blood / And Echo there, whatever is ask’d her, answers ‘ Death’ ” (1.3-4). The alliteration created by “red-ribb’d” works in conjunction with the staggered

assonance of red/ledges and ribb'd/drip to emphasize, through both rhyme and rhythm, the visual image of nature's vampiric mouth - the "dreadful hollow's" blood-red "lips" mentioned in the previous two lines. Linda Shires, among others, has remarked that "the 'dreadful hollow' evokes a threatening female force" ("Poetic Identity" 275) – an observation that is important to her Freudian analysis of the poem. While the trope of the monstrous female certainly exists in the Gothic,²⁹ the emphasis here is on how the images of a landscape continuously dripping blood in silent horror and echoing death establish both the unhealed trauma that colors the speaker's sensibility and a Gothic mode through which his perceptions will so often be expressed. Like many Gothic narrators, the speaker in *Maud* experiences this plot of land as a polluted wasteland, a "ghastly pit" (1.5) that serves as a nightmarish double to the fecundity of life-giving nature elsewhere described in the poem.

Indeed, borrowing one of the most common tropes from the Gothic, that the sins of the father will be visited upon the son, the contamination of the land is initiated by patrilinear failure, namely, the suicide of the speaker's father, whose "Mangled, and flatten'd, and crush'd" body was "dinted into the ground" (1.7) that has become his tomb. The speaker's vivid description of his familial disintegration recalls the endless array of fractured families in Gothic fiction. As Botting notes, in the Gothic "mothers are long dead, fathers rarely stay the course. Parentless children are left to roam the wild and gloomy landscapes without protection or property and often without the secure sense of themselves that comes with a proper name and position" ("Aftergothic" 284). Botting's point concerns Gothic novels, yet his observation is an uncannily accurate description of Tennyson's monodrama.

In the same vein, the speaker recalls that his father “ever muttered and maddened, and ever waned with despair, / And out he walked when the wind like a broken worldling wailed, / And the flying gold of the ruined woodlands drove through the air” (1.10-12). These lines establish the familial disposition towards madness and despair, even as they link the external world and the internal state of the speaker. Extending the Gothic’s penchant for pathetic fallacy, Tennyson elaborates on the mirroring that exists between the speaker’s disturbed state of mind and the disturbing morbidity of the world around him by also utilizing the natural world symbolically. The “flying gold of the ruined woodlands” (1.12) invokes not only the autumnal leaves that, having died, are now blown off the trees, but also invokes the literal gold that flew from the speaker’s own family tree, leaving it ruined as well. Thus, Tennyson uses images that align his poem with previous Gothic landscapes which, as Botting has noted, were “desolate, alienating and full of menace” (*Gothic 2*). That this horrific landscape “swallows” its owner is significant. Not only is the setting used to help establish the mood and mode of the poem, it also foregrounds the image of voracious consumption that becomes an important theme in the work. The recurring images of land and consumption in *Maud* are a key to Tennyson’s larger social critique of a materialistic culture’s horrifying effects on a manhood that is no longer considered innate, but is now established by, and subject to, violently shifting market forces.

Not every landscape in *Maud*, however, is desolate. In moments of respite, the speaker recognizes a fair “pastoral slope” (1.617) and numerous gardens, including Maud’s. Yet thoughts of violence and death soon fill his mind, leading him to assert that “nature is one with rapine” (1.123) so that “the mayfly is torn by the swallow, / the

sparrow speared by the shrike / And the little wood where I sit is a world of plunder and prey” (1.124-5). Not even the “million emeralds” that “break from the ruby-budded lime” (1.102) can distract the speaker from the “passionate cry” that ever rises “from underneath in the darkening land” (2.5,6). The metaphor which turns land into gems is crucial here. It indicates what Irene Basey Beesemyer has noted as the process by which land, “Having been emptied of its old meanings...now functions as commodity in a value system of use-economy, where its old purposes of beauty, sustenance and identification (among others) are sublimated to commerce” (177). This transformation entails rather Gothic results: eventually “a million horrible bellowing echoes broke / From the red-ribb’d hollow behind the wood” (2.24-5) where “Ever and ever afresh they seemed to grow” (2.28). By the end of the poem, the speaker sums up the journey of his life through the metaphor of a wounded bird, whose social situation is mirrored in the violence of Darwin’s world of “plunder and prey,” although he describes this world in distinctly Gothic terms: he has “crept [...] on a broken wing / Through cells of madness, [and] haunts of horror and fear” (3.2).

In both of these instances, Tennyson utilizes a Gothic aesthetic to dramatically voice the effects of these shifts in commerce on Victorian manhood. The first set of descriptors situates the land as polluted and haunted as it is emptied of “meaning” and filled with “market value”- a market whose instability has led to the death of the speaker’s father. That the speaker perceives a million emeralds eventually producing a million horrible echoes, and relates it to the site of his father’s death is but one of many indications that he sees the commodification of the world around him as a Gothic process. In the second image, the speaker vocalizes the experience of what would now be

called social Darwinism in terms of incarceration, and being crippled and unable to escape from the imprisoning effects of madness, horror and fear. In both instances, the speaker's reaction to these changes is the same – terror and helplessness. As Armstrong notes, describing the land this way (with a vocabulary I identify as belonging to a Gothic mode) “defamiliarizes this society, and its assumptions, about property, privilege, and sexuality” (*Poetics* 270), and in so doing foregrounds the interrelated nature of those discourses in the formation of masculine identity.

This use of Gothic imagery to represent the landscape extends to the speaker's home. Walter Houghton notes that “by 1855 the country house came to represent the ideal of gracious living located at the heart of the bourgeois dream” (181), but here, it is a Gothic nightmare in ways that echo “Mariana.” The speaker states that he is “Living alone in an empty house, / Here half-hid in the gleaming wood, / Where [he] hear[s] the dead at midday moan” (1.257-9). Being the central site for the transmission of patrilineal authority, the speaker's home has become haunted by the failure of the patrilineal line. Significantly, the speaker imagines that the moans at midday are from his dead father, and they echo in an empty house – a potent sign that the speaker has produced no heir. A similar situation arises in Browning's *The Ring and The Book*, in which Count Guido Franceschini tries to save a house in ruin with no father, and no heir, and is called upon by the family to continue the family line. Botting's observation that in the Gothic “the paternal figure polices the boundaries of legitimacy, thereby constituting meaning, behavior, and identity” (282) is pertinent to both Browning and Tennyson. In *Maud*, as with Guido, it is not just the father's absence, but also the familial shame, that damages the speaker. In both cases these bewildered men become something of a scandal as they

struggle to establish the legitimacy, identity and meaning that disappeared with the father. New social codes are in place to govern and reaffirm these episteme, yet the spectre of patrilineal legitimation haunts them.

Indeed, there are few places that are not haunted in *Maud*, and the “red-ribb’d hollow behind the wood” that functions as the opening setting for the poem is also the site of recurring trauma. Thus, the initial stanzas of the poem that describe the “red-ribb’d hollow” not only Gothicize these plots of land, but also introduce the Gothic plot. Like Williams, who links Gothic plots to the patriarchal family structure, Michael Macovski has noted the overwhelming trend to “limn primogeniture and its various subversions [...] as constitutive of the Gothic” (32). Indeed, as the first section outlined, the earliest Gothic novels and plays, and the texts that they drew upon for inspiration, reveal an overwhelming emphasis on ruined families and familial ruins, and this emphasis on familial trauma is one of the ways in which *Maud* incorporates a Gothic mode. In earlier manifestations “Gothic villains usurp rightful heirs, and often rob reputable families of property and reputation” (Botting *Gothic* 4). In Tennyson’s monodrama, however, the Gothic “villain” who disrupts the patrilineal system of hereditary legitimation and robs the speaker’s family of both property and reputation is a new signifying system that stands in radical contrast to the old codes for stabilizing Victorian manhood.

Shires draws a similar conclusion about the poem, even emphasizing the implications for gender, though without recognition that Tennyson employed a Gothic mode to dramatically voice the effects of such a shift:

Maud was written during a period of social crisis, and the poem intervenes in that history, questioning it and writing it further. During this period

power shifts from one group of men to another and from one mode of manhood to another. The poem records the strain of the latter stages of a shift from a landed patriarchal to a professional and mercantile society in the first half of the Nineteenth Century. (“Identity” 273)

The opening stanzas of the poem describe the financial and emotional ruin of the speaker’s family, the loss of his land, his displacement from the ancestral Hall and the struggles he has with the constitutional rage and suicidal madness that he fears are his only inheritance from his father. The ruin of the family is tied to the shifting economic models that were emerging with the shift to capitalism in which paper money, stocks, and the rise of industry all led to a sense of an ungrounded and uncertain economy. The speaker relates that his father’s suicide was precipitated because “a vast speculation had failed” (1.9) so that the “lord of the broad estate and the Hall / Dropt off gorged from a scheme that had left us flaccid and drained” (1.19- 20). The phallic descriptors are appropriate, as the father’s loss of the family’s financial resources brings an end to his house – both his estate, and his son’s ability to meet the responsibilities of marriage and provide for the continuation of the family name.

Yet through this financial impotence the speaker loses more than his ability to carry on his family line. The loss of money, land and estate initiates a complete loss of identity. As Beesemyer notes, “land...had long been a personal/national classifier of both privilege and responsibility in England. Functioning within extant formulas of primogeniture and entailment, members of the aristocracy often assumed the names of their estates, becoming semantically indistinguishable from the land itself” (175). This conflation of patrilineal identity and property – and the ensuing horrors that result when

the former dissolves with the loss of the latter – is a common trope of early Gothic fiction. One need only think of Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher” to recall how Roderick’s mind, the gloomy landscape, the house of Usher (edifice) and the House of Usher (family line) are conflated and collapsed to see how a Gothic mode functions here. Likewise, the *Maud* speaker’s loss of land and estate leave him, as he puts it, “nameless” (1.119)—a point reinforced by the absence of a name for the speaker in Tennyson’s poem. What is unique about Tennyson’s approach to this theme is his engaging indirectly with it through monodrama, so that the language and structure of the poem enact the dissolution of the speaker’s subjectivity, rather than simply describing it. We are given the dissolution of the subject from the inside out, so to speak.

J.G.A. Pocock has observed that in the eighteenth century there was a general social acknowledgement that “the individual needed a material anchor in the form of property no less than he needed a rational soul. If he found that anchor in the shape of land, it guaranteed him leisure, rationality, and virtue” (qtd. in Beesemyer 111).³⁰ However, by the mid-nineteenth century, “a discourse about manliness was constructed in response to industrialization and changes in the socioeconomic class system so that the traditional distinction between upper-class land-owning aristocracy versus lower-class unpropertied laborers was complicated by the rise of middle-class industrialists, bankers, merchants and a variety of professionals” (Morgan 203). In this era, which announces the passing of, in Carlyle’s terms, “the old ideal of Manhood” (qtd. in Adams 4), the speaker of *Maud* is caught between shifting social codes even as he attempts to embrace the new signifiers of masculinity that will provide a foundation (he believes) for a stable identity. The difficulty in making this shift is explicitly expressed by the speaker in terms

of gender annihilation and resurrection as he states, “ah for a man to arise in me, / That the man I am may cease to be!” (1.396-7). The lines express the theme of self-mastery that was so prevalent in Victorian literature. For example, Adams notes that Charles Kingsley’s *Westward Ho!*, published the same year as Tennyson’s *Maud*, was “exemplary in transferring the burden of manhood from martial courage to inner struggle” (7). Kingsley claims in *Westward Ho!* that “it is the prerogative of a man to be bold against himself” (qtd. in Adams 4), but, as the speaker of *Maud* realizes, it is more than a prerogative: it is a necessity. Yet this speaker is caught between the claims of these two ideological requirements, – martial courage and emotional restraint – never sure which might re-establish his sense of a stable masculine self.

A crucial example of this dynamic in *Maud* is Tennyson’s employment of the multiply- signifying social practice of the duel. As a Gothic trope, a cultural ritual of manhood, and as a subject of prolonged public debate in Victorian England, dueling is invoked here as a lens that brings into sharp relief the internal contradictions of a system in which violence is considered manly conduct. Chris R. Vanden Bossche also recognizes a more general “war of cultural codes” in *Maud*. His thematic approach articulates the individual and social struggles in terms of romance and realism. Utilizing these terms as descriptors of social values, he associates romance with chivalric codes and realism with economic commercialism. Vanden Bossche explains that “past and present are not simply historical; they come to represent the moral codes at issue in the contemporary battle over social practices” (73). Introducing dueling as one such embattled code enables Tennyson to situate recognizably the wider meaning of his speaker’s dilemma.

By 1855, dueling was an aspect of English culture whose usefulness had been debated for decades. Martin J. Wiener reminds us that even in their heyday, duels “flagrantly violated the law” yet “they were widely accepted as an ancient privilege – and obligation – of high rank” (43). That “obligation” is the crux of the debate for those who argued not just for the legitimacy of dueling, but also for the necessity of maintaining the custom. For example, Lord Erskine, arguing in 1803 for defendants in a case in which a duel resulted in the death of one of the participants, appealed for an acquittal based on the grounds that “there were feelings which occasionally actuated parties – feelings of wounded honor, which, if they ceased to exist, the welfare of society and the prosperity of the country would cease with them” (40). For Erskine, preserving an ethos of privilege, obligation and rank was crucial for the maintenance of social order and national prosperity. Yet, just over ten years before, William Hunter published his *Essay on Duelling* in which he describes the duelist as “one of those monsters, whom Nature, in her wrath, now and then produces, in order to exhibit the height of human profligacy [...] a wretch, without shame, without morality... [and] in whose breast every degrading passion is constantly in action” (qtd. in Reed 143). Almost 40 years later, Hunter’s argument seemed to be taking root and by 1838 “Violent and life-threatening defenses of one’s honor [...] once routine public rituals, were no longer considered *manly* by either state authorities or a growingly ‘respectable’ public” (Weiner 41 emphasis mine).

Weiner’s point is important because it reveals that dueling was not only contested, but that it was contested on the grounds of its gender-signifying capability. Some claimed the ancient act protected and promoted honor, decency and the characteristics of manhood needed for the “welfare of society,” while others thought that its continued

practice signaled the decline of civilization itself – a brutal and barbaric act that turned men into monsters. Both cases are built on the ritual’s transformative power to effect in its male participants either manhood or monstrosity. The difference, when that line is crossed from the one to the other, is also the Gothic moment in Tennyson’s literary representation of masculinity.

In the same year *Maud* was published, Lorenzo Sabine published a history and examination of dueling in which he concluded that the judicial authorities in England have “united to *prevent* punishments under the laws against dueling” and yet that dueling had become increasingly rare (qtd. in Reed 145). In other words, although dueling was not often practiced in the 1850s, it was also not punished, signaling the reticence on the part of larger social structures to completely dispense with such a powerful marker of English manhood. Thus, in typically Victorian ways, dueling became a complex site in which multiple codes of English manhood seemingly contradicted one another.

These codes continued to function as literary conventions long after the social practice itself became passé. Reed notes that “Duelling [sic] was expected in melodrama” and that its most common function, as a literary device, was to “demonstrate the ability and manliness of the characters” (149). As Tracy’s index reminds us, dueling was also an exceptionally common motif in Gothic literature. It occurs in 57 of the 208 stories that she annotates. This frequency is remarkable when one realizes that “ghosts” appear in only 69. Dueling appears in the Gothic as part of that form’s fascination with the past, and more specifically, with the past’s various technologies of the self that had come to signify manliness. Even within the social debates, Hunter’s invocation of the monstrous, shameless and base borrows from the Gothic in order to critique dueling’s productive

power. Importing terms and images from the Gothic, or even using the term “Gothic” itself, in the cause of larger political and social debates has existed since term’s origin.³¹ Likewise, Leslie Fiedler notes that “Duelling [...] is referred to by one eighteenth-century critic as a ‘gothic custom’”(136).

Given that dueling, as a literary motif, was not limited to the Gothic and appeared in several related forms, it may seem suspect to claim that the duel in *Maud* functions as part of a Gothic mode. Yet it is precisely in the way that the duel, as a signifying practice, not only fails in this case, but also creates a monstrous result that aligns it within a Gothic trajectory. For example, Reed mentions Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s novel *Pelham* in which the main character fights two duels, both of which “merely indicate Pelham’s mastery of all those skills considered necessary in a complete and accomplished man” (149). Significantly, those skills are a meticulously balanced combination of the martial courage and self-control that the speaker in *Maud* finds so incommensurate with one another. In *Pelham*’s first duel he acts “grandly by sparing his opponent” and in his second, he leaves his opponent merely wounded (149). In other words he has struck the precise balance between the ancient code by which a wounded honor demanded violence, and the newer code which demands emotional self-control. While it is not his main emphasis, Reed’s wording on this specific point is insightful. *Pelham*’s “mastery” of those social codes confers on him the status of manliness. It is Tennyson’s particular genius to have dramatically voiced in *Maud* the ontological terror of someone who is instead mastered by those codes. Yet Herbert Tucker’s gloss on the attempts of the speaker to meet one set of social codes through engaging in a duel is particularly enlightening:

Without dodging responsibility ('it is this guilty hand!'), his narrative of the duel depicts both antagonists as caught up in roles that their high passion assumes by social reflex: roles ordained by "the Christless code" of honor (2.i.26), dated by 1855 but still very much in force... (414)

Tucker identifies a crucial aspect of Tennyson's monodrama, particularly as it pertains to my conception of a Gothic mode and its link to the poet's critique of the formation of Victorian manhood: the notion of shared responsibility. The speaker in *Maud* (and the brother)³² accept responsibility for the violence in which they have participated, yet they also perceive their behavior as ideologically "caught up" in a series of obligatory cultural codes that demand those behaviors for the formation and performance of a coherently gendered self. The speaker's adherence to this code, however, produces madness instead of manhood. By dramatically voicing this process through the subjective emotional outpourings of the deranged speaker, Tennyson utilizes familiar conventions of the Gothic to associate the madness and breakdown of these codes with Victorian cultural assumptions.

Upon mortally wounding the brother, the speaker suffers his most intense emotional breakdown, and finds himself in an asylum as a result. Having already traced the more direct Gothic influences on the madhouse section of Tennyson's monodrama in Chapter One, the significance here lies in how that mode functions in the poem. Tennyson's dramatic exploration of madness reflects [cotemporaneous] theories about what madness is, and more importantly, how it should be dealt with. Tennyson's experiences with Matthew Allen, whose work is based on the premise that "the madman is *not* irrational" (*Poetry* 174) has important implications for understanding how those

Gothic tropes function as cultural critique. Allen's theories simultaneously require that a madman take responsibility for controlling the disease, even as that responsibility is dispersed amongst an ever-widening series of social and biological deviancies.

Armstrong notes that "the effect is to pass on the responsibility for madness to an ever widening circle of agencies and to undermine, or open up, the definition of madness... If madness is a morbid form of the norm, the norm itself is always potentially morbid" (275).

In the asylum, the speaker fantasizes that he has been buried alive, and this notion of society's potential morbidity is actualized as the world of the dead and the world of the living become almost indecipherable. The hallucination of being buried in a shallow grave "Only a yard beneath the street" (2.245) emphasizes the feeble, and apparently permeable, barrier that separates the two realms. The endless "Driving, hurrying, marrying, burying" (2.250) that flows above the speaker's head finds its corollary amongst the dead. For the speaker, there is "no peace in the grave" (2.254), because "...up and down to and fro, / Ever about [him] the dead men go; / And to hear a dead man chatter / Is enough to drive one mad" (2.255-58). The image of the restless dead functions not only to highlight the Victorian obsession with the horrors of being buried alive, but, more interestingly, it serves as mirror to the busy markets and streets that the speaker railed against earlier in the poem. This mirroring calls attention to the indistinguishability of the living and the dead, turning the busy market places into places of mindless, lifeless consumption. The speaker mentions fellow inmates who surround him, including "...a lord of all things, praying / To his own great self" (2.270-71), a corrupt statesman (2.272), and a "vile physician" (2.274). While these types of delusions

were common in Victorian asylums, each of these people also represent patriarchal power structures that actively shape the social codes that the speaker is struggling to understand and adhere to. The speaker's unique perception of these individuals and the theological, political and medical discourses that they represent, as a "world of the dead" (2.278), reconceptualizes the forces that work to consolidate homosocial power as a teeming necropolis, populated by, and reproducing the dead.

Maud's implicit indictment of larger social structures was part of larger trend in the development of mental sciences in the Victorian period. As Colley notes, Victorian scientists and writers "held society and inheritance responsible for any sort of aberrational behavior. No longer did mad men make a mad world. Now a mad world, replete with mammonism, religious, scientific, and social upheaval, unbalanced people" (32). For Victorians, the recognition that biological, theological, and political forces were all powerfully at work in the production of the most deviant citizens was a revelation that often produced paralyzing effects. Armstrong's comments on *Maud's* response to this cultural context are valuable here:

Questions of agency and choice become paramount as the madman becomes painfully responsible for the madness which is at the same time society's madness. If society is organized madness, how is power and legitimacy maintained and what confers right on legitimacy? The poem's answer is to explore the nature of the *will*. The will as the imposition of legal power controls inheritance, and the distribution of property/ The will in the personal, ethical, and psychological sense controls the biological

inheritance, the blood and the nerves of the physical being with which the speaker is obsessed. (275)

Even as the speaker's attempt to return to the codes of martial courage fails to produce a coherent masculine self, the speaker is equally unable to adhere to the new social codes. One of the central requirements for a masculinity that is rooted in the will is a relentless mental, emotional, and economic self-control.³³ Herbert Sussman goes so far as to state that "the formations of Victorian manhood may be set along a continuum of degrees of self-regulation" (3), and James Eli Adams links the process of self-regulation to its material and social objectives, stating that "energetic self-discipline that distinguished manly 'character' offered not only economic utility but also a claim to new forms of status and privilege" (5). This new method of manhood is precisely what the speaker rails against. His anger is partly because, as the opening of the poem indicates, he sees this new method as relentlessly more violent than the older codes based in martial courage. As James R. Kincaid remarks, "[the speaker] connects all images of male power with deadly aggression, animalism, and corruption. A male-dominated commercial system is, thus, not only corrupt but murderous" (112). The speaker's explanation is only partially true, however, and it is clear that part of his reaction is rooted in the transparency of these codes as codes.

The speaker's ravings against Maud's potential suitor reveal his discomfort with the way in which the establishment of manhood, at one time invisible and therefore naturalized, is now baldly paraded about and highlighted as a social process. What the speaker most despises about the suitor is that he is a "new-made lord" (1.332). The process by which the suitor becomes the "first of his noble line" (1.341) is Gothicized

through the distorted ravings of the speaker. The suitor's grandfather has moved from one black pit (the coal mine) to an even blacker pit (death) after a life spent in "grimy nakedness" (1.336) and "poisoned gloom" (1.337). The grandfather's acquisition of the coal is figured in violent terms as leaving only a "gutted mine" (1.338), and his conversion of that resource is alchemical: he "left all his coal turned to gold" (1. 340). But this description only serves to highlight the mood and mode of the situation. The more interesting aspect of the Gothic at work in this passage is the emphasis on the suitor's re-use of an older symbol of authority to signify his new status, his "gewgaw castle [...] / New as his title, built last year" (1.347-48). The castle in the Gothic functions as a symbol of ancient patrileneal authority, but in *Maud* it functions more like Walpole's Strawberry Hill estate – a blatant artifice that unashamedly calls attention to its own status as an artificial construct. Instead of an ancient estate that confers manhood by producing heirs that access nobility through primogeniture, the gewgaw castle confers manhood through the suitor's access to inherited money. Shatto remarks that "many peerages were created for nineteenth-century captains of industry who had made fortunes from coal mining in the wake of the Industrial Revolution" (185). The speaker's emphasis is almost always on the suitor's ability to master these newer forms of cultural capital. It is the fact that the suitor has a "bought commission" (1.359) that is so significant to the speaker, and why he calls him a "babe-faced lord" (2.13). The last section of this chapter will explore the Gothic implications of this process further, but for now what is relevant is that the speaker is exasperated by his own inability to access and manage these new codes effectively.

In his attempts to meet the new criteria of manhood and exhibit self-control, the speaker disdains the “passionate heart of the poet” (1.139), focusing instead on attempts to “keep a temperate brain; / For not to desire or admire, if a man could learn it, were more / Than to walk all day like the sultan of old in a garden of spice” (1.141-3). Yet the speaker’s attempts to regain and stabilize his identity in accordance with these social codes are undermined by the psychic and emotional instability that have become the only inheritance left to him by his father. The verbal eruptions express the emotional and mental turbulence experienced by the speaker, even as he recognizes his need for self-control. The speaker’s plea for “a man to arise in me, / That the man I am may cease to be!” (1.396-7) is, therefore, complicated by the other image of death and resurrection in the poem – his father’s mad ravings. The speaker recalls the last image he has of his dead father, “Wrapt in a cloak” (1.59) on his way to the grave and remembers that he “thought [his father] would rise and speak / And rave at the lie and the liar, ah God, as he used to rave” (1.59-60). The father does rise and speak and rave throughout the poem in a type of spectral ventriloquism through the ravings of his son. Indeed, the only man that “arises” in the speaker is his father, whose manifestations the speaker recognizes in his own verbal outbursts. From the outset of the poem, the speaker half questions, “What! am I raging alone as my father raged in his mood?” (1.53).

The speaker’s attempt to salvage his manhood from the ruins of his father’s legacy and redefine himself in accordance with these new social codes intersects with the fear that his fate will be determined by his rather Gothic “inheritance.” The speaker’s morbid sense that his own self destruction is inevitable is thwarted through the imposition of a self-made law, so that the question “Must I too creep to the hollow and dash myself

down and die” (1.54) is linked with the assertion of his will and his desire to “hold to the law [he] made, nevermore to brood / On a horror of shattered limbs and a wretched swindler’s lie” (1.55-56). Yet as his emotions give way in the madhouse cell, the speaker states that his “bones are shaken with pain / For into a shallow grave they are thrust” (2. 243-44) – a description that echoes the “shattered limbs” of his father that were “dinted” into the bloody hollow in the opening stanza.

This parallel emphasizes the speaker’s process of encrypting his father in several senses of the word. At the most obvious level, the speaker imagines himself, and his father, in a literal crypt. In another sense of the word, meaning to encode, the speaker takes the “text” of his father’s life as an encryption of the social codes that he is unable to decipher because he lacks the proper “key” that will clearly decode the convoluted and contradictory messages that are “written” through his father’s example. Yet the term also relates to the speaker’s emotional and psychological encryption³⁴ of his father. The speaker’s identification with, and subsequent loss of, his father initiates a process in which the speaker “swallows” his father’s image out of a need to preserve, or encrypt, him. Yet within this process the speaker has, himself, been swallowed up by the uncontainable and un-mastered grief over of his father’s death. In this sense, even as the consumed father continues to “rise and speak” through the son, the speaker’s ability to establish his always already constructed “self” has been consumed by his father’s unstable life and unnatural death in both psychic and economic terms.

Thus, the speaker’s reclamation of his identity, as it is assembled from the fragments of his father’s sense of self, would rest on his ability to reclaim what his father has lost. The speaker would have to obtain Maud, regain his estate, and thus reestablish

the house that has been left in ruins, a process that, in turn, would depend upon his ability to master these new codes of self-control. The speaker's struggle with these codes surfaces in an impassioned passage about the need for a repressive model of moral regulation. The speaker ridicules the call to "Put down the passions that make earth Hell! / Put down ambition, avarice, pride, / Jealousy down!" (l. 376- 77), knowing that it is precisely through these qualities that he could succeed in the new market economy. Motivation for economic and social mobilization is fueled by a jealousy of someone's wealth and status; ambition and pride are prerequisites for any social ascent to occur, and avarice is necessary to maintain the position acquired within the emerging capitalist system. The speaker is caught in the double bind of these conflicting social codes. He exhibits an ambition to win Maud's hand, which is fueled by an obsessive jealousy of her father's "well-gotten wealth" and her brother's ability to take the father's chair (l.466) in the great Hall. According to the social codes that were built upon a materialist economy, to restrain these emotions is to eliminate the drive towards recovering his own social status as well as his sense of "self." However, according to the social codes that are built upon a rhetoric of "self-mastery," to *not* control these emotions leads to a dissolution of the speaker's "manhood."

This set of dynamics helps to confirm that the most Gothic aspects of Tennyson's dramatic verse critique the maddening effects of attempting to adhere to a system of social codes that is itself unstable and contingent. I will make a similar case for the violent figures in Browning's dramatic monologues. In addition to explorations of madness, Chapters Three and Four show how Browning's use of a Gothic mode utilizes the dramatic utterance of violent men as a social mirror that reflects the ideological (and

actual) violence enacted against men who fail in their patriarchal duties. Tucker notes that the speaker in *Maud* “has played the game: having done wrong he cannot say where he has *gone* wrong, because he is finally victimized by the confluence of incompatible cultural imperatives” (414 italics in original). Browning’s Guido is equally bewildered when his attempts to adhere to the cultural codes of masculinity lead to public censure, and his eventual death. Where the ideological victimization of Victorian men is only implied in *Maud*, Guido argues forcefully that he is merely the product (and thence the victim) of a patriarchal system. It is from his lips a shamelessly self-serving plea, but not entirely untrue from the perspective of Browning’s implied social critique. In both of these major poems, the technologies of Victorian manhood are of course only partially the origin of the horror; the male speakers must be assigned responsibility for their choices and actions. In both of these major poems, the system is only partially at fault, and the male speakers must share that blame even as they attempt desperately to decipher “signs” of masculinity from a palimpsest of cultural codes - one which bears the traces and echoes of previous social scripts.

Spectral Visions and the Counterfeit of the Self

The process of deciphering this palimpsest of social codes is further complicated by yet another process in which these social signifiers are divorced from the signified and re-attached to others. This second process is exemplified in the “ghost of the counterfeit,” a figure and a phrase coined by Jerrold Hogle to describe the Gothic penchant for representing the increasing distance between signifier and signified in correspondence with the changing socioeconomic milieu (“Frankenstein as Neo-Gothic” 178). Hogle’s

analysis is especially apropos in light of Tennyson's having referred to *Maud* as his "little *Hamlet*." Hogle examines *Hamlet*, the play that Alexander Pope described as Shakespeare's most "Gothick" work (*The Ghost of the Counterfeit* 27), and the Renaissance emphasis on self-fashioning in order to show how the concepts of inherited status started giving way to new models of social legitimacy with the rise of a mercantile economy. He then examines Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* which, Walpole admitted in the second edition, was based, in part, upon *Hamlet*, in order to show the increasing distance between the signs and the referents of social status within an emerging capitalist economy. Tennyson's use of *Hamlet* as a model (like Walpole before him) not only aligns him within a trajectory of Gothic texts that involve spectral fathers, but also encourages consideration of *Maud* in light of "the Gothic ghost of the counterfeit."

In a series of articles, Hogle analyzes Walpole's re-signifying of *Hamlet*'s ghost.

Hogle suggests that

[Walpole's] ghosts reveal the highly conflicted assumptions behind "Gothic" reworking of past symbolic modes, especially Shakespearean drama; that those assumptions reflect an eighteenth-century transition between states of Western culture in which increasingly waning concepts of signification pull nostalgically backwards while newer, more capitalist alternatives try to make cultural capital out of the older ones. ("The Ghost of the Counterfeit" 178)

The shift in signification is tied to the shifts in economic modes which destabilized the link between land ownership, familial identity and social legitimacy. As well, these shifts disturbed the "notion of signifiers as always referring to an ordained status in people and

things” (“The Gothic Ghost” 297). The old signs and codes are not dismantled, however, they are “hollowed out” and kept, reused as receptacles into which “emergent cultural tensions can be transferred, sequestered, disguised and thus (momentarily) diffused” (“Frankenstein as neo-Gothic” 178). As I mentioned earlier, this process is illuminated in the speaker’s reaction to the suitor’s gewgaw castle (1.347). Inherent status is symbolized by the castle, a point illustrated by the confluence of a family line and a family estate under the appellation “house.” In such a matrix, a stable, irrevocable status is ostensibly represented by the castle. It is not only that the gewgaw castle is constructed as pure artifice, but also that it is clear about its status as artifice. The old symbol is hollowed out and re-used here within a newer system of signification, one that equates status and worth with monetary gain rather than inherited familial legitimacy. The self-awareness involved in the use of the gewgaw castle not only openly flaunts the constructedness of what it signifies, but it also points back to previous attributions of status and worth and reveals them as constructions as well.

Thus, Hamlet’s reading of his father’s spectre signals both a longing for a direct material reference that indicates gender, class and social position – “I’ll call thee Hamlet, / King, father, royal Dane” (1.4.25-26) – and a knowledge that the figure may only be a “questionable shape” (1.4.23) that has the potential to “assume some other...form” (1.4.54). Hamlet’s simultaneous nostalgia for a system in which signs are securely tethered to their referents and his knowledge that those signs were never secure to begin with is informed by the fact that “status and the signs once associated with it have apparently become more transferable depending on economic success and acquisition” (“The Ghost of the Counterfeit” 30). Hogle observes that

now signs can serve as partially emptied-out remnants of their former status-attachments (nostalgia for supposedly absolute grounds for themselves) and as markers of ‘natures’ that seem recoined, or simply covered over (counterfeited), by new displays of economic and social position, some of which the apparent owner may not ‘naturally’ or completely possess. (30)

The unfastening of sign and referent continues as socioeconomic structures change from early mercantile to emerging capitalist models, so that, in *The Castle of Otranto*, Walpole’s version of *Hamlet*’s ghost is marked by an “increasing distance between substance and image” (“The Ghost of the Counterfeit” 31). This dynamic is made evident through Manfred’s encounter with his ancestral ghost. While Hamlet faces the ghost of his father, Manfred is beckoned by the ghost of the *portrait* of his grandfather, or in Hogle’s terms, the ghost of the counterfeit. Not only is the haunting spectre a more distant relative (Manfred’s “grandsire”), but the distance between the material body of Manfred’s ancestor and the spectral manifestation is mediated by a portrait (or visual counterfeit), thus creating Hogle’s figure – the ghost of the counterfeit. The ghost of the counterfeit is not only a separation between “substance and image,” but also a fragmenting of the sign into portions so that “The several Otranto ghosts, in contrast to Shakespeare’s one, are first of all *tearings to pieces* of their predecessor” (“Frankenstein as Neo-Gothic” 179).

In Tennyson’s text, the ghost of the father manifests itself in two interconnected ways – both of which extend Hogle’s premise that, within the Gothic, conceptions (and constructions) of the “self” are represented through an ever-increasing distance between

the social signs of identity and their material referents. Like Hamlet and Manfred, the speaker in *Maud* encounters a spectre, and, like those before him, his encounter directly relates to his need to re-establish his house. In Tennyson's version of Hamlet's ghost, the father returns through the spectral manifestation of Maud. After Maud dies, she returns to the speaker as a "hard mechanic ghost" (2.82) which the speaker "cannot but know / Is but a juggle born of the brain" (2.89-90). In spite of this knowledge the speaker is beckoned by the ghost, and he follows, stating, "It leads me forth at evening, / It lightly winds and steals / In a cold white robe before me" (2.157-9). Yet, even before Maud is dead, the speaker refers to her in spectral terms. When her brother is killed in the duel with the poem's speaker, she enters the scene by gliding "out of the joyous wood" (2.31) only to be described by the speaker as "the ghastly wraith of one that I know" (2.32). Even in the early sections of the poem, he describes her beauty as a type of haunting, noting that it is "ever as pale as before / Growing and fading and growing upon me without a sound, / Luminous, gemlike, ghostlike, deathlike, half the night long / Growing and fading and growing, till I could bear it no more" (1.93-6).

While the shift to a female spectre may seem like a departure from Hamlet's and Manfred's patrilineal ghosts, it can also be read as an extension of the distancing described by Hogle. Tennyson continues the pattern of increasing distance between the signs and "realities" of social status by making the spectral presence a ghost of the commodity that represents the speaker's only access point to the social status and sense of "self" that are lost. Unlike earlier monodramas that bear a woman's name, Maud is not the speaker or central character of the poem. From the outset of the poem she is equated with the land that the speaker has lost, and is described in terms that identify her sole

function – to be a commodity of exchange between men, and a means by which the speaker can regain the signifying power to reassert a lost manhood. Maud is described by the speaker as “my jewel” (1.352) whose “cold and clear cut face” (1.79) is “Faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null, / Dead perfection, no more” (1.82-3). The description of Maud’s beauty as “pale” and “dead perfection” in conjunction with the alliterative emphasis on her cold, clear, cut face draws attention to her status, not only as a precious gem-like commodity, but also as a corpse-like “spectral bride” (2.318) who functions as an item of exchange between the two families. Like the diamond in an engagement band that symbolizes the promise of marriage, Maud sits in her “little oak room / [...] like a precious stone / Set in the heart of the carven gloom” (1.496-8). Maud’s function, as the gem set in the “band” that is the Hall, solidifies her roles as the center of the architectural acquisition that the speaker longs for, the symbol of exchange between familial patriarchs, and the Gothic heroine trapped in architectural “gloom.”

The implicit alignment of Maud with gems situates her firmly as a market commodity, yet the older chivalric code is also at work in the four stanzas that make up the “dream” of the fathers (1.285-300), which is later echoed in the speaker’s account of Maud’s childhood memory (1.720-6). The speaker dreams of a conversation between Maud’s father and his own in which Maud, like the property and gems with which she is aligned, is exchanged between the two men in a promise of marriage to the speaker. In this sense, she becomes the sign of house, and land that are, in turn, signs designed to re-establish the speaker’s sense of self. Similarly, Tucker notes that “Maud appears to her lover not a person intrinsically worthy, nor an object of desire, but a sign whose worth arises from the place she holds in a social system” (417). In ominous tones, the speaker

recalls how the promise of Maud's "dark father" (1.720) "sealed her" for the speaker from "her first sweet breath" (1.724). This promise is the foundation for the speaker's imagined sense of entitlement to Maud, leading him to assert that Maud is "Mine, mine by a right, from birth to death. / Mine, mine – our fathers have sworn." (1.725-6). The paternal foundation for the speaker's manic repetition of "mine" and the despotic possessiveness that claims a right to complete control over Maud's existence, literally from birth to death, not only invokes the old chivalric code, but also the Gothic implications of that system.

Yet the reality of this paternal pact is obscured by the speaker's own admission that it may only exist in a dream. In the first set of stanzas, the speaker draws attention to his own uncertainty in a self-questioning utterance: "Did I hear it half in a doze? / Long since I know not where? / Did I dream it an our ago, when asleep in this arm-chair?" (1.285-88). Here the speaker confesses his own doubts about the fathers' ostensible promise to join their children together. The "memory" itself could instead be just an "echo of something / read with boy's delight, / Viziers nodding together / In some Arabian night" (1.293-96). In the companion set of stanzas (1.719-26), readers hear that Maud's mother apparently confirms the arrangement on her deathbed, but the text's monodramatic form precludes confidence that this too is not merely "a juggle born of the brain" (2.89-90).³⁵ The speaker is painfully aware of his own inability to distinguish what is real about his relationship with Maud from what is phantasy, eventually to the point that Maud herself is nothing more than a spectral presence, a "blot upon the brain" (2.200) that threatens to "mix memory with doubt" (2.197). The reality of what Maud, or her father, did or did not do is less important than Tennyson's dramatic exploration of the

speaker's hazy perception of that reality. Shires finds the speaker "trapped in a wholly imaginary love" (285), and it is this process of dramatically revealing how the jumble of social codes regulating gender, functions within the male imagination that is the focus here.

As far as the speaker is concerned, the ghosts of the fathers continue to exert a powerful influence over the relationship. Tucker notes, "their voices are spectrally empowered by dream, but also by a paternal convention that is nowhere and everywhere" (418). Maud, who is also both nowhere and everywhere within the poem, signifies this paternal convention indexically. That is, she points to this convention by existing solely as an example of its effects. The spectre she becomes can be read as a ghost of a symbol – one that represents a series of social signifiers for masculinity (the land, the Hall, a family line) that have all been lost by the speaker. She has become, in Hogle's terms, a "nearly bodiless, spectral object of exchange" (Frankenstein as Neo-Gothic 194), that circulates with the potential to "raise [the speaker] to her estate as a landed paterfamilias. Not her, not her, but a poise, a prize, a place" (Tucker 417).

If Walpole has fragmented the father's ghost into separate pieces, Tennyson has exploded it into a mist. Hogle shows that "Hamlet's attempt to refer his Ghost's 'questionable shape' to a deeply material object outside it, his father's 'canoniz'd bones,' is turned by Walpole into the shade of a two dimensional signifier" ("Frankenstein as Neo-Gothic" 180). In Tennyson's *Maud*, the "ghost" of the father exists as a dream, as a voice in the wood, as an apparition of a symbol, and, as I will show next, as a figure reproducing an instability encrypted within both the emerging social structures and the speaker's own psyche.

The second manifestation of the father's ghost has already been intimated earlier in this chapter – the spectre of the father as the speaker himself. Just as the sign of the ghost becomes more and more distanced from its referent, in *Maud* the ghost of the father is signified by the nameless speaker whose shifting selves are revealed to be the counterfeits of an identity that is, itself, as in Walpole's text, a thin and fading image, a portrait of the "essential legitimacy" that was once tied to property, the laws of inheritance and familial name that are now given the illusion of substance through new cultural codes. For the speaker, these newer codes are pursued in an attempt to stabilize the social structures that the father formerly represented and held in place. The terror that emerges from the speaker in this process is rooted in his acute awareness that the social codes were precisely that – codes whose mobility, and volatility make for an unstable ontological foundation. The shifting codes through which Victorian manhood was established, maintained and recognized drew attention to the fact that the previous model was equally artificial. Thus the speaker in *Maud*, and the society that mirrors him, are not caught between newer, culturally constructed notions of a gendered identity and a time when that identity was innate and insoluble. Rather, they are caught between these new codes and a longing for the illusion of that past stability; for a time when the performative force of those codes operated invisibly to produce coherently gendered subjects. The ghost of "the father" in *Maud* is, in this sense, akin to Hogle's Gothic ghost of the counterfeit: an ethereally haunting spectre of a sign that is always, already emptied of its signifier.

Tennyson felt that the uniqueness of his poem lay in the fact that "no other poem has been made into a drama where the successive phases of passion in one person take

the place of the successive persons” (qtd. in Ricks 518). These “phases of passion” can be read as manifestations of “The Father’s” ghost – a simulacra of gender in which a seemingly endless parade of counterfeit after counterfeit is expressed in a frenzied battle against an increasing self-awareness that such phases or selves are perpetuations of a copy without an original. Herbert Sussman has noted that “for the Victorians manhood is not an essence but a plot, a condition whose achievement and whose maintenance forms a narrative over time” (13). In *Maud*, the narrative of Victorian manhood is dramatized by Tennyson in a Gothic mode, haunted by the phantom of a displaced paterfamilias who must be exhumed and released from his cultural, and psychic, crypts.

The Phantom Father

Nowhere is this encryption clearer than in the final section of the monodrama in which the speaker joins the nation’s armed forces and leaves to fight in the Crimean War. This final section of *Maud* was apparently one of the most alienating aspects of the poem for its first readers. With this section, Tennyson managed to offend people on all sides of the war issue. Parts of the population that believed in the war were offended at Tennyson for putting the patriotic sentiments into the mouth of a madman, and people who were against the war felt that this was Tennyson at his most jingoistic. Tennyson’s own protest that “strictly speaking I do not see how from the poem I could be pronounced with certainty either a peace man or war man” (qtd. in Turner 144) has not stopped critical speculation, ever since, about the poet’s political leanings, and their expression in *Maud*. Current scholarship is equally divided about how this third section fits in with the remainder of the poem. Once again, setting aside the potential biographical revelations of

this section opens up the poem in interesting and productive ways. My interest in Section 3 of *Maud* is not with the political significance of the war itself, but, rather, with how the image of going off to war functions within the monodrama specifically as it relates to the struggle of the speaker (and the culture) to negotiate the codes for establishing Victorian manhood.

Tucker's remark that *Maud* "represents the most complete fusion of private with public codes anywhere in Tennyson" (406) echoes the numerous critics who have drawn attention to Tennyson's positioning of speaker and society as mirrors of one another. Thus, even as the speaker is haunted by the spectre of his father – and the empty promise of unquestioned authority and social legitimation he represents – so too is the larger social structure still haunted by what John Locke called, "a strange kind of domineering phantom, called 'the fatherhood'" (qtd. in N.O. Brown 4)³⁶. Even as new codes proliferate, they overlies the older codes and produce a confusing palimpsest of cultural signifiers. The older codes, and their promise of a naturalized versus constructed reality, haunt a society in the midst of tremendous change. The longevity of the duel in England is an example of such a code in which an entire society appears to be haunted by the promise of ritual's signifying power. As we have seen, *Maud* is the spectral bride who functions as a manifestation of the father's phantom - the ghost of the counterfeit in the poem.³⁷ Significantly, the call to war comes to the speaker through her.

Earlier in the poem, the speaker's ravings about the violence of mammonism is interrupted by a voice singing "A passionate ballad gallant and gay, / A martial song like a trumpet's call!" (1.165-66). The ballad invokes an older and virtually obsolete ethos. The appeal of its "martial song" sings in the ears of the troubled and susceptible speaker

like a "trumpet's call." More specifically, the song invites the speaker into an ancient code of manhood that equates manliness with socially sanctioned violence in the service of national interests. Maud is

Singing of men that in battle array,
 Ready in heart and ready in hand,
 March with the banner and bugle and fife
 To death, for their native land. (1. 169-72)

The words of the song celebrate warfare one of the most ancient homosocial rituals for establishing manhood and honor. These qualities are exhibited less in fighting for a just cause than in resolving to sacrifice one's life on the field of battle. The disembodied voice is specifically "Singing of Death, and of Honor that cannot die" (1.177).³⁸

The new and old codes are juxtaposed with one another as the ravings against the rival suitor (1. 330-65), a new made lord, are set alongside the speaker's desire to "hear again / The chivalrous battle song" (1.382-83). These longings are tied directly to his lament that men are no longer manly and that Maud is at risk of taking "a wanton dissolute boy / For a man and leader of men" (1. 387-88). They are also tied to the speaker's impassioned plea, "[...] ah for a man to arise in me, / That the man I am may cease to be!" (1.386-97). Yet the speaker resists this summons by the spectral Maud, recognizing that the real basis of its seductive power is in its false promise to re-establish, if only posthumously, his threatened manhood. Consequently, the voice can only "trouble the mind / With a joy in which [he] cannot rejoice, / A glory [he] shall not find" (1.181-83).

The spectre of Maud appears again in section 2, plaguing the speaker as a “hard mechanic ghost” (2. 82). James R. Bennett links this phantasmal visitation with the martial song (39), a reading that would make sense of the speaker’s now recalling how “an old song vexes [his] ear” (1.95) precisely when contemplating everything that he has lost. However, the speaker clarifies in the next line that the song haunting him here is “of Lamech” and is “of mine” (2.96). The biblical allusion is to *Genesis* 4.23 which states, “[...] I have slain a man to my wounding, and a young man to my hurt,” and is thus connected to the duel, not to Maud’s martial song. However, the significance is relatively unchanged: Maud’s spectral presence and voice are already linked to the invocation of implicitly violent chivalric codes and, further, to the solidification of manhood that those assumptions once seemed to ensure. But the speaker’s identifying himself instead with Lamech’s sorrow clearly signals the collapse of any confidence in the efficacy of those older codes to reify manhood. Having complied with them by participating in the duel, he is full of remorse and pain rather than any sense of restored honor. Gothic tropes and dramatic indirection enable Tennyson to offer Victorian England a portrait of dejected or baffled disillusionment with culturally inscribed romantic performances of masculinity.

Tennyson’s monodrama draws towards its close with another such context, that of actual warfare abroad. And here the Gothicizing of its significance is perhaps best illustrated by a comparison with his rather different treatment in “Locksley Hall” of very similar subjects. In themes and dramatic situation, the earlier poem clearly prefigures *Maud*’s most Gothic aspects. In fact, the speaker in “Locksley Hall” is virtually a younger version of the speaker in *Maud*: a self-absorbed and spiteful rejected lover whose “bluster” will, in time, develop into the morbid raving of the later poem. As in

Maud, the speaker of *Locksley Hall* is landless and fatherless, and although the father in this case was killed in battle, the same injunction against social mammonism is voiced: “I was left a trampled orphan, and a selfish uncle’s ward” (155). Similarly, the speaker rails against the “gold that gilds the straiten’d forehead of the fool” (62) and focuses his critique on a society in which “Every door is barred with gold, and opens but to golden keys” (100). His disgust with wealth and primogeniture is inextricably connected to the fact that his own social status is questionable. Like the speaker in *Maud*, he blames this failed relationship on the paternal rejection of his suit and assumes this is the reason his cousin has married a more suitable social match. As in *Maud*, the scorned speaker despises the other suitor, whom he considers a “clown” (47), and curses the “social ties that warp us from the living truth” (60).

Yet in the most recognizably Gothic moments of “Locksley Hall,” the speaker reveals his own violently possessive attitude towards a woman he ostensibly loves: “Better thou wert dead before me, tho’ I slew thee with my Hand! (56). The invocation of the ancient patriarchal code stipulating that a woman’s death is preferable to her shame is a shallow ruse here, for she is no fallen woman but honorably married. The speaker continues to vocalize macabre desires as he fantasizes about joining her in the grave: “Better thou and I were lying, hidden from the heart’s disgrace / Roll’d in one another’s arms, and silent in a last embrace” (57-58). The misogynist rant extends itself to a fantasized and imperialized foreign paradise where, his “passions cramped no longer,” he will be at liberty to “take some savage woman, she shall rear my dusky race” (168). Even if these and other fatuous sentiments in the poem are simply meant, as Tennyson averred, to be representative of callow Victorian youth, their cultural implications are

sinister, and their psychological tendencies grim. The speaker in *Maud* will echo the question posed rhetorically in “Locksley Hall” – “Am I mad?” (65). Hence the feature of “Locksley Hall” that most pertinently and symptomatically anticipates the Gothic ending of *Maud* is the frustrated and emasculated Englishman’s desiring a solution for his loss of self worth in the comforting, if horrific and violent, romantic platitude of exorcising one’s disappointments through noble death in warfare abroad. Unfortunately for the fulfillment of this outlet for thwarted masculinist self-assertion, he responds to the bugle call but laments that England is not at war in 1842. This will not be so, however, a dozen years later as *Maud* is being composed in a darker spirit and in a more fully Gothic mode. Nor, when the story is resumed, as it were, is the speaker a puerile misanthrope.

The dream of war in *Maud* is Gothicized as the spectre eventually fills the sky and “spoke of a hope for the world in the coming wars” (3.11). Yet the allure of such optimism is again being undercut by the speaker’s repeated acknowledgment that such redemption, through a system in which a manhood worth having is displayed on the literal battlefield, is nothing but a “dream” (3. 15, 16, 18). Bennett affirms the ending of *Maud* as a type of exorcism, because the speaker sees “the dreary phantom arise and fly / Far into the North, and battle, and seas of death” (3.36-37). Yet, as Shatto notes, the North is “synonymous with Russia” (221), the scene of the war. Thus the phantom of the fathers – the spectral residue of the old code – does not leave the speaker but simply advances to the battlefield, where its voice will apparently continue to summon the speaker with the (empty) promise of manhood.

The kernel of the speaker’s dream of war is his longing for the uncomplicated manliness of a hegemonically imagined past, even that of one “man with heart, head,

hand, / Like some of the simple great ones gone / Forever and ever by” (1.389-91). Yet the Gothic aspects of the poem seem to subvert the essentially romantic dream of “the glory of manhood on his ancient height” (3.21). As with consenting to the duel, the speaker’s enlistment, and thus his inclusion back into a form of hegemonic masculinity, might seem to be affording him some resolution of anxiety. But again the reunion is far from reassuring. Although he states that he has now “felt at one with my native land, I am one with my kind,” (3. 58), the “kind” now constituted by acceptance into homosocial community (English nationality and military comradeship) is no better off than himself. Whereas some critics have claimed that “‘Locksley Hall’ and *Maud* illustrate a hope in the possibility of progress, national unity and international justice and peace” (Killham 172), a Gothic reading emphasizes how that mode confronted Victorian society with a reality it was not ready to see: the speaker’s proclamation that “However we brave it out, we men are a little breed” (1.131).

Chapter Three

Monstrous Men: Violence & Masculinity in *The Ring and the Book*

“Yet here is the monster! Why, he’s a mere man –”

Tertium Quid 4:1603

Spectral Poetics & Browning’s Gothic Mode

Just as the last chapter established Tennyson’s use of a Gothic mode to explore shifting constructs of masculine identity in *Maud*, this chapter examines Robert Browning’s epic-length experiment with dramatic presentation, *The Ring and the Book*, on similar grounds. Though Browning’s poem is distanced geographically and temporally from the contemporary British setting in *Maud*, the central protagonist of Browning’s work is facing a remarkably similar crisis in masculinity. As in Tennyson’s poem, this crisis is framed and dramatically voiced in a Gothic mode.

Although well known for his dramatic investigations into abnormal psychology and murder in macabre settings, Robert Browning is not usually considered an author who experimented with a Gothic mode. In a distinctly Wordsworthian echo, James Thompson does, in 1881, associate *The Ring and the Book* with a Gothic cathedral. The details of this comparison are nearly plagiarized in Henry James’ address to the Royal Society of Literature on the occasion of Browning’s centenary (1912).³⁹ Both writers’ vivid impression of how readers experience the notoriously labyrinthine passages within Browning’s series of poems is intriguing, but ultimately remote from the focus of this dissertation. In fact, the architectural analogy is more akin to Walter Bagehot’s famous description of Browning’s deliberately inelegant style as “grotesque” – in both cases the

focus of the critical alignment with the Gothic or grotesque is on the peculiar coarseness of Browning's style of writing, not his content.

As is the case with Tennyson, Browning's omission from the Gothic canon is due, in part, to generic and temporal biases. But while *Maud* found a "resistant readership" in mid-Victorian England, much of Browning's work found a readership that was not only mildly baffled but often actively hostile. In addition to reviewers' common complaints of "obscurity" within Browning's works, came their criticism of its subject matter. An unsigned review of *Men and Women* (1855) disparaged the production of yet "another book of madness and mysticism" that only served as "another melancholy specimen of power wantonly wasted, and talent deliberately perverted" (Thomas 86). William Dean Howells criticized Browning's later works, such as *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country* (1873), for its unseemly story line calling it "horrible and revolting" and a work whose "far-reaching insinuation and an occasional frantic rush at expression" can only be compared to "'dung' and 'devil's dung'" (Thomson 105).

The poetic turning point for Browning, *The Ring and the Book* (1868-9), was also a point at which his critics were divided. In reviewing *The Ring and the Book* the *British Quarterly Review* maintained that "it is a primary canon of criticism that a great poem can be based only upon a great human action [...] that always the action noble, the actors are noble" and accordingly objected that "Guido's murder is no worthier theme for a great poem than the crime of Tawell the Quaker, or Palmer the betting-man" (Oxford ed. intro. xxxiv). Here, the reviewer is comparing Guido to a married Quaker, John Tawell, whose poisoning of his pregnant mistress with prussic acid garnered tremendous coverage from newspapers in 1845 (Wiener 141). Shifting from subject matter to poetic

form, *The Spectator* felt that Browning's style was apt to "break the current of the story in which it is imbedded. And give a grotesque effect to the whole" while *The Times* "made a guardedly favorable judgment only after censuring Browning for [...] 'jostling violence' of rhythm, and 'abortive creations' of vocabulary" (Oxford ed. intro. xxv). Favorable reviews from the *Athenaeum*, and *Tinsley's Magazine* commended the quality of characterization with specific reference to "Pompilia" (xxxv).

While no review called the poem Gothic, there were some perceptive associations. *The Fortnightly Review* noted that "the theme is an Italian tragedy, and lies in that department to which English taste, narrow and rigid, usually expresses its repugnance by labeling it as morbid anatomy" (Litzinger and Smalley 307). The invocation of Italy and morbidity suggests that readers of Browning's poem may have seen elements in it that recalled the Gothic novels' continual placement of morbid and violent situations and domestic tyrants in Italian landscapes. John Doherty says as much in a scathing review that takes issue with Browning's supposed calumny against the Catholic church: "[Browning] could not have taken a readier way of commending himself to [the British public's] favour than by the construction of a tale in which, conformably to the venerable models of Mrs. Radcliffe's time, nearly all the scoundrels are priests; and though the hero is a priest too, he is so by an unhappy mistake" (325). Doherty's sensitivity to the anti-Catholic sentiment that filled the early Gothic novels and that that remained so popular in a primarily protestant England is not surprising given that his review appears in *The Dublin Review*. In tracing the type of Gothic mode used by Browning, this chapter's focus is not with the elements that Doherty rightfully identifies as a typically Radcliffian setting, or the anti-Catholic sentiment, superstition and

corruption associated with those locales. Rather, I draw on a constellation of elements that includes the decay of an ancient familial palace, the failure of an aristocratic line, the terrorizing violence of a tyrannical husband, and the plight of an immured woman who is exposed to the sadistic sexual proclivities of her monstrous mate. It is significant, however, that Doherty recognizes in Browning's poem a constellation of Radcliffian elements as it demonstrates how multiple Gothic modes can operate in the same text.

More recently, Adam Roberts has suggestively noted that Browning's entire poetic career is marked by the manner in which he "focuses his necromancer poetics by returning again and again to figures that straddle life and death" (112). Roberts' premise is that the type of resurrectionist poetics that Browning attributes to himself in Book 1 of *The Ring and the Book* is, in fact, a common *modus operandi* for the poet.

Conspicuously, Roberts does not himself use the term Gothic to describe Browning's work, though he does in effect thoroughly Gothicize the dramatic monologue, stating that "Browning's poems are haunted by ghosts" (110) and that "the dramatic monologue [is] a form of verbal resuscitation of the dead, a quasi-Spiritualist voicing of dead men and women" (109). Roberts continues,

His first collection of dramatic monologues, *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842), is full of poems that give voice to the dead. This is to say more than the fact that Browning's poems of necessity give voice to historical speakers [...] it is to observe the way these poems (taking as they do the dead speaker's speeches) are so frequently plotted against content that expresses the passing from life to death and back again; poems that deliberately straddle the death-life border. (114)

Browning's only enunciation of a theory of Gothic or, as Roberts would have it, "necromancer" poetic composition, is found in the Book 1 introduction to *The Ring and the Book*. There, the author of the whole (whether Browning himself or a dramatically projected "Browning") first deploys a metallurgical analogy for the "repristinating" process of creative production, and then meticulously describes an imaginative process by which the documentary source materials of this Roman Murder Story, the *Old Yellow Book*, produces through him, by a sort of spectral time-travelling, the poem to follow. The significance of these curious processes and of the indulgently long description of them in Book 1 more generally, is worth exploring as a prelude to consideration of dramatic monologues that resulted from them.

While Browning never produced a systematic theory of dramatic composition, in Book 1 of *The Ring and the Book*, his poetic persona describes the process of creating this lengthy poem. The speaker recalls that after discovering, and being profoundly affected by reading, the textual source for this Roman murder story, the *Old Yellow Book*, he "turned, to free [him]self and find the world" (1: 478). In the process, he turns from the "facts" and "travels" to a mountain range, shifting, as he goes, from the ocular to the affective with a simple formula, "I looked [...] till I felt the Apennine" (1:497, 500). This poet does not simply imagine the mountain range, but "feels" it, an emphasis that lends a sense of solidity to the speaker's projected "surplusage of soul" (1:723) which has gone out "in search of body" in order to "add self to self" (1:724). This image of disembodiment and spectral travel is an early indication that Browning represents the poetic process itself as being as Gothic as his subject matter. Utilizing images of both spiritual possession and the reanimation of a corpse, the speaker of Book I commissions

forth “half of his soul” to search the “unwandered waste ways of the world” (1:751) so that it might enter into some “Rag of flesh, scrap of bone in dim disuse” (1:753). The process of dramatic composition is eventually represented as entering a crypt and restoring utterance to ghosts who will speak and be heard again the voices of the poem.

This promethean reconfiguration echoes the process in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, though the poet here is neither Dr. Frankenstein, nor the creature, but the very current that animates the lifeless corpse of historical facts. The poet enters “spark-like” (1:755) into the historical account’s rags of flesh in order to bring the story to life. In doing so, the poet pushes “lines out to the limit” (1:756) as if his poetic power were bursting the seams of the textual body he has found. The salience of the Gothic overtones in this process is confirmed as he leads forth this re-animated corpse “(By a moonrise through the ruin of a crypt)” (1:757) so that what is “mistily seen, murmuringly heard, / Mistakenly felt” (1:758,59) will be fully revealed in all of its horror. Only then will the poet “write [his] name with Faust’s!” (1:759), thus revealing the demonic pact that has enabled such a resurrection.

Among Browning’s commentators, Roberts perceives most clearly the occult implications of this notion of creative practice. He links this conjuring mage figure with Cornelius Agrippa, and hence with the occult, but reads the parenthetical line, “(By moonrise through the ruin of a crypt)” as a “certain ironic detachment, an acknowledgment of the egregious Gothicism of the whole thing” (111). I am apt to agree with Adams, that the line functions as a foil, a conspiratorial wink to the reader who might expect to find well-used Gothic trappings given the occult-like overtones in the passage. Browning is aware of the worn-out props of a Gothic mode and sets the cliché in

contrast to the horrific crime at the center of the poem. He does this not as a means of distancing his subject matter from the Gothic, but rather as means of intensifying the shock. It is a cue to the reader that his “Roman murder story” is similar to the Gothic novels with which they would be familiar, but more horrific than those Gothic plots of old, because of its ostensible status as historical “truth,” and its cotemporaneous relevance. As the next chapter will illustrate, Browning often employs burlesque Gothic motifs as signals of much darker social realities.

The speaker continues, “Whence I went on again, the end was near, / Step by step, missing none and marking all, / Till Rome itself, the ghastly goal I reached” (1.516-18), and again a few lines later stating that he “saw with his own eyes” (1.523) how the events of the story he had just read, had become a “tragic piece” (1.523) that “then and there / Acted itself over again once more” (1.522) even claiming to have “breathed...the fearfulness of the night” (1.525). What is important here is not just the speaker’s strange mixture of the corporeal and the spiritual, and his invocation of the Gothic through terms such as “ghastly,” and his emphasis on imaginatively experiencing “fear,” but precisely what happens to the characters as they are “fused” with the speaker’s “live soul” (1.469), revived, as it were, through the speaker’s “entrance” into their “Rag of flesh” (1.753).

Of Monsters and Men

Browning’s poetic investigations into aberrant minds included creating a coterie of terrifying male figures, and his experiments in the Gothic almost always emphasize men as generators of fear, men who are violent (often towards women), and men who struggle to interpret the cultural codes for regulating and maintaining masculine

authority. Like Tennyson, Browning found that poetic hybridity was needed to fully explore and express these disturbing interiors, in particular, hybrid forms such as dramatic lyrics, dramatic romances and the dramatic monologue. These forms enabled his troupe of villains to reveal a nexus of Gothic tropes that interrogate the terrifying production and breakdown of masculine subjectivity as these men respond violently to moments of personal and cultural crisis. While the unnamed confessor in “Porphyria’s Lover” and the infamous Duke in “My Last Duchess” are examples of such men, none are more monstrous than Count Guido Franceschini, whose situation and actions in the poem mark the strongest manifestation of a Gothic mode in Browning’s *The Ring and the Book*.

For many of Browning’s characters, their terrorizing activities are rooted in their own sense of terror at the thought of being emasculated men, seemingly unable to produce the fear necessary in the domestic realm to completely control the woman who is held captive there. Some, like Guido, are rejected from the patriarchal social structures that finally deny them the illusion of a stable self. Their rejection from those structures, and the loss of masculinity that they experience as a result, leads them to violent reassertions of authority in a bid to re-construct their shattered sense of a proper masculine self. This perspective on Browning’s villains aligns with Cyndy Hendershot’s interpretation of the intersection between the Gothic and gender.⁴⁰ Hendershot notes that “the Gothic reveals...the myth of masculinity as a whole and dominant, rather than concealing fissures that threaten to expose the male subject as a subject like the female one, one lacking and incapable of ever achieving wholeness and mastery” (3). Whereas Tennyson enacted a character who surrendered to those fissures, and whose “loss of

mastery” was the primary focus of his poetic experiment, Browning dramatizes men whose struggle with these fissures ends in violence and attempts at mastery over female will. The violent conclusion to these struggles, the complicit social structures that are depicted, and the manner in which male subjectivity appears to be rooted in the death of the female Other, shift the horror of the situation from the characters within the text, to the readers who have been invited to view them from the inside out.

As Richard McGhee notes, “the more alien the consciousness of the character in the design, the greater is the power of imagination required of the reader. Suddenly, the reader sees himself in the design, caught there in strange fashion as though he were looking at himself in the crazy mirror of a carnival” (68). If the point of the text was to act as a social “mirror,” as McGhee states, the question is how “alien” was the dramatized consciousness of Guido to Browning’s contemporaries, given the tremendous social changes that separate an increasingly domesticated male population in Victorian England from the violent aristocrat in seventeenth-century Italy, and how accurately did these grotesqueries reflect the world of the reader who was imaginatively “caught” in the design of this poem?

John Tosh provides a cursory answer, stating that in mid-Victorian England, “patriarchy was alive and well. Men did not stop wishing to exert domestic authority just because the material conditions of traditional patriarchy had largely disappeared” (77). Tosh’s point seems to be borne out in Browning’s repeated focus on the masculine contributions to domestic terror in his poems, and at least one reviewer recognized in Browning’s dramatic resuscitation of this seventeenth-century tyrant the face of his fellow man. In comparing the Guido books with Shelley’s Gothic drama *The Cenci*, an

unsigned reviewer for *The Saturday Review* (1869) remarks on the superiority of Browning's villain:

How superior is Guido to Count Cenci, in Shelley's play! Cenci is a motiveless monster; he has a fiendish delight in cruelty and lust, but we recognize in him no community of nature with ourselves; the possibility of becoming like him does not occur to us in our wildest imaginations. But Guido is, every inch of him, a man of passions, reasonings, volitions the like of which may be seen [...] in many of those whom we meet in our daily life. (Litzinger and Smalley 323)

As I mentioned in Chapter One, one of the charges laid against the villains in Gothic novels⁴¹ is the inexplicable lack of motive for their horrific treatment of women. I also suggested that, in taking up such characters, the dramatic monologue began to probe beneath the surface of such actions and reveal the various fissures, insecurities and social pressures that propelled men to these types of extreme behavior. The anonymous reviewer makes a similar observation. Count Cenci is an inferior "monster" precisely because he is unrecognizable and "motiveless." Browning's exploration of motive through the dramatic monologue enables the reviewer to find a "community of nature" with Guido. Where he is unable to imagine acting in a way similar to Count Cenci, he is able to imagine becoming like Guido, who is "every inch of him, a man." Browning's poem shares with Shelley's drama being set in Italy and having the action take place in the remote past, and yet, where the reviewer cannot find a Count Cenci in Victorian England, he sees a Guido in the men who surround his daily life. The reviewer's comparison of the "monster" Count Cenci and Count Guido "the man" is also significant

as Browning establishes, through the various voices in the monologues, these two terms on a continuum rather than as opposites.

Similarly, John Rickards Mozley's "Modern English Poets" proffered a rare opinion of Browning that he was in tune with his times. Commenting on *The Ring and the Book*, Mozley remarks that in taking on such subject matter, Browning "feels deeply with the men of his own generation" (322). The gendered observation is significant as the context for Mozley's statement is the effectiveness of Browning's "distinct moral purpose" (322) in writing the poem. By this he does not mean to reduce the poem to mere didacticism but, given the central role of marriage, domestic violence and threatened masculinity in the poem, it is interesting to note that Mozley saw in the poem "sentiments put forward [that] are needful to be known and weighed" (322) and felt that the poem called for "deep meditation on human action and the problems of life" (322). In other words, for at least for some reviewers, *The Ring and the Book* is a poem by a man in touch with the challenges and struggles of Victorian masculinity who challenges his readers to compare their own interior thoughts, motives, feeling, actions with the dramatically uttered horrors of the poem. Such reviews contrast starkly with Bagehot's cultural blindness. Bagehot famously noted of Browning that "it is Italian life and scenery that he has so skillfully analysed" (301) and that the poet's unpopularity rested on the fact that he was ignorant of "England and English character" (301). When Bagehot states that "so different is the material on which [Browning] has chosen to expend his poetical labour from all we see around us, that we can not regard the result otherwise than as a mere artistic product" (301), he misses completely how the guise of seventeenth-century Italy could be used as a way of speaking about nineteenth-century England.

More recently, Vivienne J. Rundle makes a similar point. Rundle identifies the way the dramatic monologue places the reader as the speaker's interlocutor, even when other silent listeners within the text are referred to. In pointing out the number of direct appeals that seem to implicate the reader in the story, Rundle claims that such direct appeals draw "the reader into the diegetic world and demand that he or she at least consider the questions if not propose answers to them. This process holds particular relevance when Guido is asking, "Do your eyes see with mine?" (5.113-114). Male readers in particular are invited to consider whether or not they share Guido's perspective. They are also invited to make specific judgments. Rundle provides a particularly relevant example from Book 11:

Had things gone well
 At the wayside inn: had I surprised asleep,
 The runaways, as was so probable,
 And pinned them each to other partridge-wise,
 Through back and breast to breast and back, then bade
 Bystanders witness if the spit, my sword,
 Were loaded with unlawful game for once –
 Would you have interposed to damp the glow
 Applauding me on every husband's cheek?
 Would you have checked the cry 'A judgment, see!' (11.1537-46)

In this mode of direct address, Guido's questions about his fantasized actions extend to the reader. What Rundle does not explore is the gendered aspects of both the question and the answer. In this scene, Guido's gruesome tableau establishes manliness through

violence, and then establishes the bonds of hegemonic masculinity by creating an approving audience of husbands whose impassioned glow applauds his actions. The questions then “would you have interposed?” and “would you have checked a cry?” are a direct challenge to male readers – one that asks if they are willing to take an active stance against a particular gendered norm at the risk of exclusion from the ranks of their approving peers.

Martin J. Weiner remarks that “in nineteenth-century England, the problem of violence, the meanings of gender, and the workings of the law were all assuming more prominent places in culture and consciousness” (9).⁴² Nor was this a new debate that only surfaced in the context of “the Woman Question.” James Hammerton notes that as early as “the 1760s Blackstone observed that a husband’s physical ‘power of correction’ over his wife had been doubted for a century, and that while a wife clearly had ‘security of peace’ against her husband, the ‘lower rank’ remained fond of ‘the old common law’ and exerted their ‘ancient privileges’ of physical restraint” (53).

McGhee’s point then, that making the character distant, but recognizable draws readers in to the point of recognizing themselves if only “in the crazy mirror of a carnival” (68), is an accurate model for how *The Ring and the Book* utilizes geographic and temporal distance to speak about Victorian society. *The Ring and the Book* was based on found documents regarding an actual seventeenth-century domestic murder case in Italy.⁴³ The source would have been attractive to Browning for several reasons. He was enamored with Italy to be sure, but a character like Guido that was sketched out in the trial documents also possessed the type of complex, violent, criminal mind that Browning was so interested in dramatically investigating. As well, I would like to suggest that what

the reviewers perceived about Guido's role in the poem was not wholly unintentional on Browning's part. One of the things that made the documents such a rich textual source, was that they documented a very public debate about a very private crime; one that foregrounded issues of masculinity, violence and the domestic sphere. The issues of domestic abuse, divorce and the intervention of legal forces into household rule were all intensely debated at the time of the poem's publication. Browning saw in those old documents the types of gendered codes and domestic debates that were still being contested in his own society. In finding the documents, Browning found a way to address the complexity of those situations. It is worth examining some of those codes, and the ways in which they came to be represented in literature, to better understand what, exactly, those reviewers saw in Guido's situation and behavior, that so reminded them of their fellow man.

In writing a series of dramatic monologues about the event, Browning was participating in a long literary tradition of transforming actual crimes into literary productions. In the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century, such cases of familial murder were often surrounded by a wide array of literary and dramatic re-presentations, including broadsheets, pamphlets, handwritten notices, ballads and plays that, like Browning's poem, focused on actual events. The attraction for Browning to this story (in spite of the fact that he tried to give it away twice – once to Tennyson) is both generic and thematic. The Gothic's debt to Jacobean and Elizabethan drama was mentioned in Chapter One, but more specifically, Browning's Gothic monodramas share elements with a sub-class of those fields – domestic tragedy. Like Browning's *The Ring and the Book*, in "domestic tragedies (also known as murder plays) [...] the action is usually

precipitated by a murder, the basis of which is an actual and recent crime recorded in a ballad, chapbook, chronicle or pamphlet” (Comensoli 4). The broadsheets, pamphlets, plays and ballads that accrued around domestic murder cases often deployed the term “monstrous,” “unnatural,” and “strange,”⁴⁴ not so much to condemn the savagery of the offenders but rather, especially in the case of fathers and husbands, in order to show that these monstrous men were aberrations, thereby eliding the complicity of the patriarchal power structures that helped create them. This practice had not diminished by the Victorian era, as indicated by the emergence, and popularity, of the Newgate phenomenon. Although the “Newgate Calendar” began in 1719, later series were issued from about 1820, and the “New Newgate Calendar” appeared weekly in 1863-65. It also spawned the Newgate novels which appeared from the 1820s to the 1840s, along with subsequent dramatizations of such novels. These literary offerings effectively mirrored the same production methods, and values, as their early modern ancestors. As Tromp notes, many such works were “culled tales from the session papers of trials and the Ordinaries of Newgate (records made by prison chaplains). The documents...contain surprisingly graphic depictions of violence in the home, with details of severed limbs, grotesque murder strategies, and women burned alive, both at the stake for a spouse’s murder and at the hands of a husband” (38). The similarity of these texts with Browning’s poem lies in “the insistence on the text’s truth” and in “the graphic, almost gothic, details” of the crime (38). My point here, however, is not to align Browning’s poem with the Newgate sensation, but rather to illustrate the Victorian fascination with the same types of texts and subject matter that circulated in the early-modern period as domestic tragedy. Thus, while there are important generic differences, Browning’s text, the Gothic,

and the early domestic tragedies share a nexus of social and familial signifying practices and dramatize their violent unraveling.

Studies of the domestic tragedy, such as Viviana Comensoli's *Household Business*, Margaret J.M. Ezell's *The Patriarch's Wife: Literary Evidence and the History of the Family*, and Francis Dolan's *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England 1550-1700*, emphasize how often the accounts of domestic crime focused on creating a spectacle of the female criminal, thereby reinforcing the notion of woman as the monstrous other who must be controlled for the maintenance of familial and social order. But domestic tragedies also portray the men who commit domestic crimes as worse than a woman. It is in her "nature" to fall into such behavior, but for fathers and husbands such behavior means that they have transformed twice – once into a "woman" lacking the ability to control the family and themselves, and then into a "monster" that lost reason altogether. Thus, Browning's Gothicizing of the original trial documents as found in *The Old Yellow Book* is not surprising given the original discourse of "the monstrous" that was utilized in the public reporting of such incidents.

David Punter reminds us that "the term 'monster' is often used to describe anything horrifyingly unnatural," and that "etymologically speaking, the monster is something to be shown, something that serves to demonstrate (Latin: *monstrare*: to demonstrate) and to warn (Latin, *monere*: to warn)" (263). Thus, even before the early Gothic novels created their monstrous aristocrats, domestic tragedies described men as "monstrous" to signal their "horrifying unnaturalness" – meaning, of course, that these men either lacked the particular cultural signifiers of masculinity at play in that historic moment, or embraced them to excess, and therefore serve as a demonstration of what

manliness is *not*. Indeed, the crucial aspect of domestic tragedies that had men as the protagonist was to show “that a man who would murder his wife was no longer a representative of order and authority” (Dolan 103). This early-modern deployment of dramatic forms to align male domestic violence with unnatural monstrosity was a strategic, public disavowal of practices that were not only tolerated in private, but also encouraged. The reason for the didacticism of these dramas was not that domestic abuse was necessarily frowned upon. In fact, the control of one’s wife and children was a sign of healthy, proper manliness. Instead, such plays often emerged because a recent spectacle of violence had alerted the public’s attention to the patriarchal codes that were meant to function invisibly. When public attention was alerted, a public disavowal was called for.⁴⁵

While Gothic monsters often function similarly, as grotesque emblems whose hideous appearance or behavior is put on display in order to provide a moral warning of what might occur if certain social codes or mores are transgressed, they can just as easily serve as living indictments of those same codes. As David Punter explains, “rather than being the demonic other to mainstream society, the monster is explicitly identified as that society’s logical and inevitable product: society, rather than the individual becomes the primary site of horror” (266). This double play at work in the function of Gothic monsters can be seen as early as Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein: The Modern Prometheus*. While some read the creature’s hideousness as apt punishment for transgressing the laws of God, Shelley’s goal, quite clearly I think, is to demonstrate the social formation of the monster. Despite Hollywood’s realignment of Shelley’s text to emphasize the biological source of the creature’s monstrosity,⁴⁶ Shelley’s text is quite clear that Victor’s articulate

creature is *made* monstrous by a society that abuses and rejects him. Thus, the Gothic displays a certain ambivalence towards the “monster” – depicting at various times both horrific individuals whose destruction is welcomed and applauded, and “sympathetic” creatures whose very existence demonstrates the social forces that form a “technology of monsters.”⁴⁷ However, as we will see, where Gothic novels such as Charles Robert Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer* feature characters who change into monstrous figures amid a stable if alienating society, Browning’s dramatic studies feature men who seem to remain the same while society changes all around them. In both cases the disjunction between self and society produces Gothic results, but the latter may be more effective as a form of social critique. In Tennyson’s *Maud*, this critique was aimed at an increasingly materialist society, and the impact of a market mentality on constructions of masculinity. Some of Browning’s shorter poems run in a similar vein, but *The Ring and the Book* dramatizes the social production of a monstrous man, and his violent reaction to his displacement from the power matrix that he assumed would support his domestic cause.

Browning’s multiple narratives are part of what structures *The Ring and the Book* as, in Isobel Armstrong’s phrase, “a double poem.” As Armstrong explains, “the double poem is a deeply skeptical form. It draws attention to the epistemology which governs the construction of the self and its relationships and to the cultural conditions in which those relationships are made” (13). In this case, the double poem enunciates both meanings of “monstrous” and allows for individual guilt *and* the complicity of culture. Guido must face the consequences for terrorizing Pompilia and her family, even as the reader recognizes that Guido is subject to forces, both dark and violent, that are deeply enmeshed in the production of masculinity.

Fear and Loathing in the House of Franceschini

Book 1, then, not only Gothicizes the poetic transmission, it also begins to Gothicize the events. The poet/speaker in Book 1 of Browning's twelve-book masterpiece begins by telling readers, in summary, each of the ten versions of the Roman murder trial. Readers are given brief, but lurid details of the horrific crime, and the series of events that led to it. The events are adapted from a legal document that reflects a society attempting to come to terms with the limits of domestic violence in relation to the importance of domestic fidelity, "wherein it is disputed if, and when, / Husbands may kill adulterous wives, yet 'scape / The customary forfeit" (1.129-31). For Browning the case reads, and writes, like a Gothic novel filled with some of the genre's most obvious characteristics including an aristocratic line that is in jeopardy, an innocent young woman immured in the palace of a monster, corrupt clergy, deceptive usurpations, a vicious and bloody triple murder, and a sense of terror that seems to permeate victim and perpetrator alike. As we will see, it also held some relevance for Browning's own society.

The "house" of Franceschini is depicted as a lust-driven "satyr-family" (1:570) that includes two "obscure goblin creatures" (1:549) who serve as Guido's brothers. The Count's mother, with her "monkey-mein," (1:571) mocks Guido's new young wife, Pompilia, with wild gestures and grotesque faces. While her parents, "in the potency of fear, / Break somehow through the satyr-family," this dark cohort surrounds Pompilia, preparing to "wring the uttermost revenge / from body and soul" (1:579-80) of their young captive. This melodramatic tableau, in which "the victim stripped and prostrate" (1:582) is encircled by the feral family members in front of a fiery cauldron, echoes the

depiction of macabre aristocratic families, and their feminine prey, in the Gothic novels of the late eighteenth century. In this scene, not only is the family structure Gothicized, but so is the “main-monster” (1:551) of this horrific clan, Guido, who *must* produce a male heir to perpetuate the family name, and legitimate his place in the patrilineal line.

Guido faces this reproductive imperative with absolute ferocity. When Pompilia escapes and flees in fear for her life, Guido and his men pursue her. When they find her, the scene contrasts the “warmth and light” (1:614) that pours out of the villa with what lies just outside its idyllic promise of domestic tranquility: “All was grave, silent, sinister, - when, ha? / Glimmeringly did a pack of were-wolves pad, / The snow, those flames were Guido’s eyes in front,” (1:610-12). The were-wolf, Guido, and his pack stand outside Pompilia’s threshold with their “blood-bright eyes, / And black lips wrinkling o’re the flash of teeth, / And tongues that lolled” (1:616-19). Browning’s use of the “were-wolf” figure from the Gothic invokes a particular type of monstrous, unnatural savagery. It also speaks to the level of bloodlust in the men, and to the Count’s voracious consumption of Pompilia and her family. Rather than relating the group’s wolfishness to Rome’s mythic founders,⁴⁸ the speaker’s image of the were-wolf insists upon the animal/human hybridity that initiates Browning’s placement of man and monster on a continuum, rather than positing them as opposites in a binary. In the last section of this chapter, I will revisit Guido’s perception of himself as wolf/man.

In introducing readers to Guido’s Gothic family, the speaker of Book I quickly establishes Guido as the “main-monster” (1:551). The speaker’s description of Guido may lend some insight into *why* the speaker describes him in such Gothic terms. The were-wolf is actually the second extended image utilized by the speaker to describe

Guido, and the less Gothic of the two. The first image is of a false star which, at the outset, sounds exceptionally un-Gothic. The speaker informs us that Pompilia's parents have trod through the mud of life holding up their pure daughter to "whatever star should stoop" (1:538) to save her. Unlike the Duke in "My Last Duchess," Count Guido's familial and financial situation forces him to be the star that "stoops" to carry Pompilia away. But the speaker quickly confirms that Guido's star-like luster is actually a demonic glow: "I saw the star supposed, but fog o' the fen, / Gilded star-fashion by a glint from hell" (1:544-45). Richard Altick's note for line 544 in the Penguin Edition is of particular interest: "*fog o' the fen* – Phosphorescence emanating from decaying matter in a swamp, thought to be a carrier of pestilence" (Altick 641). The "decaying matter" in this instance is the Franchesini family and its noble claims. As we will see, the metaphor of the house as a decaying corpse that is drowning in a bog is an image that recurs throughout the poem.

The hellish glow that attends Guido and his position in the church is "haled on its gross way. / By hands unguessed before, invisible help / From a dark brotherhood" (1:546-48). In other words, Guido's position, and his engagement, rests not on his theological qualifications, but rather on the homosocial network that has given him a place in the ranks of their "dark brotherhood." This "dark brotherhood" rolls the "starlike pest[ilence] to Rome / And stationed it to suck up and absorb / The sweetness of Pompilia" (1:554-56). In these lines Guido himself becomes the decaying carcass, and the source of a pestilence that will consume Pompilia. It succeeds in that it "rolled again, / That bloated bubble, with her soul inside. / Back to Arezzo" (1:556-58). In Arezzo, Guido's "palace" is actually "...a fissure in the honest earth / Whence long ago had

curled the vapor first” (1:559-60). This surreal imagery of the disease-spreading Count and the vaporous palace reveals the dark heart of this drama. It also sets the stage for the were-wolf analogy in that both images speak to Guido’s consumption of Pompilia and her household, and the emaciated state of the Franceschini line. Whether they are viewed as a decaying body, a roaming pestilence or a clan of wolfmen, the house of Franceschini is in need of new blood in order to survive. The emphasis on the fog, the bubble, and the cloud that Pompilia is carried away in, speaks to the same issue: the house of Franceschini is but a vapor, not an illusion so much as an apparition, the ghost of an older time that refuses to rest in peace. It also identifies part of the social critique at work within the poem, in that this signifier of hegemonic masculinity– the “House of Franceschini”– is but a fog that emanates from the corpse of an old code, but one that lingers nonetheless. Count Guido Franceschini and his house are introduced to us in these Gothic terms in order to establish a specific type of relationship between the present system of social codes governing masculinity and the past that continually resurfaces, in destructive ways, into the present.

The next two monologues reflect the public’s divided opinion regarding the case, and begin by talking about the gruesome remains of Guido’s crime. Half-Rome perversely delights in “trying to count the stabs” (2:23) of the mutilated bodies on display within the church, explaining to his listener the reason why Violante “took all her stabbings in the face” (2:27) by reminding them that a nobleman with wounded honor will “disfigure the subject, fray the face, / Not just take life and end, in clownish guise” (2:32-33). Half-Rome’s gloss of the mutilated body justifies such an action on the basis of the chivalric code and its demand for violence when honor is besmirched. A more

discreet Other Half-Rome simply describes Pompilia's "flower-like body" [...] stabbed through and through again" (3:5,6), though she remains temporarily "Alive I' the ruins" (3:7). The books then recount what led up to the shocking spectacle before them. The Other Half-Rome describes how for four months after Pompilia, and her parents, Pietro and Violante, moved in to Count Guido Franceschini's "strange place" (1:516) in Arezzo, "penury and pretentious hate" (3:23) did "brutify and bestialize" (3:24) the nobleman who now holds a husband's rights over their daughter. Abandoning their daughter, they flee Guido's crumbling palace, leaving him alone "With his immense hate and, the solitary / Subject to satisfy that hate, his wife" (3:699-700). Violante's confession that Pompilia is, in fact, not their daughter but rather, the purchased bastard child of a prostitute further enrages the Count not only because his noble family tree has been grafted with what he calls a "misgrowth of infectious mistletoe" (5:813), but also because the revelation terminates all of the financial benefits he had expected to acquire from the marriage. Like the speaker in *Maud*, Guido's crisis of masculinity and his proposed solution are complicated by two sets of codes. The marriage to Pompilia and the continuance of the family line satisfies the demands of an older code, one that finds worth in the perseverance of an ancient family name. The marriage also satisfies the demands of a newer code that bases worth and rank on income because of the dowry that Guido would receive in the transaction. Through the revelation of Pompilia's illegitimacy, Guido is embarrassingly emasculated by the standards of both codes at once.

Described in increasingly Gothic terms, Pompilia's parents are able to escape the Guido's "cage and torture-place" (1:502), though Pompilia cannot immediately break free from the increasingly monstrous actions of her husband, and finds no respite "From

tooth and claw of something in the dark” (3:787). While the sadist Half-Rome chalks up Guido’s treatment of Pompilia to “the regular jealous-fit that’s incident / To all old husbands that marry brisk young wives” (3:828-29), Other Half-Rome views Guido’s cruelty as springing “like an uncaged beast [...] on the weak shoulders of his wife” (3:966,67). Lacking both monetary and conjugal rewards from his marriage to a 13-year-old bride, Guido begins a “slow sure siege laid to her body and soul” (3:1434) in which his “cruelty graduated dose by dose” (3:525).

As expected, when the domestic terror shifts from simple torture to murder, Half-Rome relishes the gory details of the family that has been “hacked to pieces” (2:1443). Half-Rome depicts the event in Gothic terms as a type of daemonic baptism:

Vengeance, you know, burst like a mountain-wave
 That holds a monster in it, over the house,
 And wiped its filthy four walls free again
 With a wash of hell-fire – father, mother, wife,
 Killed them all, bathed his name clean in their blood. (2:1433-37)

The images of the wave that wipes clean the filthy walls of the house, the washing of the home with hell-fire invokes the idea of apocalyptic judgment on Pompilia and her family, and a cleansing of the Franceschini name. Guido’s manhood can only be “born again” in this context through vengeance and blood. That the wave of vengeance holds a “monster” in it once again foregrounds the troubled relationship between manhood and monstrosity. In the eyes of Half Rome, the only way for Guido to regain his manhood is by becoming a monster.

In fact, at least half of the Roman public feels that Guido's only fault is that he took the "new path" (2:1525) by appealing to the law for justice, which left him "stuck in a quagmire" (2:1526), until he scrambled back "Into the safe sure rutted road once more, / Revenged his own wrong like a gentleman" (2:1527,18). The link between masculinity, violence and domestic authority is made explicit as this personified segment of the population rejects the new path, and advises the implied listener to "take the old way trod when men were men!" (2:1524). Half-Rome views this violent "road" to manhood as somewhat excessive, yet socially necessary, "the better for you and me and all the world, / Husbands and wives, especially in Rome" (2:1438, 39). The Other-Half Rome only briefly mentions how "the noise o' the slaughter roused the neighborhood" (3:1637), but reminds the listener that Guido himself "elected law should take its course" (3:1632) only to "chop and change and right your wrongs / Leaving the law to lag as she thinks fit" (3:1672,73). Significantly, both speakers have gendered the law female. If the "old way trod," in which a man could "revenge his own wrong" allowed men to be men, then it begs the question, what/who is a "man" now, under the new way of the law? In this sense, the patriarchal powers of the state and church, designed to establish and maintain masculine domestic authority, potentially emasculate the men subject to their power. This is particularly true of Guido, whose efforts to control Pompilia consistently rely on help from the Archbishop and the Governor. Both voices representing the divided public agree that the slaughter of this family was simply the bloody culmination to a reign of domestic tyranny, though they disagree about the criminality of such a situation.

These dramatically uttered opinions of representatives from Rome's general public certainly would have resonated with Browning's readers given the level of public

debate that surrounded the conduct of husbands and wives in Victorian England. As Martin J. Wiener has pointed out,

In nineteenth-century England, the problem of violence, the meanings of gender, and the workings of law were all assuming prominent places in culture and consciousness. As they did, the three converged on one issue in particular – that of more effectively controlling male violence, particularly in order to better protect women. (9)

Courts' involvement in matters of violence intensified as indicated by the 1828 Offense Against the Person Act, and its reformed counterpart in 1837. In spite of these legal reforms actual behavioral change was so slow that by the 1870s, Frances Power Cobbe was launching her feminist campaign against "wife torture" (Hammerton 53). Indeed, in 1851 "the *Annual Register* was moved to observe that 'cases of wife murder have lately become shockingly numerous'" (Wiener 144). As well, John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor's articles on domestic abuse in the 1850s eventually led to Mill's publication of *The Subjugation of Women* in 1869. My point here is not to draw a one-to-one parallel between Browning's poem and a specific event or legislative act, but simply to emphasize, however briefly, the overwhelming amount of legal and social debate over domestic violence and manhood that so occupied Victorian culture.

Pompilia's own deathbed testimony in Book 7 confirms her husband's cruelty and her "miserable three drear years/In that dread palace" (7:947-8) at Arezzo. She remembers that her lot as a woman was "terrible and strange ... And I was found familiarized with fear" (7:118-22). She describes her "dreadful husband" as a "serpent towering and triumphant" (7:1589) and as a fiend. But as in most Gothic narratives, the

most horrific terror is that which cannot be spoken. Despite the fact that she was “firm, withstood, refused” (7:719) Guido’s and his brother’s sexual advances, her confession to the priest is riddled with telling ellipses, which silently signify the rapes she undergoes at the hands of her husband. The trauma is hinted at when she pleads to the Archbishop for the “right” to refuse Guido her body since they are in “estrangement, soul from soul” (7:723), and he replies with a sadistic smile that she is to “swallow the burning coal your husband proffers you!” (7:730). In the end, Pompilia states that, “this blood of mine / Flies forth exultingly at any door” (7:1716), glad to have death deliver her from Guido’s cruel hate.

Guido is introduced by the poet/speaker in Book 1, in the context of the “dark question” of domestic violence in a masculinist culture. Guido speaks for himself in Book 5, invoking ideologies of class and gender in puzzlement at being held criminally accountable for performing a husband’s regrettably necessary duty when obedient “wifeliness” is lacking and therefore threatening to the “social fabric” (5:444). As we have seen, several characters speak about Guido as an emblem of larger social debate, but Browning’s poem is at its most Gothic point when Guido takes his place in the long line of the poet’s violent men, and finally speaks for himself. Guido freely admits he had vindictively hated, beaten, and threatened Pompilia. He reminds the court of his “obligation” to “practice mastery [and] prove [his] mastership” (5:716-17) over his new wife whose duty was to “submit herself, / Afford [him] pleasure, perhaps cure [his] bile” (5:718-19). The Count invokes the traditional alignment of theological authority and social practice to justify his treatment of Pompilia, asking “Am I to teach my Lords what marriage means, / What God ordains thereby and man fulfills...?” (5:720-21). That the

Count's "mastery" is an attempt to maintain control through sexual violence and the production of extreme fear clearly places him in a trajectory of the Gothic villains created by William Beckford and Matthew Lewis, whose incorporation of extreme and depraved sexuality and violence created a rather disturbing alternative to Radcliffe's Gothic niceties. Seeing that the authority of the husband is one of the central ways in which masculine identity is formed and maintained, his control over his wife must be complete and testified to in front of a literal jury of his peers. Thus, rather than hiding the fact that he attempted to discipline his wife, Guido boasts to the jury about his domestic authority:

[...] – take as proved

I taught my wife her duty, made her see

What it behooved her see and say and do,

Feel in her heart and with her tongue declare,

And, whether sluggish or recalcitrant,

Forced her to take the right step, I myself

Marching in mere marital rectitude!

And who finds fault here, say the tale be true? (5:854-60)

It is not enough for the Count to control Pompilia's speech, her actions, and her perception, he must control what she "feels in her heart" (5:858), most specifically towards him. His failure to shape her interior attitudes leads to his attempt on her life. This, of course, echoes another of Browning's aristocrats who resorted to violence because he could not alter his wife's heart, which was "too easily impressed" ("My Last Duchess" 23) by things other than his "nine-hundred-years-old name" (33).

The Count's shaken confidence in his sense of manhood produces a maddening rage that is fueled by the fact that his failures are made public. Not only does he fail in his obligation to control his wife, but this failure and shame is "published before my lords, / put into print, made circulate far and wide" (5:765-66). In fact, the Count defends murdering his wife by claiming that his only fault was that he had been too kind. He gruesomely suggests that when he first suspected his wife of flirting he should have "Calmly and quietly cut off, clean thro' bone, / but one joint of one finger of my wife" (5:93-54) with the threat of cutting off a bit more each time she was suspected of casting her affections elsewhere. His line of argument is that he should be allowed the brutal murders of his wife and her family because he restrained himself so long when they clearly deserved worse treatment. Guido is correct, of course, in surmising that neither church nor state would have charged him if he had privately dealt in such a violent manner with Pompilia. Guido's failure to deal with his wife and her family in a discreet manner, however violent, is what takes center stage in his trial. In fact, his defense turns into an inadvertent confession, revealing his emasculated state within his own house. The fact that Guido was not violent enough at home, that he was unable to produce a level of fear necessary to completely control his wife, proves this lack of "mastery."

This contradiction – that manliness meant domestic control, but only a domestic control that did not reveal physical force as its basis – was alive and well in Victorian England. As Hammerton notes, "despite clear rulings against violent 'chastisement' in the nineteenth century, legal and popular misunderstandings persisted [...] and in 1850 John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor claimed it was 'universal belief among the laboring class, that the law permits them to beat their wives'" (53). As mentioned before, the class

lines involved in the debate over a man's proper regulation of the household were firmly drawn. However, Wiener's study of masculinity and violence in the nineteenth century also reveals how men from all classes had a vested interest in maintaining domestic authority. In turn, Hammerton contextualizes his claim that "middle-class outrage against wife-abuse among the poor certainly had a long pedigree" (57) by reminding readers that, the lax sentencing and "scant attention to plight of abused and neglected women" (54) from magistrates "offered a dramatic illustration of the process by which men of all classes seemed to conspire in the oppression of women" (54). The central point in both studies is that in the nineteenth century "men's domestic conduct had become a vehicle for questioning traditional views of masculinity and its prerogatives" (52).

Guido's desperate attempt to restore a masculine identity that, like his palace, lies in ruins, manifests itself in his attempt to possess Pompilia's soul, control her body, and forcibly impregnate her with a legitimating heir through a series of rapes, demanding that she "give [him] the fleshly gesture [he] can reach / And rend and leave fit for hell to burn!" (7:783,4). As Judith Halberstam points out, often within the Gothic "rape...is not the sexual enactment of violence...it is violence enacted with bodily or fleshly weapons. *Sex is a metaphor for violence* not the other way around" (156). For Pompilia, the rapes were terrifying harbingers of Guido's desperate bid for masculine authority, which culminated in the "twenty-two dagger wounds" (7:38) that he savagely inflicted on her after brutally killing her father, and stabbing her mother's face beyond recognition. Within this series of events, the rapes are not a simple reversal of the sex/violence metaphor. The correlation between the rapes and the stabbings is not a replacement of "penis for knife" instead of the more common substitution of "knife for penis." It is a

moebius band of “penis is knife is phallus is power is me” in continual, ontologically productive, circulation.

This circulation, which manifests in Guido’s first murder attempt, is temporarily halted by Pompilia’s own “unlawful appropriation of phallic authority” (Boose 204) – the use of her tongue. Having escaped the torture place with the help of a young priest, the two are eventually discovered and cornered by Guido, whose rage is stirred at the thought that he has been cuckolded. When facing imminent death at the hands of her husband, Pompilia’s outburst reveals the horrid conditions in which she was forced to live:

At least I am mine and God’s,
 Thanks to his liberating angel Death –
 Never again degraded to be yours
 The ignoble noble, the unmanly man,
 The beast below the beast in brutishness! 3: 1295-99

As Lynda E. Boose points out, “a discourse that locates the tongue as the body’s ‘unruly member’ situates female speech as a symbolic relocation of the male organ, an unlawful appropriation of phallic authority in which the symbolics of male castration are ominously complicit” (204). Pompilia’s words here are like daggers piercing Guido in his “tremulous part” (5:30) – and her cut to Guido’s social rank, and more importantly, his masculine identity, leaves him “unmanned,” unable to act, and helplessly calling “on the law to adjudicate” (3:1320). That feminine speech has emasculated Guido in this scene is important. The early modern period likewise dedicated an “obsessive energy” to “exerting control over the unruly woman – the woman who was exercising either her sexuality or her tongue under her own control rather than under the rule of a man...

illogical as it may seem – being a scold and being a so-called whore – were frequently conflated” (195). Thus after years of being subject to Guido’s degrading treatment, Pompilia refutes his mastery over her by reversing the signification of phallic power. Again, Boose notes that “genital differentiation tended to be subsumed within a problematically gendered orality... her open mouth the signifier for invited entrance elsewhere. Hence the dictum that associates “silent” and “chaste” (196). Guido’s continually uninvited entrance into Pompilia is accordingly reversed through her verbal emasculation. Her tongue finds words that are able to penetrate Guido to the core, and render him impotent to act. Guido’s revenge for this emasculation is the brutal and compensatory murder described above. However, the fact that Pompilia survives for four days, pouring forth speech, unsilenced by Guido’s attack, intimates that he has, once again, failed to master his wife.

Guido fantasized about the gruesome scene before ever taking action and while the vicious murder is an attempt to curb Pompilia’s speech, his rage was initially aimed at her “passive” silence: “Then, she lay there, Mine: / Now, mine she is if I please wring her neck, - / A moment of disquiet, working eyes, / Protruding tongue, a long sigh, then no more - / As if one killed the horse one could not ride!” (11:1358-62). Not only does the scene echo “Porphyria’s Lover,” but it confirms the sexual implications of controlling a woman’s speech. Guido’s failed possession of her, emphasized through his repetitions of “mine, mine,” are signified by Pompilia’s protruding tongue. He projects his own impotence in the “creation” of his wife’s limp “member.” The fact that he equates the fantasized murder with the killing of a useless horse not only reminds the reader of the bits and bridles that fit into a horse’s mouth in order to control its actions, but it also

reveals the sexual frustration that fuels the fantasy: both the horse and Pompilia are “useless” because neither of them can be ridden. When the actual murder does take place, the incident is reported, and celebrated, by Other-Half Rome indicating that the public is acutely aware of the ways in which masculinity’s stability is imbricated not only with social rank, but with acts of violence.

Though Boose’s article describes codes at work in a seemingly distant past, the scene would have resonated with equal force – and amongst equal debate – for Browning’s readers as well. For example, in commenting on the inadequacy of the Aggravated Assault Act of 1853, John Stuart Mill points to a public case of attempted wife murder in which,

... after a week’s remand, the magistrate, in the face of a son’s allegation of his mother’s ‘provocation by her ill temper,’ released the husband, gave him some money donated by a ‘benevolent gentleman’ and warned his wife ‘not to make such free use of her tongue in abuse of her husband’”

(Hammerton 59).

Nor was this an isolated case. As Wiener remarks, “looking over the Victorian era we can see that the notion of acceptable physical ‘chastisement’ of bad wives was dismissed from courtroom discourse...those claiming provocation, the most common mitigation claim made by those on trial for killing their wives, often continued to find sympathy from juries” (199). However general the trend, the specifics of Mill’s case are pertinent. The justification of the attempted murder because of provocation, is tied directly to the wife’s speech. The collusion of Victorian homosocial bonds is highlighted not only by the judge’s paternalistic reprimand that the wife control her tongue, but also by the

donation of funds from a gentleman. Even as the public debate about domestic abuse divided along class lines, the lax enforcement of the law, as well as Mill's example of a "gentleman's donation" to this working-class offender, confirms a homosocial bond that transcended, at times, class structure. More significantly, the case itself simply highlights the extent to which this exchange in Browning's poem was both culturally charged and socially recognizable to Victorian society.

The House of Grief and Shame - Metaphors, Masculinity and the Gothic Plot

Almost every monologue within *The Ring and the Book* recognizes the spousal abuse, both physical and mental, that marked the Franceschini's domestic relationships as a series of ongoing tortures. The Count is no exception in this mode of description. However, in his version of the story, he is the victim, not the perpetrator, of ill treatment. Fresh from the torture chambers of his examiners, the Count thanks the Court for this "quite novel form of taking pain" (5:22) in which he is "getting tortured merely in the flesh" (5:23) which serves as an almost "agreeable change" from the mental and emotional vivisection he has been subject to. The Count claims that he has been, "...plied too much / With opposite treatment, used (forgive the joke) / To the rasp-tooth toying with this brain of mine, / And, in and out my heart, the play o' the probe" (5:21-24). The Count's metaphoric embodiment of his suffering is then clarified: "Four years have I been operated on / I' the soul, do you see – its tense or tremulous part - / My self respect, my care for a good name, / Pride in an old one..." (5:29-32).

On one level, the Count's comparison of the court's physical torture to the domestic torture he had ostensibly suffered from his wife is a rhetorical strategy that,

from the outset, reveals his attempts to align and ingratiate himself with his judges through class affiliation by reminding them that, at some point in the past, “Noblemen were exempt...from racking” (5:11-12). His other strategy is to feign the role of the victim in the case, even thanking the court for their tortures in comparison with what he has had to live through. The Count’s exaggerated jibe is clearly a mode of expression aimed at condemning Pietro, Violante and Pompilia as the individuals who turned his home into a torture chamber, but it also evinces a revealing moment of personal candor. As is common in dramatic monologues, the Count’s evidently performative remarks, his rhetorical flourishes, almost always reveal some aspect of his character or his situation to which he is blind. His claim of domestic torture, in other words, also reveals symptomatic aspects of his cultural situation – in particular, men’s reactions when paternal or spousal authority is eroded or threatened. While the Count is attempting to show his wit, and his refined abilities with language before a body of his social peers, he *does*, in fact, display the symptoms of one who suffers from a rasp-tooth file that grates on his brain, and a surgical probe moving in and out of his heart. His soul is tortured in all of the “tremulous parts” that he lists, specifically his adherence to a code that ought to value his “old name.” Yet he is unaware that this experience is born out of a disjunction between his old ideal of manhood and his inability to master the newly- emerging social codes of masculinity.

The Count’s bewilderment with the fact that he is being judged for his actions not only reveals his sense of betrayal by the seventeenth-century power structures that he struggles to remain a part of, it also reflects Browning’s assessment of nineteenth-century anxieties regarding the shifting social codes of masculinity, especially within the

domestic realm. As Guido's character changes from Book 5 to Book 11 he reflects these later anxieties through the disjunction he feels between his adherence to the older codes and networks of power that solidified masculine identity and his inability (unwillingness) to adapt to the reformulation of those codes within new networks of power. In Book 5 the Count's primary locus for self identification is his "care for a good name, / Pride in an old one" (5:31-2), indicating that his world view, and his sense of his place in that world, remain tied directly to culturally constructed notions of aristocratic entitlement and the laws of primogeniture in which social worth (rank) and individual identity were inherited along with the estate and family fortune. Yet Guido's father has left the estate in ruins, and Guido's heir will be the illegitimate son of a prostitute's daughter. In this sense, his time on the physical "rack" of the torture chamber is less painful than the ontological rending that has been taking place as he is stretched out between the past and future failings of the patrilineal line.

In her analysis of domestic tragedies that feature murderous husbands, Francis Dolan notes that, "far from presenting property-holding, gentle males as unconstrained and autonomous, these texts reveal the particular strains of accountability to the past and future, of being inseparable from your family and its 'house'" (157). Likewise, in Browning's text, the Count's sense of self is torn asunder by the failure of his father to provide a proper inheritance, and his brothers' inability to produce an heir, leaving him solely responsible to meet the familial, civic and ontological demand: "there must be a Franceschini till time ends" (5:225). For Guido, there are specific social and material signs that serve as a language through which masculine identity is enunciated. Guido's responses show how the roles of husband and father have been charged with this type of

enunciating power in regards to masculine identity. This code was still active in the social context of Victorian England. For example, in commenting on John Heaton, a representative middle-class figure from 1851, Tosh notes that “now with a child as well as a wife, his masculine standing was complete” (11). Even though the patrilineal transmission of property, status and rank had given way in the Victorian era to a society built on class mobility through the accumulation of wealth, the power of marriage and the production of a son to signify manhood was still a powerful force. Similarly, while the Count views this dictate as his “vocation” (5:226) it is also the process through which his sense of “self” comes into being. Given Dolan’s observation of how masculine subject formation is tied directly to the past and future of one’s “house,” it is clear that Count Guido Franceschini is locked inside “the house of grief and shame” (5: 1432).

This understanding of the term “house” is similar to the ways in which homes and castles function in the Gothic. As Anne Williams points out: “[in] that the house embodies family history [it] reminds us that the word ‘house’ has two meanings relevant to Gothic fictions – it refers both to the building itself and to the family line” (45). Like the collapsing castle in Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* and Roderick’s mansion in Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher,” Guido’s decaying palace in *The Ring and the Book* is synonymous with his lack of a legitimate heir to bear the family name, and the disintegration of his sense of self. All of these Gothic tropes come into play in *The Ring and the Book* as Count Guido Franceschini defends himself against the charges of the horrific murders, with continual references to his house, his name and his bloodline. Each of the tropes work with and within each other, but it is worth examining them independently before moving on.

The spectral fog-palace that was illuminated from the nether regions of hell described in Book 1 has been replaced by a more substantive, though still decaying, palace in Book 5. While Browning seems to trade in one Gothic convention for another, namely spectres for ruins, both descriptions establish the same point – that the House of Franceschini is unstable, ungrounded, and passing away. The Count informs us that the weight of the House of Franceschini rests fully upon his actions and choices. He has become the supporting beam, so to speak, needed to prop up the “dropping palace” (5:184). In describing the various responsibilities of each family member, the Count relates that he has been given specific duties because of his role as the eldest male in the family⁴⁹: “The eldest son and heir and prop o’ the house, / so do you see your duty? Here’s your post, / hard by the hearth and alter” (5:212-14). The imperative is reiterated a few lines later in even more explicit terms, “There must be Franceschini till time ends - / that’s your vocation” (5:225-6). While the vocation is clear, the source of the “calling” is vague. The Count relates the information via a conversation with his “fellows” (5:192) about the unsettling upward mobility of the *nouveaux riches*, indicating not only his dependence on his peers for confirming admittance to the ranks of manhood, but also the anxieties about new and mobile forms of signification. The ambiguity of the source reminds us that the “call” of Guido Franceschini is also ideological; unspoken, internalized and that which calls the Count into subjectivity. Locating the source of this interpellation, and using appropriately Gothic descriptors, Frances Dolan summarizes: “[the ‘house’] forms a collective subject out of the dead, the living, and the anticipated” (157). She explains that,

this figurative structure encloses many individuals and connects them to one another and to those who precede and succeed them. ...Since the 'house' survives any one individual or generation, it can be seen to offer a cosmic conception of subjectivity, dwelling on continuity rather than mortality, the communal rather than the individual. (157)

The existing male representative in such a system is haunted by his father's legacy, and in terror of their future heir. In psycho-social terms, the father must die in order for the son to gain access to power, while the child and heir of the new father becomes the harbinger of the father's own death. Thus, both the past and the future lay claim to the present through the laws of primogeniture and the issues of inheritance. The present male in the patrilineal line becomes the site of transmission – on the one hand, he has inherited a sense of masculine selfhood woven from a nexus of financial, social, and familial signifiers and must in turn, weave those signifying practices into the next generation. On the other hand, he has also inherited a guilt rooted in the ontological, and social, necessity of his father's death. This is not to imply an Oedipal reading. The necessitated death of the father is at least as practical as mythical or psycho-sexual. It has material outcomes, and practical social and familial consequences. What becomes terrifying about this process is that there is seemingly no escape. The production of an heir is demanded for the continuance of the family line the longevity of its name depends on such a process.

As I have mentioned before, while this familial dynamic is altered by the time Browning is writing, the gender-enunciating power of fatherhood had hardly diminished. Tosh notes that, generally

among men's impulses, the desire for the ultimate demonstration of virility, and the ambition to endow the future with one's own offspring, are comparatively impervious to cultural variation, and they do not appear to depend for their power on cultural reinforcement. (80)

Fears of failing to provide for one's family were rampant in Victorian England, as were public condemnations of men for such behavior. Yet, similarly to Guido's sense of an ideological imperative at work, Victorian men sensed that "*establishing* a household [...] [was] a crucial stage in winning social recognition as an adult, fully masculine person" (*Place emphasis in original 2,3*). He also remarks that, in spite of the often-conflicting roles and expectations of Victorian fathers, husbands without children suffered a loss of masculine status" (80). And in reference to producing an heir for future generations, Tosh notes that "a man's place in posterity depends on leaving sons behind him who can carry forward his name and lineage. Whether that place in posterity is credible or not depends on the son's masculine attributes – his manly character" (4).

Both the speaker in *Maud* and Guido are left in a patrilineal vacuum, with dead fathers that left the family nearly powerless, and no heirs to continue the familial line; the site of intergenerational transmission has failed. More importantly, the sense of "self" provided by this system has evaporated. Guido is the son of a father who "let the world slide" (5:47) so that "the purse he left held spider-webs" (5:49) instead of the much needed financial inheritance to support the remaining family members and, more importantly, carry on the family line. Left as the heir to a "poor old noble House" (5:39) the Count struggles to resurrect the "bare dropping palace" (5:184) that has decayed so much that it "could hardly show a turret sound" (5:187).

The Count's language is significant in terms of the (inadvertent?) pun on the phrase that is used to describe his role in this process: "...son and heir and prop o' the house" (5:212). The term "prop" here functions in two ways. Its most obvious meaning is that the family is depending on the Count's ability to marry a woman from Rome (preferably wealthy), produce an heir, and thus secure both a continuance of the family line and the financial means to support it. However, the term "prop" can also function in this context as a theatrical term – something that is used in a play to help establish the authenticity of a character, place or point in time. The passage is recounting the numerous signifiers of social status and, in this case, the evident loss of that status, as it is made public through the decaying structure of the house. The count is demanding to know "Why our bare dropping castle, in the street / where such-a-one whose grandfather sold tripe / was adding to his purchased pile a fourth/ tall tower, could hardly show a turret sound?" (5:184-7). Hawlin's footnote explains that the comparison is between a tower built purely for effect, "to show off wealth and status" of a previously lower status citizen, and the decaying remains of the Franceschini palace (Oxford ed. 16).

The newly built fourth tower, then, is a prop in this second sense of the word whose purpose is to create a particular effect on the public audience. Far from being an ancient ancestral estate, this castle does not represent a familial transmission of honor, status and legitimacy but rather signifies, even by its recent construction, a new acquisition of these qualities through recently acquired wealth. Its location, on the same street as the formerly illustrious House of Franceschini, reflects the overlapping of the cultural codes and signifying practices that were evident in *Maud*. While the speaker in *Maud* has lost his paternal estate, Guido is still struggling to

keep the villa's head above the waves
 Of weed inundating its oil and wine
 And prop the roof, stanchion the wall o' the palace so
 It should keep breath I' the body, hold its own
 Amid the advance of neighbouring loftiness –
 (People like building where the used to beg) –” (5. 253-58)

Guido speaks of the palace in terms of someone drowning, an image he later returns to in relating his situation to his peers: “I – chin deep in a marsh of misery, / Struggling to extricate my name and fame / And fortune from the marsh would drown them all” (5.908-10). The “solid ground” of an older system of codes is giving way to more fluid signifying practices that match the increasing mobility of people as they are able to rise – and fall– through previously stable categories. The palace, a metonym of a specifically masculine subjectivity because of the patrilinear line it represents, is sinking in this new social bog.

Thus, the neighboring fourth tower's symbolic function as a family's claim to legitimacy through new wealth sparks the Count's rage. It harkens back to the “gewgaw castle” that so infuriated the speaker in *Maud*. As we have seen, Guido's ancient spectral palace is no less artificial than this new tower, and in this sense the false tower recalls Hogle's notion of the ghost of the counterfeit. Guido's castle is a counterfeit, a symbol longing for a disappearing “natural” connection between sign and social status. The newly-built fourth tower is a ghost of the counterfeit. On the one hand, it knowingly apes the older sign (an ancient castle), but it is also signifying a newly acquired wealth and the claim to new social status. Neither architectural artifice indicates a “natural” connection

between property and identity. Neither one has the power to signify land-holding, patrilineally-transmitted legitimacy. However, the false tower is the emperor's new home, so to speak, and Guido's rage reveals the depth to which he wants to believe in the older system of social signification, even as its constructedness is laid bare before him. Even as Guido grudgingly attempts to adjust to the realities of the market economy (admittedly going to Rome to sell his name, his rank and himself) he is still haunted by older signifying practices that bestowed on class privilege an inherent worth and value. This is why he deplors the *nouveaux riches* who appropriate the signs and flaunt the arbitrariness/artificiality of the symbolic process. His anger is also, of course, fueled by his inability to master these new codes.

In this passage, we can see, yet again, where Guido's rhetoric reveals the origins of his crisis and the state of social affairs. While Guido is attempting to paint himself as a victim to a needy household whose sole financial, social and familial stability is dependent on his ability to keep the house "propped" up, the reader begins to realize that Guido is also a prop *of* the house. To the extent that he is defined by his roles as Count and, son and, heir and, father he remains but one "prop" among many in the play of class and gender that is at work – a play whose script is continually being rewritten. As the, at one time, invisible production of inherent masculine status ends, the props become revealed for what they are: objects to help a larger social audience further the illusion of naturalized manhood.

The metaphor of the "play" which Browning sets forth in Book I, is mirrored by the characters' self-referencing metaphor of drama in their monologues. The Count utilizes the trope of the theatre in describing his confrontation of Pompilia and

Capponisacchi: “As two avowed lovers forcibly torn apart, / upbraid the tyrant as in a playhouse scene, / Ay, and with proper clapping and applause / from the audience that enjoys the bold and free” (5:1129-31). While the connection between the theatre and the reality of the Count’s situation is held together by simile within this passage, the Count’s obsession with the public’s knowledge of his embarrassing familial situation, and their contemptuous judgment on it, reinforces the notion that social performance has come to replace inherent status. One of the Count’s central justifications for the brutality of the murders is the amount of public shame that he, and his “old name” have had to endure. The story of his family’s loss of fortune is made “into a rattling ballad-rhyme which, bawled / At tavern-doors, wakes rapture everywhere” (5:1452-53). Even the religious institutions that used to be part of the social matrix supporting essential identities have “served as a theatre” (2:51) that proudly show the gruesome spectacle of Pietro and Violante’s mangled bodies to an eager audience hungry for more. This blurring between dramatic performance and cultural performativity continues as Guido cites a play that he viewed at the “Vallombrossa Convent, made / Expressly to teach what marriage was!” (11:908,909).

The Count concludes a melodramatic performance before the Court, portraying himself as fore-doomed martyr in a long line of male martyrs, with similar theatrical metaphors: “Here’s one who has chosen his part and knows his cue / I am done with, dead now; strike away, good friends” (5:1440-41). The contradiction in the Count’s argument, that he cannot “escape from man’s predestined lot / Of being beaten and baffled” (5: 1416-17) on the one hand, but also that he has “chosen his part” (5:1440) on the other, does imply some dispersed responsibility for the Count’s actions. While the

Count is responsible for clinging to the older codes of manly conduct, the social power that they afforded him, and the innate sense of self that were knit into those codes, he is partially motivated to his desperate measures by the terror that he experiences as those codes unravel, and the consequential loss of manhood that follows.

In the midst of the Count's performance to his judges, in which he casts himself as the victim of unstable social roles and familial expectation, there resides the kernel of authenticity. Clearly, the Count's attempt to rhetorically reverse the role of victim and perpetrator is only one of several strategies that he employs in his attempt to deny any responsibility in the crime. Yet, there are moments throughout his monologue in which his astonishment in the repercussions of his own actions reveal a man who truly had believed in the salvific power of the aristocratic line. There are also moments in which the reader senses the weight the Count feels in "bearing" the family name and his duty to continue the family line. Readers are invited to be at least partially sympathetic to the baffled rage he expresses at being jailed and tortured for attempting to fulfill these duties. Unlike the narrator of *Maud*, who loses all sense of self as the social "play" is re-written, Franceschini clings to an older script, and tries in vain to demand that the other actors follow suit.

Guido's Guilt and the Mystery Revealed

"Yet here is the monster! Why, he's a mere man – / Born, bred and brought up in the usual way" (4:1603,04). So says Tertium Quid, prefiguring the foundation for Guido's confusion after he has been condemned to death. In his final moments, Guido is perplexed, searching in baffled rage for the basis of his crime. Richard D. McGee depicts

the Count as “the champion of the law and the order of society; duty and law become ends in themselves and their enforcement assumes highest priority” (84). In Guido’s mind, he is fighting to preserve social order, to return to a time when

Manners reformed, old habits back once more
 Customs that recognize the standard of worth
 The wholesome household rule in force again
 Husbands once more God’s representative,
 Wives the typical Spouse once more ... (5.2040-44)

This old “wholesome rule” is the ancient privilege of *paterfamilias*: absolute authority over all family members, even adjudicating over their life and death. Over and over, Guido tells his jailers that “all this trouble has come upon me / Through my persistent treading in the paths / where I was trained to go” (5:123-25). Following in his father’s footsteps, Guido recalls that “taught from my youth up, I trod” (5:434). Guido reminds them that these codes of masculinity were reinforced by class structures: “Were we not put into a beaten path, / Bid pace in the world, we nobles born and bred?” (11:91,92). In Guido’s mind, “whoever owned wife, sister, daughter – nay / Mistress” (11:40) would approve of his vicious actions, and more importantly – “These manly men / Approved!” (11:43,44). Guido appeals to his place within a validating homosocial tradition that endorses his right to violent conjugal acts. He pleads “obedience” to the patriarchal structures that govern Rome, asking “Who taught the dog that trick you hang him for?” (11: 950). It becomes clear that this is one of several guises that Guido will adopt in an attempt to save his own life. This, however, does not make the context for his statements any less true.

Throughout the monologues, it becomes increasingly clear that the major patriarchal social structures of his time, the state and the church, are complicit in enacting violence on Pompilia in both ideological and physical ways. Ideologically, the legal system maintains women as chattel, and religious doctrines inculcate both husband and wife that a woman's duty is to remain with her husband in unwavering obedience. Guido reminds his judges, "Father and mother shall the woman leave, / Cleave to the husband, be it for weal or woe: / There is the law: what sets this law aside / In my particular case?" (5.581-84). Quoting both the Biblical text, and the marriage ceremony Guido again states that a wife is "flesh of his flesh, bone of his bone" (11.1302) and recalls the charge put her on that day: "They desire / Shall be to the husband, o'er thee shall he rule!" (11.1304-5). In addition to the numerous times Guido quotes scripture to justify his cruelty, he summarizes, "I did / God's bidding and man's duty" (5.1702-3). But in Browning's poem, these institutions also have a more active role. Guido is shocked that his crime is so horrific to a court who "brands a woman black between the breasts / For sinning by connection with a Jew" (5:1243,44). Several characters remark in surprise that Pompilia was not publicly whipped when she was caught with the priest. Certainly either of these two institutions could have prevented the crime from happening. Even the public knew of Pompilia's need for protection, and that "She cried / To those whom the law appoints recourse for such, / The secular Guardian – that's the Governor, / And the Archbishop – that's the spiritual guide, / And prayed them take the claws from out her flesh" (3:967-71). The Other Half-Rome tells us that "Three times she rushed, maddened by misery," (3:1003) to the Archbishop, who was a "friend / of her husband" (3:1004, 1005) and he "Thrice bade the foolish woman stop her tongue" (3:1009). Not only did he

fail to provide her with protection, he “Coached her and carried her to the Count again,” (3:1011), stating that “His old friend should be master in his house, / Rule his wife and correct her faults at need!” (3:1009-1013). Guido’s plea, “Apprize me that the law o’ the game has changed?” (11:116) reveals the extent to which he believed in the codes of hegemonic masculinity that informed his actions. While Guido attempts to deny all responsibility for the crime, there is an important element of truth in his pitiful cry: “Do Thou wipe out the being of me, and smear, / This soul from off Thy white of things, I Blot! / I am one huge and sheer mistake, - whose fault? / Not mine at least, who did not make myself!” (11: 936,39). Like other Gothic monsters, such as Frankenstein’s creature, Guido is partially *made* monstrous by the prevailing codes of manhood. But the courts will hear none of it.

Guido’s perplexity also stems from the conflict he feels between the law as an embodiment of patriarchal authority and social custom as an enforcement of patriarchal tradition. The law has condemned Guido (officially) for the murder of his wife and her parents. Yet social pressure, informed by patriarchal norms, also condemns him for not having killed her when she was first discovered with the priest, Caponsacchi. He hears in his head the court’s objection that “[he] shrank from Gallant readiness and risk. / Were coward” (5:1090,91), and attempts to appease them by agreeing. He pleads guilty to “having been afraid” and aligns himself with “eunuchs, women, children” (5:1099) who are all “shieldless quite / against attack” (5:1099). In his invoking of the law for his own protection, his choice of associations speaks to the earlier question – what kind of man is under the law? In Guido’s eyes, one that is emasculated and effeminized.

Yet Guido's final and bloody assertion of his manhood is precisely what makes him, in the eyes of the state, an unnatural monster. Ultimately, Dolan notes, "Such exaggerated, grotesque characterizations evade the relationship between wife-murder and the dominant ideology of male supremacy [...] murderous husbands are monstrous exceptions, not husbands whose 'legitimate' correction of their wives gets out of hand" (106). Guido's assessment of his own monstrosity is worth quoting at length:

Let me turn wolf, be whole, and sate, for once,
 Wallow in what is now a wolfishness
 Coerced too much by the humanity
 That's half of me as well! Grow out of man,
 Glut the wolf-nature, – what remains but grow
 Into man again, be man indeed
 And all man? Do I ring the changes right?
 Deformed, transformed, reformed, informed, conformed!

Guido's impassioned speech articulates the torturous transformations and conflicts that the conflicting codes of manhood produce. One set of codes demands that Guido regain his manhood through violence. The other set of codes demands that Guido exhibit self-control, since it is precisely his violence towards his wife that strips him of his manhood and transforms him into a "monster" and a "beast."

The sense that wounded honor must be violently avenged is evidenced in Half Rome's complaint that Guido's only fault is that he did not kill sooner, and did not, in fact finish the job by killing his wife's suspected lover. For Browning's readers, this sentiment would not be altogether unfamiliar. Wiener points to the case of Isaac

Hazlehurst who was only sentenced to “one year’s imprisonment for murdering his notoriously unfaithful wife in 1887 upon finding her in his bed with another man” (202) and goes on to note that “if Hazlehurst had instead killed the man, he would never have been even charged with murder” (202). Guido’s situation is different in that he only suspected Pompilia of marital unfaithfulness, and in Victorian courts, when infidelity could not be proven, the sentencing was not as lenient. That being said, Wiener points out that “when the Home Office confidentially listed five cases between 1860 and 1895 where ‘popular feeling’ had to be taken into account in granting a reprieve, four out of five were of killers of unfaithful wives” (204). Of interest here is the continuity between Guido’s use of spousal violence as a means of reestablishing manhood, and Wiener’s observation that wife-killing due to proven or suspected infidelity is “a ‘man’s crime’ *par excellence* [...] always of great interest, [and that] this male-linked crime brought forth particularly strong and conflicted responses in Victorian England” (201). These conflicted responses reflect the male population’s attempt to decipher and adhere to conflicting codes that establish and maintain manhood.

The previous chapter discussed the other code at work here – the implementation of a new cultural imperative for self-regulation for Victorian men. This imperative and its effects are most often associated with Sussman and Adams in their respective studies, but Wiener’s assessment echoes a similar refrain as well: “as the gospel of self-management spread, impulsive and violent behavior become all the more threatening...by the increasing contrast it made with the self-improving way of life” (13). Guido complains that his reaction to his wife’s suspected infidelity is “honest instinct, pent and crossed

through life, / Let surge by death into a visible flow of rapture” (11.2061-63). The image he employs is of a volcano in which his natural manly instinct is a

strangled thread of flame

[that] Painfully winds, annoying and annoyed,

Malignant and maligned, thro’ stone and ore,

Till earth exude the stranger: vented once,

It finds full play, is recognized a-top

Some mountain as no such abnormal birth. (11.2064-69)

The image effectively blames a model of social repression for corrupting a natural manly instinct, and recalls Sussman’s assessment of Carlyle. Sussman points out that Carlyle envisioned men as having a “hydraulic” body – one filled with a fluid energy (19). While such an energy had to be regulated, “too rigid control of the fluid interior results in eruption or ‘wasteful volcanoism’” (23). Though compounded by class divisions, Victorian men across the economic spectrum were faced with an equally confusing and equally terrifying prospect of attempting to decipher the balance between these codes. The difference between manhood and monstrosity hung in the balance.

Guido’s manliness is on trial, and it is measured against an impossible and horrifying ideal. The collapse of his decaying house, his inability to be a master in his own home, and his public display of domestic weakness all draw attention to the gap between the masculine ideal, and the male subject. Paradoxically, then, he is also punished for his revelation in such a public fashion of the violence that constitutes the foundation for male authority within both the state and church settings. Guido’s own sense is that the reproduction of this dynamic is dependent upon performance in two key

roles – husband and father. Failure in either realm is subject to anything from private ridicule, to public torture or even, as in Guido's case, death. The reason for such vigilant policing of masculinity, as legitimated by spousal and paternal roles, rests on the fact that failure in either realm was a threat both to social order and to the ontological foundation of masculine subjectivity.

Hence, Guido's continual sense of terror that operates at two levels: his fear of the violent repercussions that result from failing to maintain proper patriarchal authority, which threatens the body, and the terror of facing an ontological void if such structuring mechanisms are abandoned, or simply fail to shore up, the fragile masculine self. This does not keep him from benefiting from the power structure that condemns him (hence his outrage, and bewilderment when he finds himself cast out), but it does foreground that in the late seventeenth century, even for men, there were few ways out of such a structure. Browning links this complex of horror to the homosocial affiliation between Guido, Church, and State, indicating a complicit relationship in the patriarchal structures that perpetuate the violent subjection of women.

In the end, Guido is not punished for his treatment of Pompilia so much as he is for clumsily exposing the violence that forms the foundation for the law (theological and social) in such a public fashion. Thus masculinity itself is revealed as being predicated on a violence that must terrorize and eradicate the feminine other on which it depends for its patrilineal succession and self-identification. Perhaps this is what Donna Heiland means when she claims, that "patriarchy is not only the subject of gothic novels, but is itself a gothic structure" (11). However, in Heiland's study of the Gothic and gender, she claims that "gothic novels are all about patriarchies, about how they function, what threatens

them, what keeps them going” and that “patriarchy inevitably celebrates a male creative power that demands the suppression – and sometimes the outright sacrifice – of women” (11). While this is true, what becomes equally clear is that a Gothic mode in Browning’s *The Ring and the Book* reveals what the consequences are for the men who, for one reason or another, have made that structure their home, one that becomes particularly *unheimlich* as they realize that patriarchy’s phantasmatic dominance can also demand the suppression - and outright sacrifice - of men with equal vengeance. This is the punishment for “Count Guido, who reveals our mystery” (11:2010). Book 1 describes Guido’s last night before his execution and the reader is presented with a visage of the “part-man part-monster” (1:1294) that sits in the “close fetid cell, / Where the hot vapour of agony, / Struck drops on the cold wall, runs down / Horrible worms made out of sweat and tears - ” (1:1286-89). The ambivalence triggered by this brief picture of “justice” – the mixture of satisfaction that a tyrant is getting his due, and frustration that he is the product of system that continues to function – signals the extent to which Guido is both produced by, and is a source of, unrelenting terror.

Chapter Four

“As if...Alive”: Browning’s Brides

Browning’s critique of anxiously destabilized Victorian notions of masculinity in *The Ring and the Book* is somewhat veiled by being temporally and geographically distanced to seventeenth-century Italy and by being framed as “history.” That poem’s Gothicized representation of violence against the female Other as a response to threatened masculinity also informs several of his other dramatic poems. Most notably, of course, the Renaissance Italian setting of “My Last Duchess” (1842,1849) shares with *The Ring and the Book*, and undoubtedly anticipates, the strategic displacement of the theme to the imagined social ideology of that cultural milieu. The topic’s otherwise highly comparable treatment in “Porphyria’s Lover” (1836) and “Mesmerism” (1853) is not, however, strongly associated with a particular time or country. Yet in each of these works, motifs of madness, possessive violence and troubled patriarchy are woven together into an identifiable Gothic tapestry. As well, all are carefully contrived to embody and express those implications “objectively,” by dramatic projection of character and voice, and all contain the utterances of men desperately attempting to impose and exercise control over the haunting spectral presence of a female Other. Browning eventually collected the three shorter monologues together in his 1863 edition of *Dramatic Romances*. Examining them together, and from a Gothic critical framework, reveals a particular arc in Browning’s horrifying representations of personal crises in cultural masculinity regarding the precariousness of such control and the apparent threat

of female autonomy. These poems, viewed together, can be seen to enact the tragic paradox that culturally-inscribed masculinity, when called into question, can seek both to preserve a fantasized feminine reflection of male power and to obliterate the living female Other out of shame and fear. There is every reason, moreover, to find in the Gothicism of these disturbing motifs a new ground for many scholars' conclusion that an implicit referent of Browning's relocated or unlocated dramatic situations is Victorian England.

Historical Bodies

Of this triptych of shorter Gothic poems, "My Last Duchess" has the most in common with *The Ring and the Book*. Scholarly interpretation of the earlier and much shorter poem's horrid implications have been numerous and varied, but its use of a Gothic mode, has not been explicitly named or explored. Re-examined from this different perspective, the famous ambiguities of "My Last Duchess" may assume a more definite shape and additional pertinence to a Victorian cultural milieu. Lingering disagreements in critical interpretation of the monologue turn mostly, of course, on the question of whether the speaker should be understood to be deliberately and safely, as opposed to inadvertently and dangerously, disclosing his proud and murderous nature. The poem's meanings, and that enigma in particular, can be illuminated by foregrounding the Gothicism of Browning's dramatic representation of the Duke's performance. Both *The Ring and the Book* and "My Last Duchess" dramatically voice the responses of men whose sense of masculinity is destabilized by the threat of a female Other, in each case an "uncooperative" wife. Yet, in spite of the characters' similar responses, the Duke of

Ferrara manages to remain safely ensconced with the homosocial system that ejects Guido so violently. Guido's bewilderment is vocalized in his recurring complaint that, in spite of adhering to the old codes, the system of homosocial bonds has failed to protect one of its own. In other words, Guido's sense is that the whole system is being thwarted by newer models of masculinity that challenge the rights, privileges and power structures of the older model. The significant difference in "My Last Duchess" is in how the dramatic form exposes the vacuity of the older system in and of itself. The continual revelation of the Duke's paranoid insecurity reveals that even when the old code is in full reign, even when hegemonic masculinity is functioning as it "should" to consolidate power and protect its own interests as it does for the Duke, it still utterly fails to produce a sense of stable and secure manhood, and remains haunted by the violent logic on which it is predicated.

The pertinent features "My Last Duchess" most significantly shares with *The Ring and the Book* are evident enough. Both poems are based, however loosely, on actual historical incidents, both are set in Italy in the distant past, both voice an arrogant male aristocrat's justification of his violent response to marital anxieties, and both hint at possible cuckoldry. As well, both feature the sudden disclosure of a horrid crime, both display a type of female "corpse," and in both the central male characters remain haunted by a dead woman's "ghostly" presence. In these and other ways, "My Last Duchess" anticipates the Gothic situations and themes that Browning resumed again in greater detail, and with greater expressive ferocity, in *The Ring and The Book*.

Nor should the emphatically historical and foreign setting of either poem be taken literally. "My Last Duchess" was originally paired with "Count Grismond" under the

general title, “Italy and France” in *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842). DeVane asserts that those two poems reflect Browning’s interest in “national psychologies” (98) and that “Italy” is Browning’s “first brilliant study of the culture and morality of the Italian Renaissance” (99). But more recent scholarship invariably recognizes that Browning is also, addressing certain comparable aspects of the culture and morality of mid-Victorian England itself.⁵⁰ Joseph Bristow, for example, reminds readers that “to understand [Browning] one has to see how often [his] often uneasy thoughts about power are displaced from the contemporary scene into other poetic spaces” (65). There was perhaps good reason for Browning to do so. As already seen with respect to the reception of Tennyson’s *Maud*, “even when framed as an expose of madness [...] *Maud* proved distasteful because it put forward a point of view about current affairs” (63). Thus, while the unpleasant cultural implications of “My Last Duchess” are strategically displaced by Browning to a time and place far away from his contemporary British audience, “the poem connects forcefully,” as Matthew Reynolds points out, “with the potential for oppression in marriage in mid-nineteenth-century Britain” (60).

Similarly to *The Ring and the Book*, Browning engages in this critique by re-articulating a historical figure through a Gothic narrative. Louis S. Friedland convincingly argues that “My Last Duchess” is based on Alfonso II, Duke of Ferrara 1559-97 (656). Friedland notes that in 1558, Alfonso married a fourteen-year-old girl, left three days after the wedding for almost two years, only to have his young bride die, conspicuously, upon his return, at the age of seventeen (656). Public speculation centered on rumors that the young girl was poisoned. Significantly Alfonso, like Guido, had never produced an heir and was the last of his line. While Browning clearly eschews an exact

historical model of Alfonso, this ostensibly incidental historical fact about Alfonso's having no heir resonates with the Duke's (and later with Guido's) violent reaction to his marital situation. The Duke's speech to the envoy persistently reflects anxieties about the marital faithfulness of his last Duchess, and thus, by implication, also about the legitimacy of any future heir that she might have borne him. So, in spite of his attempts to enclose and control his former wife, her present representation in a painted portrait, and the future wife for whose hand he now negotiates with her father's ambassador, this Duke is, no less than Guido, Gothically encrypted within the patriarchal matrimonial system that he requires in order to legitimate himself.

There are, however, several significant differences between "My Last Duchess" and *The Ring and the Book*, chiefly in the framing of the main character's dramatic and rhetorical situation. Most notably, of course, the victim in "My Last Duchess" was clearly not subjected to the threats and spousal terrorism suffered by Pompilia. The Duchess received no warnings prior to being summarily eliminated. The Gothic eeriness of her marriage, during which her "joy" and "smiles" actually "grew," is an impression fostered only later, by her husband's admission of silent cruelty in superciliously *declining* to "stoop" to imposing his will on her. In addition, this Duke has apparently managed to evade not only the legal consequences met by Guido after disposal of an unsatisfactory wife, but also any dismaying personal and social stigma. This difference in outcome between these otherwise comparably "historicized" situations is highly significant. It is as if Browning explores in these texts alternative cultural "plots" for these similarly horrifying exercises and utterances of tradition-bound masculinist subjectivity and authority in response to a perceived female threat.

In “My Last Duchess,” an implicit link between violence and masculine prerogative informs the Duke’s decorously enigmatic rhetoric. Unlike the exasperated Guido, this Duke does not, to borrow his own phrase, “stoop” to explain to the listener the sordid details of his wife’s disappearance. The emphasis is entirely on representing her removal, at his secret “commands,” as a reassuring restoration of temporarily suspended personal, social, and class stability. In fact, the apparent aplomb of such a disclosure to the envoy, amid dowry negotiations, signifies (and may indeed intend to re-consolidate) a tacit mutual understanding of untouchable privilege, of what conduct will be expected in his next bride, and of the terror on which such assumptions rest. More particularly, the Duke’s confiding his power and readiness to take such extreme measures invokes the masculine authority and status that is homosocially produced, sustained, and transferred from fathers to husbands in marriage arrangements, and evinces confidence that the unspoken basis of this ideology is shared by her father the Count.

Returning later to virtually the same scenario in *The Ring and the Book*, Browning will deploy its Gothic possibilities quite differently, emphasizing instead the villain’s conspicuous failure to preserve through extreme action or desperate utterance his inherited class and gender prerogatives. As we have seen, Guido’s clumsy loss of mastery over his own wife, and the even clumsier violence of his attempt to regain it, are played out indiscreetly as scandal, on a public stage. The public rather than private display and articulation of the unspoken and unspeakable link between terror and masculine authority is a betrayal of the very social system, culturally encoded in patriarchy, which Guido might otherwise rely on to approve, or to allow, or at least to forgive, his crime. Hence my conclusion that he is punished by members of his own

class and gender, not for murder but for his dangerously public revelation of the violence that is supposed to be so Gothically encrypted as a basis for patriarchal systems.

In “My Last Duchess,” Browning’s Duke plays a similar hand much more adroitly, recognizing that discretion and indirectness in disposing of his wife, and a subtler form of bravura in negotiating for the political alliance to be acquired with a new one, will enable him to retain his position in the homosocial power structure. Thus the differences of outcome in “My Last Duchess” and *The Ring and the Book* highlight the elements that confirm Browning’s determination to confront, dramatize and diagnose, by means of the discourse (the literary and social speech type) of Gothicized villains, variations upon a cultural crisis in the “fortress of masculinity.”⁵¹ Yet “My Last Duchess” also reveals that even when patriarchal systems function in this way, as a type of homosocial Gothic “castle” serving to consolidate, protect, and enforce the traditional power of masculinity, the fortress is always already haunted from the inside out.

In the first place, of course, the Duchess displayed “as if . . . alive” (2) in her portrait on the wall is a ghostly presence rather than an absence. The possessiveness of the monologue’s opening lines immediately emphasize the Duke’s jealous desire to assert control over the female subject and her sexuality, in death even as in life. This motif is typical of other aristocratic villains within the Gothic who, like the Duke, enforce this control by imprisoning their living female victims (or their lifeless bodies) within a castle or manor house. To insist that “That’s my last Duchess” (1) and “there she stands” (4) is to emphasize his ownership of her as well as the continuity of her location and confinement within the home. The ancestral house as a site of female imprisonment and/or death, recalls that, in the Gothic, the passive and subjugated female body is often

one of a series of artifacts necessary to shore up masculine identity. For instance, the Duke's transformation of the person into an aesthetic object recalls the way portraiture functions in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Oval Portrait" as a means of mortifying the female Other, and preserving her in state consistent with the masculine ideal.

As Carol Christ notes, "for Victorian poets and painters, the portrait of a woman was inextricably connected with death. [...] the death that the portrait involves for its subject is specifically gendered in a way that suggests the desire and fear both of looking at the forbidden sexual object and of appropriating its life" (150). This idea will recur in Browning's "Mesmerism," but in "My Last Duchess" the commissioned portrait functions Gothically as a type of corpse, a partial body encrypted within the Duke's home, "looking as if she were alive" (2), usually curtained from the eyes of others yet available for his own morbid fascination and as a gruesome confirmation of his power. Here the horror is chiefly in the villain's having arranged an exhibit of his victim's body as a type of trophy or sign. At this first level of Gothic signification, then, Browning infuses the Duke's remarks with the shock value of a Bluebeard-like morbidity. Like Bluebeard, the Duke keeps the female body immured within the house as a macabre celebration of his seemingly unlimited power. The curtaining of the picture also invokes a long tradition within the Gothic of women, such as Madeline Usher, whose living death or dead life is immured (unsuccessfully, as it turns out) within the patriarchal house from which they can find no escape. The Duchess has been triply immured: in life confined to the palace, now confined to the canvas, and then concealed behind the curtain. Her curtained representation, the "buried" presence that yet haunts the house itself "as if... alive," remains a permanent fixture within the structure that apparently could not

altogether contain her when she was living. Uncurtained, it will trouble even more the meanings Browning obliquely invests in the Gothicism of the scene.

Following the Gothic's conflation of the haunted house with the haunted mind, the Duchess' "burial" within the house is symbolic of the Duke's psychic encryption of her. As Sussman remarks, "setting the portrait within a chamber hidden by a curtain [is] an image that anticipates Pater's later image of the 'narrow chamber of the individual mind'" (80). Thus, unlike other Gothic moments in literature, the Duchess does not come down from her portrait and wander about the house terrifying the Duke – she haunts the Duke from the inside out. The Duchess's picture stands in, in this case, for the terrifying ghost or apparition often produced by the Gothic villain's guilty conscience. Earl Ingersoll argues along similar lines, and provocatively finishes his critique of the Duke with a set of rather Gothic-sounding descriptors:

[The Duke] has reduced her to the beautiful object which, like the sacrificed Porphyria, can never be lost. By the end of the monologue, it is clear that the Duke is a fragile shell of prestige and the accoutrements of power concealing a hollow core, very like a cast bronze statue. It is ironically appropriate, then, that he has made her what he fears he himself is, one of the living dead, absent yet also there, 'as if alive'. (156)

Like the House of Franceschini, the Duke's façade of power and security belies the reality that the "fortress of his identity," (*Jekyll and Hyde* 76) as Robert Louis Stevenson describes it is, in fact, lying in ruins – even if his actual mansion is not. His fragile sense of self, understood too in terms of ancestral heritage and future lineage, is threatened when apparently undervalued by the Duchess. This perceived affront, and the Duke's

response to it, become the real crux of the Gothic elements within the poem.

The Duke's performance for the envoy is actually originated, conducted, and motivated in extreme gender anxiety: possessiveness, sexual jealousy, and alarm regarding the reputation (and legitimate continuity) of his "nine-hundred-years-old name" (33). It is, amongst other things, a patrilineal horror story exhibiting masculine paranoia. Like *The Ring and the Book* (and like Tennyson's *Maud*), this poem presents, in his own voice, a male figure who, as Catherine Maxwell notes, discloses "the anxiety of experiencing the shifting grounds of his identity" ("Pygmalion" 996). The threat to "identity" perceived by the Duke arises directly and indirectly from his fearful obsession with his aristocratic family history and name. This entire investment of personal "self" in a specific inherited social apparatus accounts in large part for the alarmed and alarming motifs of suspected infidelity, legitimacy of heirs, sexual jealousy, injured egomania, psychological abuse, and criminal violence.

Just as Guido's masculine status is contingent on his sense of place within a patrilineal line extending into the past, and, through him, into the future, the Duke's sense of manhood (because the family line is traced through the father's "name") is tied inextricably to the honor associated with his forefathers and descendents, and thus to his own ability to produce a legitimate heir. The Duke represents the Duchess as ungratefully oblivious to both the importance of his familial past and the necessity of confidence in the legitimacy of its future. His remark that one of the Duchess' key faults is that she "ranked / [His] gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name / With anybody's gift" (33-35) directly prefigures Guido's obsession with the value of his aristocratic family's "name." The key difference between the abjectly insolvent Guido Franceschini and the prosperous

Duke of Ferrara is that the signifying social power of the Duke's familial name still exerts its cultural authority. However, as with Guido, the Duke's valuation of himself, and the "market value" of his familial name, are also mortifyingly subject to the estimation of a female Other. The aristocratic wife's function is to serve as a conspicuously compliant sign of his position, prestige, and financial security in homosocial system of marriage alliances and codes of cultural currency. As Herbert Tucker notes, "the Duke is the heir to a heavily traditional sense of himself – possessing a highly valued 'nine-hundred-years-old name'" (33) – one "which prescribes fixed relations between form and meaning" (178). Apparently the Duchess's promiscuously bestowed words, smiles, blushes, and glad-heartedness have called disconcertingly into doubt the preservation of precisely that prescribed relation between form and meaning, signifier and signified. As such, Lee Erickson points out, "a nine-hundred-years-old name is revealed not only as an insufficient ground for the self but also as the dangerous voice of a demonic tradition that suppresses the Duchess' genuine individuality" (84). Erickson's recognition that the very process of patrilineal succession is a "demonic tradition" that suppresses the female Other reinforces this study's grounds for hearing in "My Last Duchess" the Gothic "voice" of anxiously reaffirmed masculine identity formation. That this impression is at least partly intended by the Duke is confirmed by the poem's concluding lines, with their renewed innuendos of brutal power and wealth. Insecurity about his "market value" in the eyes of peers resurfaces in the calculated gesture of reassuringly drawing the important emissary's attention to yet another commissioned work of art that conveys the same meaning as the portrait: a rare bronze statue of "Neptune [...] taming a sea-horse" (54-55). The statute is expressing (and

signaling) the basis of the Duke's identity and worth (and connoisseurship) in coercive subjugation of the female and everything she represents in a patriarchal economy.

Yet it is not only the Duke's ancestral name that he fears is being devalued by the Duchess. He also has anxieties about the legitimate continuance of that line into future. Groundless or not, the Duke's fear of cuckoldry accordingly suggests much more than eccentric paranoia or sexual jealousy. In the dramatic and rhetorical context of subtle negotiations for his next political and economic alliance through marriage, it addresses any possible imputation of inability or laxity in his responsibility to ensure the purity of his bloodline. The fact that he goes out of his way to mention having commissioned a celibate monk to paint the Duchess's portrait makes this point, even at some risk of also disclosing personal feelings of insecurity regarding her sexual fidelity.⁵² Likewise, his complaint to the envoy that her "approving speech / Or blush" (30, 31), which should have been reserved for him alone, was given equally to "some officious fool" (27) who broke a bough of cherries for her suggests that the Duke was anxious about who else, besides the artist monk, might be calling that "spot of joy" (21) to his wife's face. As in the case of Guido, the production of a legitimate heir had not only practical consequences, but ontological significance. Since masculine identity was tied up with the continuation of the family line, the assurance of an heir's legitimacy was necessary in establishing a sense of self that extended into both the past and future. This concept of masculinity, rooted in what Dolan has called the dynamics of the "house," had shifted in Victorian England, but, as we saw in the last chapter, the fear of emasculation by being revealed as a cuckold had not.

Thus, the Duke reveals an awareness of own dependence on being properly

estimated as “worthy” by the Duchess and by observers of her conduct. While her own cultural worth is of course always already determined in a homosocial system of exchange between men, his is established, in part, within the more private economy of her estimation. This internal economy is made visible, however, in numerous ways, including an expectation of her public performance of compliant deference and exclusive regard. Her fatal failure to satisfy this expectation is made visible, according to the Duke, in the “body language” of the Duchess. Although he acknowledges that his “favour at her breast” (25) did draw forth the appropriate “blush” (30), so did other, more mundane, pleasures:

The dropping of the daylight in the West,
 The bough of cherries some officious fool
 Broke in the orchard for her, [and] the white mule
 She rode with round the terrace... . (25-28)

In fact, such perceived affronts to his exclusive dignity are the Duke’s admitted reason for deciding to instruct Fra Pandolf to transform the unsatisfactory living Duchess into a mute ideal, complete with her cheek’s formerly indiscriminate but now ostensibly controlled “spot of joy.” Yet even when she is done away with, the Duke remains obsessed with imposing interpretive control upon the body-as-text offered in the displayed portrait of the Duchess: “for never read / strangers like you that pictured countenance...but to my self they turned...and seemed as they would ask me...” (6-7,9,11). The text being read is the language of the body, both metaphorical – her “heart” (22) and “breast” (25) as the symbolic seat of her affections – and corporeal – her “glance” (8) and “cheek,” (15) as places where her internal affections are made manifest.

The symbolic and corporeal dimensions of her tragic story collide in the picture's capturing of the now Gothicized body of the Duchess: the "faint / half-flush that dies along her throat." The image simultaneously invokes not only the reason given for her death (her blushing at anyone's compliment) but also the consequence for her response, as that half-flush *dies* along her throat. This language of the body is evidently being represented by the Duke as the cautionary narrative of a fickle woman to whom any gifts, including his, were "all one" (25). The Duchess is encased in a portrait behind a curtain in a series of entombments meant to conceal the meaning that her living body had threatened to reveal: the forbidden truth that the Duke, and his nine-hundred-years-old name, are indeed no greater in value than "anybody's gift" (34).

As indicated earlier, a further advantage of revisiting "My Last Duchess" from a Gothic perspective may be the light it can shed on long-standing critical questions about how the Duke's extraordinary candors should be dramatically understood. One important point of perennial uncertainty is the extent of the Duke's rhetorical "success" in imposing and confining the meaning of the Duchess's portrait and in justifying the necessity of her disappearance. Is his listener, the Count's envoy, likely to be persuaded? Intimidated? Horrified? Cynically acquiescent? Or, if the Duke's performance is indeed functioning Gothically, all of these at once? As Hawlin notes, earlier interpretations of the poem focused on the probable effectiveness of the Duke's sublimely arrogant demonstration of "strength and power" (157), while newer readings of the poem have emphasized how the Duke's bravado should instead be interpreted as an overcompensation for his weakness. Catherine Maxwell, for example, not only reads the Duchess as actively resisting in death, even as in life, the Duke's assertion of power, but also regards this resistance as

signifying Browning's critique of gendered power structures generally. In terms approximating the language of the Gothic, Maxwell reads "My Last Duchess" (and thematically related poems such as "Porphyria's Lover") as an inversion or reversal of Ovid's Pygmalion myth. Instead of an unsatisfied male creating a work of art that is eventually imbued with life, Browning's "male subjects, threatened by a woman's independent spirit, replace her with statues, pictures, prostheses, corpses, which seem to them more than acceptable substitutes for the real thing" (990). These male characters "desire feminine simulacra, static art-objects, whose fixed value will reflect their self-estimation" (990). Significantly, this is a desire revealed by Browning as a "plan that goes askew" (990). Employing yet again a vocabulary suggestive of the Gothic, Maxwell continues, "The female subject constantly eludes her *captor*, unmasks the poverty of his suppositions, or *returns to haunt* him... 'My Last Duchess' stages a confrontation in which *the dead return* to challenge the living, and thereby empties and renders null the gesture of *appropriation*" (emphasis mine 990,994). In this view, the Duke may feel he has succeeded in substituting a static art-object for the real Duchess, but the very quality captured in the portrait, a "spot of joy" (21) called to her cheek by the artist's compliment, memorializes his own insecurity. He is haunted by the portrait of the Duchess because it is a constant reminder of her power to affect his sense of a masculine self and of his inability to control her when she was alive. While the portrait's "fixed value will reflect [his] self-estimation" (990), Maxwell points out, the Duke is haunted by the knowledge that he had to give "commands" (45) to effectively terminate the unnerving, and unmaning, estimations of his worth by the Duchess.

Scholarship also divides on the meaning of the Duke's startling disclosures and

representation of himself – how much, and what exactly he intends to reveal, and why. Debates in this regard are perhaps epitomized by B.R. Jerman’s early article “Browning’s Witless Duke” (1957) and Laurence Perrine’s rejoinder, “Browning’s Shrewd Duke” (1959). But the debate was somewhat overshadowed by Robert Langbaum’s *The Poetry of Experience* (1957). Langbaum’s now famous statement about the Duke continues to shape contemporary literary criticism: “the utter outrageousness of the duke’s behavior makes condemnation the least interesting response” (83). Given the rates of wife-murder, and the more general debate about domestic abuse in Victorian England, the Duke’s behavior is, perhaps, less outrageous than one might expect. But Langbaum’s assessment, though quoted less often, continues “what interests us more than the duke’s wickedness is his immense attractiveness...we suspend moral judgment because we want to participate in the Duke’s power and freedom” (83). By this I am not suggesting that Langbaum’s hugely influential distinction between sympathy and judgment is wrong. In fact, his encouragement to reserve judgment so that the Duke, with all of his “bland amorality” and “high-handed aristocratic manners” (83) can be fully understood and appreciated is also essential to my reading. Without that understanding, the Duke is quickly disregarded as an aristocratic monster. My sense, however, is that *when* the duke is understood – when readers fully begin to understand the rationale of one who talks with calm, confident, mannerly reserve about the disposal of an uncontrollable wife – then they are forced to confront the Gothic element of the monologue: the dark and labyrinthine mind of a man.

Herbert F. Tucker Jr.’s reading of the poem in *Browning’s Beginnings: The Art of Disclosure* also sets aside the ample evidence for both sets of interpretive claims about

the Duke's intentions, and focuses instead on the Duke's own interpretive struggles. He points out the movement from "the Duke's difficulty in interpreting his Duchess's heart to a more intimate difficulty in interpreting his own heart or 'will'" (178). He draws attention, as does my study, to the Duke's reading of the Duchess's body, and shows that despite the Duke's attempt at interpretive control, the Duchess remains an uncontrollable mystery:

the Duke's question, how such a glance came there, is a question about origins...it is a question the Duke can no more answer now than he could answer when she was alive...his inconclusive wondering is the mainspring of his monologue; and, with his choice to turn aside from an unanswered question and stop wondering, the monologue comes to a halt. (179)

In Tucker's reading, "the 'spot' is the interval that has prevented the Duke from taking her meaning and from determining in a name the significance of her intent, earnest glance" (179). Initially, this reading is similar to my own in that the Duke's bid for a totalizing masculine authority over the Duchess is flouted by his inability to gain access to and to control her thoughts and feelings as indicated by the uncontrollable spot of joy memorialized in the portrait. However, Tucker's emphasis on the Duke's failure to properly "interpret" the Duchess, comes at the cost of downplaying the violence that is a direct result of that failure. The spot may act as an unquenchable, uncontrollable point of female resistance to the Duke's interpretive authority, but given the outcome, it seems a pyrrhic victory at best.

For Tucker, to focus on this aspect of the poem is to miss the point – to misinterpret the Duke in the same way that the Duke fails to interpret himself. When

Tucker states that the Duke's parting remark about Neptune taming a sea-horse is the Duke's "ultimate self-interpretation" (180), his point is that it is "obviously a misinterpretation" (180), and that "a reader who accepts such an assertion of ducal power as an adequate motive for Browning's forceful monologue makes exactly the reductive mistake made by the Duke" (180). W.J.T. Mitchell also claims that the poem is ultimately about interpretative claims and the problems of representation: "the duke thinks of his power as something that is certified by his control of representations – by his painting of the duchess hidden behind a curtain that only he can draw, by the statue of Neptune 'cast in bronze for me' ... what Browning shows us, however, is the uncontrollability of representations" (20).

Such interpretations are not antithetical to my own reading. Rather, they reinforce Isobel Armstrong's notion of the double poem which reads "the text as struggle ... an endless struggle and contention...[a] struggle with the play of ambiguity and contradiction" (10). That the poem embodies a process of interpretive struggle, and, in fact, enacts the failure of that struggle to resolve with a foreclosed meaning, simply mirrors the crisis that the speaker within the poem is facing. My reading contextualizes that process with specific reference to its gendered dynamics and the expression of its struggle in a Gothic mode.

When the poem's dramatic and rhetorical situation is contextualized as Gothic, its implications assume a definite and sinister bearing. Browning's study of domestic violence and masculinity in crisis in "My Last Duchess" does differ importantly in dramatized conduct and outcome from his later treatment of similar matter in *The Ring and the Book*. Unlike Guido's, the crime and the self-justifying candors of the Duke in

“My Last Duchess” are apparently going to escape not only scandalous exposure and legal consequences but also the decisive factor in Guido’s fate: rejection by the patriarchal power structure itself. Where Guido’s actions and words isolate him from the otherwise probable protections of that system, the Duke’s attempts to assiduously preserve and enlist them.

For Browning the basis and meaning of this crucial difference is one of the ways that the poem enacts a cultural critique. Firstly, the Gothic framing of the speaker (violent Italian aristocrat)⁵³ makes it likely that the Duke’s bravado and ingratiating gestures are primarily calculated attempts at male and class bonding with his powerful future father-in-law. The Duke evidently wants the envoy to infer and then reassuringly convey to the prospective new bride’s elite family a certain cluster of shared ideological understandings or codes of social power. Just as Guido initially tries to invoke homosocial common cause with his judges, the Duke’s much more adroit performance seems designed (even rehearsed?) to achieve that end, and certainly belies the false modesty of his claim to have “no skill with words.” Thus, the speech’s revelations are not inadvertent, foolish, or boastfully clumsy. Rather, they craftily express authoritarian attitudes that he seems confident the Count will both welcome in a new alliance and pass along to his daughter. Whether the Duke will turn out to be mistaken in this supposition is a different and open question, one that obviously cannot be answered on the basis of this text.

Secondly, other details in this apparently confident assertiveness in the Duke’s speech and motives are open to interpretation as gestures of Gothic paranoia – a haunting dread produced by the presence of something that was meant to stay buried. For example, to be sure that the envoy understands the crux of the message he is to convey,

the Duke repeats, in slight variances, that he refused to be the one to teach his last Duchess about his worth. The Duke's refusal to "stoop" (43) and "lesson" (40) her centers on the fact that to do so would be to admit that he must *make* his will quite clear (36,37) to her. The prospect that the Duchess would submit herself to being "lessoned" (40) and "so set her wits to [his]" (40,41) is irrelevant to the Duke. To lesson her, is to lessen him. If he has to "stoop" to teach her that his value is greater than the white mule, the cherry bough from some other suitor, or the compliments of a monk, then he is forced to admit *to himself* his complicity in affecting her will. This complicity would forever undercut the legitimacy of the Duchess' affections towards the Duke, who could only ever see such affirmations as coerced. In a state of paranoiac uncertainty the Duke is never completely sure about the "actual" status of his worth, his masculinity, or his social power. Yet, not to make his will known, is to risk uncertainty, vulnerability and possible rejection. The goal of the Duke, is to find a way to ensure female acknowledgement of his status and power, and yet to keep the process hidden even from himself so that the woman's behavior towards him appears as a natural response to his innate masculine authority. To do, of course, means that he must also keep the fact that the process is hidden from himself, hidden from himself – an so forth in an endlessly regressing series of rather Gothic encryptions.

Such a process serves Browning's purposes by dramatically illustrating that the cultural ideology on which masculine authority so contingently depends must, to remain effectual, remain unspoken (even to oneself if possible). In "My Last Duchess," it does remain cryptically buried, even in so otherwise brazen a speech as this Gothic Duke's. But, as we have seen, Browning later explores in *The Ring and the Book* the very

different consequences of attempting to save oneself by openly and impudently speaking the unspeakable. Clearly his choice of dramatic verse form in both cases was in large part to locate and exhibit the exercise of patriarchy's Gothic pathology in utterance, in discourse.

Both "versions" of this story ultimately show how the homosocial system fails. Even when, in "My Last Duchess," the codes are apparently being carefully observed in action and discourse, even when men such as the Duke do apparently exert absolute control over the life and death of the female Other, even when homosocial bonds can apparently be relied upon to reinforce the exchange of women and validate the use of domestic violence, it fails to produce in the Duke any stable sense of masculine authority. In "My Last Duchess," the instability of the system is exposed, in having mistakenly (if only briefly) accommodated a woman such as the Duchess, and in having resorted to such extreme measures and elaborate rationalization to "bury" safely the threat she represents. Masculinity, within such a system, is still haunted by the knowledge that any validation given to its status as "legitimate" is always already coerced, and therefore, unstable.

Questioned Forms

"Porphyria's Lover" is a dramatic study in sexual jealousy, but, more particularly, in the Gothically framed rationalization of a murder enacted in the name of threatened masculine ego at a moment of crisis in which the speaker explains having found "a thing to do" to a non-compliant woman. Like Guido and the Duke of "My Last Duchess," this Gothic villain is another of Browning's dangerously disappointed male figures who

expresses feelings of betrayal by “traditional” expectations of gendered relationships. The dramatic and rhetorical context in “Porphyria’s Lover” is much less clear; there is utterance but no apparent listener, no apparent addressee for what seems instead to be a strange self-justifying reverie or soliloquy. A Gothic mode is evident in this monologue, however, in the shocking revelation of violence, the display of a corpse, and the horror of a murder regarded as acceptable in a cultural context of masculine entitlement. It is a text that has perennially fostered disagreements in critical interpretation and is, perhaps, the most ambiguous and debated of Browning’s many dramatic monologues, partly on account of the very sort of enigmatic contexts and features that invite a Gothic reading.

Unlike the characters in *The Ring and the Book* and “My Last Duchess,” the couple in “Porphyria’s Lover” are neither temporally transferred by Browning into a specific historical past nor culturally displaced into a remote Catholic and otherwise un-English country. In this instance, the undefined setting and societal situation cannot be either dissociated from or associated with Victorian Britain. Yet this poem too is derived from source materials that lend an otherwise merely sordid crime its distinctly Gothic implications. It marks Browning’s earliest and most direct link to a literary lineage of earlier Gothic writings. The “source” is in a short Gothic tale printed in 1818 in *Blackwood’s* entitled “Extracts from Gosschen’s Diary,” written by John Wilson (Mason 255) Wilson was a key figure in the major shift that occurred in Gothic writing between the time of Walpole, Radcliffe (and other early Gothic novelists) and a Gothic mode as it would emerge in mid-nineteenth century.

As Robert Morrison notes, “[Wilson’s] short tales of terror played a central role in shifting the Gothic tradition from the suspense and unease of Ann Radcliffe to the

explicit horrors and concentrated dread of Edgar Allan Poe” (1). Such tales nevertheless retained some familiar traits from their Gothic roots. Like the early Gothic novels that often portrayed a corrupt or decadent Catholic clergy, Wilson’s fictitious “Extracts” purports to be a translated narrative from a diary of “a Catholic clergyman of great eminence in the city of Ratisbonne” (587). The “translator” informs the reader that he will extract from the journal “many a dark story, well fitted to be the groundwork of a romance – many a tale of guilty love and repentance – many a fearful monument of remorse and horror...from this record of dungeons and confessionals” (597). These “old” Gothic tropes are combined in Wilson’s story with the Victorian preoccupation with madness and paternal self-destruction. Like Tennyson’s *Maud*, the protagonist in the tale fears that he descends from a “family of madmen” (599), and notes that his father “perish[ed] by his own hand” (599). While the themes of this familial horror story also include tormented spousal relationships, it is the realistic description of the remorseless and brutal killing of his wife, and the condensed narrative, that marked a shift in Gothic writing. As Morrison notes,

[Wilson’s] tales rendered terror in ways far more explicit, condensed, and disturbing than anything found in Radcliffe, and at the same time they exploit those stark contrasts that were soon to become such a staple in the fiction of Poe: rationality and insanity, dream and reality, calm and frenzy, deformity and purity, volition and helplessness. (9)

The plot similarities between this work and “Porphyria’s Lover”⁵⁴ are obvious, and both Mason and Morrison outline other affinities, including “the claimed absence of suffering to the victim, and some of her physical traits – the white flesh, the golden hair, and above

all the blue eyes still visible” (Mason 256). Significantly, however, neither scholar mentions that Browning’s text is unique in that it transfers those “stark contrasts” that marked the new direction of Gothic writing into the realm of dramatic poetry.

The author of the second source, Bryan Procter (“Barry Cornwall”), was a friend of Browning. Procter acknowledged Wilson’s text as the source for his own extended poem “Marcian Colona” (1820) (Mason 256). Though Browning probably did not meet Procter in person until after the original publication of “Johannes Agricola” and “Porphyria” in *The Monthly Repository* in 1836 (Mason 257), he would have had access to the texts, and the similarities in the works indicate a working knowledge of them prior to the meeting. Browning’s poem exhibits distinct elements of both previous texts, providing it with a traceable lineage to the nascent world of the new Gothic writing as found in *Blackwood’s*. The textual relation of “Porphyria’s Lover” to Wilson’s tale of terror not only indicates the usefulness of reading Browning’s dramatic monologue through a Gothic lens, but also marks another instance in which unexplored implications of a poet’s experiment with a Gothic mode can be brought to light.⁵⁵ Most importantly for our present purposes, Wilson’s tale of male violence and domestic horror, and Browning’s reiteration of those themes, confirms that Gothic representations of masculine anxiety, and the ensuing violence that attempted to alleviate it, were not unprecedented.

Yet even if one disregards the direct connection to a more obviously Gothic text, “Porphyria’s Lover” abounds in Gothic cues. Indeed, some readers have judged the text to be “a juvenile and unrepresentative horror poem” (Honan 30). Park Honan challenges Browning’s famous maxim about attempting to portray “Action in Character, rather than

Character in Action" by stating that "Character is no more revealed in 'Porphyria' than in the average tale of Poe; the horror story itself is the thing" (30). While Honan does not use the term Gothic to describe the poem, his comparison of the poem to Edgar Allan Poe's tales of that kind recognizes that the plot and the settings of Browning's poem are as Gothic as those of his American contemporary. The poem contains numerous Gothic elements: a violent and stormy night, a confining space (either a madhouse-cell, or a domestic prison), suddenly revealed horror, the murder of a woman, the presence of a corpse, a madman's ravings and even some spectral gliding. Jennifer Gribble actually notes in passing that the opening scene establishes a "distinctly gothic space" (22), and, as we will see, she does connect the use of a Gothic mode and poetry as a form of social critique.

In addition to the other Gothic cues, the speaker sets the tone of the poem, by describing the violent storm outside – one that "tore the elm-tops down for spite / And did its worst to vex the lake" (3-4) – which not only foreshadows the violence that occurs later in the poem, but also mirrors the troubled interior state of the speaker's mind. As observed by Stefan Hawlin, "The reader can sense [the speaker's] unbearable tension – enacted by the storm rocking the elms in the grounds of the big house – because [the speaker] has no control over when Porphyria will come to him" (74). Although Hawlin understates the speaker's perception of natural violence (the wind does not "rock" the elms, it "tears" them down), he pinpoints the crux of the speaker's agitated mind, and locates the motive for the murder he will shortly commit in the speaker's need for control. Indeed, the stereotypical gender roles as articulated in most Gothic narratives are being reversed. A socially powerless male's frustrated desire to possess and dominate an

autonomous female is his professed reason for killing her, and he deludes himself that subordination had been her “darling wish” too (5). Hawlin’s further observation that “the [poem’s] social situation reverses what, for the nineteenth century, might be considered the usual relations between women and men” (156) also warrants development in relation to Browning’s strategic purpose for the poem.

This reversal of gender roles is being established in the poem as perilous. And it does turn out to be fatal for the unsuspecting Porphyria, who evidently exhibits no surprise or alarm at arriving to find her lover so despondent. And yet he seems to resent how entirely she controls the terms of their relationship. He refers bitterly to her having been at a “gay feast” (27) at which he was not welcome on account of “vainer ties” (24) of social class, marriage bonds, or presumably both – ties he imagines she is “too weak ...to dissever” (22,24). He feels relegated and diminished to the status of an embarrassing secret. Just as in the previously examined Browning poems, a tense intersection between class and gender originates in fear of scandal. Whereas “My Last Duchess” and *The Ring and the Book* feature the typical Gothic constellation of an [innocent] woman who is subjected to the whims of an aristocratic tyrant, “Porphyria’s Lover” features the “revenge of the poor boy on the rich girl for the ignominy he has undergone, it is a taking over of property which he feels is rightly his” (Melchiori 6).⁵⁶ Browning’s poems that feature cases such as those of the Duke and Guido emphasize how class position provided no guarantee of male power over a woman, and thus, no sense of a secure masculine identity within a patriarchal matrix. Melchiori’s emphasis on the speaker’s perceived “rights” in “Porphyria’s Lover,” however, highlights the extent to which the patriarchal control and exchange of women transcended class ideologies and were rooted more

firmly in issues of gender. Though seemingly without high rank, social status or monetary wealth, the speaker still fully expects the domestic authority promised to him by systems of hegemonic masculinity, simply on the basis of his being a man.

However, the speaker's own description of Porphyria's actions rather belies his suspicions and tell a different story about the relationship. The fact that she has fled her home and a gay feast to travel by night through "wind and rain" (30) to join him even briefly indicates affection. As well, he reports that upon her arrival she calmly and busily transforms the gloomy room into the very picture of domesticity. Jennifer Gribble notes that "her potentially erotic flight 'through wind and rain' is instantly transformed into the domestic servitude and business of the 'angel in the house', and the clandestine space is transformed into the holy ground of domestic ideology" (23). It is uncertain whether he sees this behavior as submissive devotion (presumably welcome) or as presumptive control (presumably threatening). What is certain is that it will not mitigate the dangerous reality of the situation: the speaker impossibly wants Porphyria as his sole possession. Her attempts at domesticity may inflame that desire by reminding him that she retains the power to choose when she will come and go and when to "play" for him the domestic charade. Possessive jealousy is also expressed in his resentment of the "vainer ties" supposedly preventing Porphyria from giving herself to him completely. Her conduct and choices not only challenge the speaker's need for male relational authority but also continually remind the speaker that his precarious sense of self and of self-worth are entirely subject to her estimation.

Yet one recurrent thematic function of the Gothic has been to imply, contra Gribble, that there is no difference: the holy ground of domestic ideology is always

already a clandestine space. Browning seems to suggest through such voices and situations that the Victorian home bears an unsettling similarity to Bluebeard's proto-Gothic castle in which there is always a cloistered room that holds the awful and sometimes bloody truth about patriarchal terror and terrorism. Such poems participate in the Gothic literary tradition in that they reveal (by failing to conceal) the unholy "secret" of the power structures at work even in the domestic sphere itself. The male violence that results from Lover's need to impose domestic tyranny is a manifestation of a perceived loss of control in the relationship – specifically an inability to control a woman's reassuring estimation of one's social and relational value. Within the Gothic, females that fail or decline to exhibit this behavior must be silenced, pathologized, punished, or, more importantly, (re)-possessed. Echoing both Guido's and the Duke's possessive refrain, Porphyria's lover fantasizes a moment when Porphyria "was mine, mine" (36) and boasts of having used violence to "fix" that moment eternally by killing her. The mad logic offered for Porphyria's murder confirms Browning's employment of a Gothic mode as a critique of such a system.

While Edgar Allan Poe infamously remarked that "the death of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetic subject in the world," (813) Melchiori sees this poem as moving beyond Poe's necrophilic horror, which, she notes, is romantic in origin (7). In explaining why contemporary readers and critics were not offended by the poem, she cites a "Victorian fascination with dead girls [that] seems to hold social as well as psychological implications" (7). Drawing on examples in poems, pamphlets and paintings, Melchiori illustrates that in mid-Victorian England "the bourgeois ideal woman of the period was essentially dead...she was shut-up and cloistered (hence

Tennyson's moated granges) and served no useful function beyond childbearing" (7). Even more to the point, Melchiori asks, how could a woman serve as the "ideal model" of purity, moral guidance and inspiration "when, alive, some of her actions, however strictly the moral codes had been inculcated, would inevitably conflict with this unreal picture" (emphasis mine 7). Melchiori's description is applied not only to the Pre-Raphaelite paintings of dead women, but also to the situation in "My Last Duchess" in which men have sought to transform live, but variable, women into dead, but ideal, objects of art. She states that "the reason Victorian literature is so strewn with attractive female corpses [is to enable men to say]: there lie the women that it is safe to admire" (7). This formulation corresponds closely to a central feature of the Gothic representation and diagnosis of gendered violence, and explicitly connects its implications to the dark side of Victorian culture and aesthetics.

From the speaker in *Maud* who resentfully views his inaccessible beloved as "cold, clear, cut... icily regular, splendidly null" (1.79, 82), through the Duke's curtained portrait, to the strangled Porphyria, a cluster of Tennyson and Browning's poems critique the aestheticizing and valorizing of dead women by dramatically employing a Gothic mode. While Porphyria's lover does not transform Porphyria in a work of art per se, he takes great pains to set up a tableau that reflects the shift in power from the beginning of the poem. Initially, Porphyria placed the limbs of the motionless Lover about her as she sat in front of the fire (16) and placed the speaker's head on her bare shoulder. The subsequent violent reversal of the situation, however, enables the speaker to prop Porphyria's now motionless head up on *his* shoulder. The resulting macabre tableau is meant to restore and exhibit, once and for all, the proper gender-power relationship

between the two. Now that she is dead, the speaker is able to realize his fantasy as he mentally projects Porphyria's "true" feelings:

The smiling rosy little head,
So glad it had its utmost will,
That all it scorn'd at once is fled,
And I, its love, am gained instead! (52-55)

Whether we are to understand that this has just happened, or that it is being recalled in memory, or even that the episode is entirely imagined, the speaker voyeuristically rehearses a narrative affirming the replacement of the unsatisfactory living reality of a woman with a satisfying dead unreality.

Interpretations of the grisly act so complacently announced in this poem have been quite varied since its original publication. As early as 1898 James Fotheringham's *Studies of the Mind and Art of Robert Browning* asserted that the entire event "took place only among the wild motions of a lover's brain" (90). Some later scholars have continued in that vein, most notably, David Eggenchwiler and, still later, Edward E. Kelly, both of whom make generic and interpretive claims about the poem on the grounds that the poem is not to be understood as actually "spoken," but rather that readers are exposed to "the elaborate workings of a mind" (Eggenchwiler 39). Catherine Ross suggests that the poem is actually "a tale of erotic asphyxiation" (68), and almost all suggested readings are ultimately no less lurid or implicitly Gothicizing. Nearly all interpretations see Browning's intention as the production of shock and horror in the reader, and most do connect this effect (without naming its inherently Gothic properties) to the violation of Victorian social norms. As well, this tendency in so many otherwise different

interpretations is consistent with Morrison's observation that "explicit horrors and concentrated dread" began to dominate a Gothic mode towards the mid-nineteenth century both in England and in America.

A principal reason for the variability of critical interpretations of "Porphyria's Lover" is the issue of names – the name, or title, of the poem, the names under which Browning classified it in different editions, and of course Porphyria's name. Certain changes in title and heading progressively accentuate the monologue's function as a Gothic utterance in a Gothicized domestic space. The poem first appeared as "Porphyria" (preceded by "Johannes Agricola") in the *Monthly Repository* in 1836. The two poems were printed together again in *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842) under the heading "Madhouse Cells," an ambiguous signal indeed about the supposed dramatic situation and about the symptomatic abnormality (or otherwise) of the ghastly event and its professed motives. In 1849 the poem again appeared under that heading "Madhouse Cells," but its own title was altered to "Porphyria's Lover," presumably to signify that its real interest is indeed dramatic, lying not in the crime or the victim but in the expression of an alarming kind of "love" by a certain kind of villain. By 1863, the heading "Madhouse Cells" had been dropped, dissociating the monologue from so safely restricted and aberrant a context, and it was also separated from "Johannes Agricola." It was then included in, and remained, one of the *Dramatic Romances* from 1868 onward. These successive alterations mark significant differences in how readers are being invited to experience, regard, and respond to the poem's implications. As Barry L. Popowich notes, "the reader has been resituated from looking through a cell-door at someone suffering a delusion to an ethereal perspective in a country cottage" (60). In a Gothic critical framework, this apparent

relocation of the reported incident from cell to cottage, from public asylum to private domestic space, actually aligns the two spheres on a continuum. The personal and cultural imperatives are symbolically the same, and produce and re-enact one another. In the same way that Guido should be seen as both a product and a perpetrator of patriarchal ideology, Porphyria's lover a prisoner and a warden of a domestic sphere ruled by a logic that, this poem seems to indicate, is a kind of madness – one that posits a stable masculinity as the product of absolute male dominance over the female Other.

The pathological desperation or “madness” of that mentality has of course its place in nearly all interpretations of “Porphyria's Lover”. As we have seen in Tennyson, the trope of madness in Gothicism requires careful critical footwork. Browning's strategy in the early editions was clearly to provide Victorian readers with the opportunity to dismiss the Porphyria horror story as nothing more threatening than a curious case study in abnormal psychology. The text's deeper cultural implications were always elusively present, of course, and in later editions any definite hint of so socially complacent a meaning disappeared along with the “Madhouse Cells” heading. Among pertinent discussions is Steven C. Walker's rather troubling argument that “The very madness advertised in the ‘Madhouse Cells’ title becomes a moot question: though the speaker's behavior is clearly antisocial, his motives for that behavior are not easily condemned” (70). In something of the same spirit, Mason actually claims that Browning's dramatic achievement here is to have fostered empathetic identification: “The principle of consistency helps to make Johannes Agricola and Porphyria's lover the surprisingly sympathetic figures they are” (25). Mason continues,

Porphyria's lover becomes her murderer precisely because he loves, not

because he has come to hate. [...] The distinction between the ‘circumstances’ of loving and murdering is dispelled when both are seen as the same ‘primitive color’ in the soul’s spectrum. (25)

The idea that the “distinction between the ‘circumstances’ of loving and murdering are dispelled” was precisely the objection of feminist critics of the Gothic such as Eugene Delamotte and Allison Millbank. Browning’s dramatic method and critique is focused precisely on those motives, but on their basis in a cultural rather than psychological or psychiatric malaise. Mason’s inadvertent insight represents an intriguing recognition that what passes for “normal” and “sane” in relationships between the genders is part of slippery continuum with what is viewed as pathological. The crux, and Gothic horror, of the monologue is not just that the speaker kills her, nor that the killing of women is often explained away as eccentric acts of madness, signifying nothing. More important, and highly signifying, are his reasons for killing her.

Rather than attempting to justify his action as a crime of passion or of sexual jealousy or of temporary insanity, the speaker himself invokes more normatively acceptable social ideologies regarding male/female relations. This in turn serves to reveal the otherwise obscured power dynamics at work. In other words, it is not that, as Mason would have it, the violence is rooted in “love”, but rather, that so much of what is thought of as “love” is actually a violent bid for control. Catherine Maxwell too reads the poem along these lines, stating “The lunacy Browning exposes is that his monologist’s crime can be regarded as ‘rational.’ The speaker’s act of violence thus casts its shadow on all those other less-dramatic acts of domination and appropriation that manage to pass unnoticed under the cover of rational male behavior” (3). The blurring of such “stark

contrasts” – rationality and insanity, dream and reality, calm and frenzy, deformity and purity, volition and helplessness – is one of the ways a Gothic mode functions as cultural critique. It establishes a continuum of settings, states, and behaviors that had previously been paired as binaries, and shows how these ostensibly opposing pairs are often extensions of one another. Thus, while the actions depicted in the poem are extreme, these depictions of madness, violence and domination are merely images of “sane” “domestic” “loving” relationships writ large. As we shall see next, nowhere is this Gothic blending of dream and reality, volition and helplessness more evident than in Browning’s poem “Mesmerism.”

Spectral Lovers

Browning’s eerie dramatic monologue “Mesmerism” first appeared in the same year as Tennyson’s *Maud*, was published in *Men and Women* (1855), and was later republished in *Dramatic Romances* (1863). As the title of the original collection indicates, Browning initially placed it among shorter poems focused predominantly, though not exclusively, on gendered categories and on relationships between the sexes. Perhaps more exactly a dramatic soliloquy (there is apparently no immediate listener), the text callously voices the now familiar Gothic pattern of anxieties, obsessions, and actions (real or imagined) associated with troubled masculinist subjectivity. In this variation of the situation and the self-performance, Browning finds in the cult of mesmeric power a metaphor obliquely representing the desire to control and confine the presence and behavior of an essentially spectral female Other. Significantly, no physical force is necessary in this idealized version of hegemonic masculine control, though the speaker is

made no more secure in his manhood for its absence.

“Mesmerism” has been compared to “A Lover’s Quarrel” and “By the Fireside” (De Vane 225-6) because of a shared preoccupation with mental or spiritual communion or trances. The former actually cites the capacity of “the mesmerizer Snow” to “Put the earth to sleep,” and, in imagining a lost lover’s return, the speaker claims, “I shall have her for evermore!” However, setting “Mesmerism” alongside “My Last Duchess” and “Porphyria’s Lover” highlights instead the nexus of Gothic tropes woven throughout such poems, aligning them also with the Gothic elements in *The Ring and the Book*. There is of course a particularly significant difference in this case. Whereas the speakers in *The Ring and the Book* and “Porphyria’s Lover” expose and apparently carry out the threat of direct physical violence that serves as the invisible and unspoken foundation for patriarchal social structures, and the Duke in “My Last Duchess” – though avoiding violence himself – still needs to “give commands,” the speaker of “Mesmerism” articulates instead a diabolical scheme for invading and conquering the mind of the female subject, thereby establishing mental, emotional and spiritual control, but without the use of physical violence. In other words, this monologue expresses a possibly even more sinister assertion of masculine power, one that is able telepathically to manipulate and subordinate the female subject without appearing to have coerced her at all.

Critic and Browning editor Ian Jack is representative in emphasizing the speaker’s abnormality or atypicality. He suggests that “Mesmerism” could easily “be classed with ‘Porphyria’s Lover’ and ‘Johannes Agricola’ as a third ‘Madhouse Cell’” (*Major* 160). Drawing on the “rhythm of the opening lines” (160) and the “rushing movement of the verse of the succeeding stanzas” (160), Jack concludes that “the speaker here is clearly

deranged, as Porphyria's lover and Johannes Agricola are deranged, and the conclusion is irresistible that his mesmeric powers are in fact a pure delusion" (161). Just as debates about the sanity or madness or unreliability of the speaker in "Porphyria's Lover" have shaped readers' interpretive claims, interpretations of "Mesmerism" are often divided along similar lines. However, the plausibility of this character's power to actually conjure up the woman, or the question of his sanity, are ultimately not as important as what the created dramatic voice reveals about male desire and the fantasy of control. Whether or not we are expected to believe that the fantasy is ever actualized through the speaker's psychic or spiritual powers, we have, either way, a Gothicized representation of extreme masculinist assertion of control.

Importantly, this dark desire is articulated within a Gothic configuration of domestic relationships. Indeed, in the Oxford edition of Browning's poetical works, Ian Jack actually observes, in passing, that "Mesmerism" is a "brief Gothic tale, told by a man who believes himself to possess paranormal powers" (*Works* 105). Daniel Karlin has suggested the possible influence of Edgar Allan Poe (77), and finds a "morbid intensity" in the poem, but reads the Gothic cues at the opening of "Mesmerism" as merely a "burlesque of Gothic horror" (74). The fuller implications of such brief but intriguing associations of this poem with the Gothic tradition deserve development. Thus, my analysis begins where they end, by examining "Mesmerism" as a thoroughly Gothic text that critiques the issues of gender, power, individual will, and the domestic realm in mid-Victorian England.

Like "Porphyria's Lover," "Mesmerism" has a detectable Gothic literary lineage or kinship. J.C. Austin has linked the text to Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of Seven*

Gables mainly because both texts intertwine the concept of mesmerism with that of telepathy. Ordinarily, the mesmerist and the subject are in the same room together, so that the mesmerist can use his gaze, his voice, and even his hands to influence (without touching) the subject. Yet in Hawthorne's text, as in Browning's, mesmeric power can dominate and command by summoning the subject from a distance.

Seated by his humble fireside, Maule had but to wave his hand; and, wherever the proud lady chanced to be – whether in her chamber, or entertaining her father's stately guests, or worshipping at church – whatever her place or occupation, her spirit passed from beneath her own control and bowed itself to Maule. (208-9)

While the term “spirit” may lead one to believe that only an apparition appears to the lady in Hawthorne's tale, she in fact does materialize in person, summoned on a night that was “cold and wet” (210), resulting her sickness and eventual death.⁵⁷ Likewise, the speaker in “Mesmerism” does not mesmerize a female subject that sits before him. Rather, he conjures her forth from her own ostensibly imprisoning home to appear obediently before him. Indeed, just as Browning was known for his investigations into “abnormal psychology,” critics of Hawthorne also picked up on the writer's fascination with the dark grottos of the human mind. As Richard Henry Stoddard notes in 1853, “in the region of mystery, the wilderness and caverns of the mind, [Hawthorne] is at home” (qtd. in Coale 70). Hawthorne was, like Browning, profoundly disturbed by the very concept of mesmerism – even though his artistic process mirrored it and thrilled readers with its depiction. In addition to Browning's debt to Hawthorne, Daniel Karlin has suggested that Edgar Allan Poe's “The Facts of the Case of M. Vlademar” may have had some influence on the production of the poem (77). He points out that the collection of Poe's *The Raven*

and other Poems was dedicated to Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and cites a letter that she wrote urging Robert Browning to read the story (77).

Yet, like “Porphyria’s Lover,” “Mesmerism” does not need to be seen as the sibling of such texts to be considered a legitimate offspring in the Gothic’s family tree. In typical fashion, Browning cues his readers at the outset as to the type of poem they will be reading, in this instance by filling the opening stanzas with recognizably Gothic motifs. As in previous poems, Browning employs what had now become familiar Gothic effects in order to affiliate the fictional horror of an established literary genre with an all-too-real horror in contemporary society. He does this primarily by centering the horror of the poem firmly within the gendered power dynamics that permeated mid-Victorian debates about domestic ideology, and the sanctity of individual will.

The almost formulaic Gothic atmosphere fostered in these beginning stanzas of Browning’s poem on the occulted subject is perhaps his most explicit invocation of the tradition. The setting is nocturnal, in a house being eaten by wood-worms as the “death-watch ticks” (2:8) to the sound of a howling cat drowning in a near by rain barrel. The scene is set with flickering lamps, groaning house-beams and impending footsteps ascending the garret-stairs, and completes itself with a spider descending from the rafters to find “God knows what friends!” (4:5) down below. Within this haunted house, the mesmerist has sat since “eve drew in” (5:1) and “brought / (So the speak) [his] thought / to bear on the woman away” (5:2-4). The purpose of this paranormal feat of mental concentration is to summon the absent object of his thought to appear before him. Browning’s heavily conventional use here of Gothic cliché seems almost to invite, or at least permit, reading the poem as parody. His other poem on a similar subject, the

satirical *Mr. Sludge, The Medium*, along with his known contempt for mesmerism as a practice and his public distaste for spiritualism in general, might seem to confirm that “Mesmerism” too was written with tongue firmly in cheek and a conspiratorial wink from the author.

The opening section certainly functions as a Gothic parody, but reading the remainder of the poem in the same way becomes increasingly difficult as the “plot” of the dramatic scene unfolds and becomes the uncanny double of poems such as “My Last Duchess” and “Porphyria’s Lover.” Karlin’s reading of the opening scene as an example of Gothic “burlesque” is not entirely inaccurate, but the significance is much more complex. The Gothic clichés create certain expectations, whether alarming (if the dramatic situation is taken literally) or amusing (if only a parodic jest of a popular type). Browning will proceed, however, to intermingle those expectations by revivifying the worn out Gothic scenario with a fresh sense of everyday horror. For example, the speaker’s incantation employs a phrase from the Church marriage ceremony, revealing how his desire for absolute possession of the woman is inscribed by religious ritual and sanctioned by social authority. The familiar phrase, “to have and to hold” takes on an increasingly sinister tone as it is repeated again and again, with greater and greater intensity, as a refrain throughout the next three stanzas (6:1, 7:1, 8:1, 9:1). Browning’s rooting of this monologue in an ominous domestic setting also helps to identify the relevance of a Gothic mode to actual social circumstances. As Kate Ferguson Ellis remarks, “The Gothic [...] is preoccupied with the home. But it is the failed home that appears on its pages” (preface ix). While she does not refer to them as Gothic, Melissa Valiska Gregory does note that “Of those early monologues which conjoin lyric violence

with acts of domestic abuse, especially resonant are Browning's expressions of masculine failure within the domestic sphere" ("Violence" 495). Read as such, "Mesmerism" is a representation of masculine anxieties about relational failure in which Browning figures domestic space as an attempted locus of control.

In stanza 16 the mesmerist recounts how his telepathic powers can reach and affect the woman even where she lives as someone else's possession (in "the house called hers"), transforming it in her mind into a claustrophobic crypt: "Till the house called hers, not mine, / With a growing weight / seems to suffocate / If she break not its leaden line / And escape from its close confine" (76-80). As in "Porphyria's Lover," the speaker represents her journeying to him as a flight from domestic unhappiness elsewhere. The imagery here in "Mesmerism" is specifically in the long Gothic tradition of depicting women's confinement in imprisoning sepulchral spaces. That the mesmerist manipulates the woman's perception so that the "room of her own" becomes a prison that must be fled, is indicative of masculine anxieties about the growing autonomy of women, and the need to regain some form of control within a domestic sphere that was increasingly under the purview of women, rather than men.

The spectral image of the absent female in "Mesmerism" is also a uncanny variation upon the Gothicized situation in "My Last Duchess." While the mesmerist does not literally possess a portrait of the imagined woman, his concentration begins to be rewarded with an image or semblance of her that seems both more, and less, material than the Duke's painting: "...I seemed to have and hold, / In the vacancy / 'Twixt the wall and me / From the hair-plait's chestnut-gold / To the foot in its muslin fold --" (6:1-5). The mental manifestation of the woman he has summoned up in his imagination

assumes a spectral form that “imprints” itself between the speaker and the wall of his house. The speaker emphasizes presence and possession by carefully locating this figure temporally and spatially, “then and there, / Her, from head to foot, / (8:1-2). The phrases echoes the Duke’s own spatial directive indicating his absent woman’s image as he states, “That’s my last Duchess[...] there she stands” (1, 4).

In the same way that “My Last Duchess” is an ocular poem, a poem that involves looking, seeing, perceiving and the desire for the speaker to direct the auditor to see in the same way, “Mesmerism” is a poem that expresses the fantasy surrounding the power of the male gaze. Both poems deal with a male’s imaginative construction of a “substitute” female ideal and with the consequent need to obliterate any and all aspects of the actual women that they have been previously unable to conform to that desire. In attempting to do so, they merely re-create haunting images – ghosts – of those same women. In “My Last Duchess,” the transformation of the Duchess into art and artifact is more than just the macabre literalizing of the Duke’s ideal of physical beauty. It reflects his desire for masculine control – especially of the Duchess’s will – and stems from the need to control her thoughts, feelings and cultural estimations. In “Mesmerism,” the comparable confluence of art and life occurs when the speaker continues “having and holding, till / [He] imprint[s] her fast / On the void at last / As the sun does whom he will / By the calotypist’s skill” (9:1-5). The mesmerist’s desire to “fix” the image on the void before him echoes the desires of Guido, the Duke and Porphyria’s Lover, all of whom evidently resort to a form of physical violence in order to accomplish their task. The mesmerist, however, compares his conjuring to something far less violent – a photographic image. Thus, while the Duke must depend on the careful hand of the painter Fra Pandolf to

capture the Duchess on the gallery wall, the mesmerist conjoins his skill as a verbal calotypist with the sun's indomitable will (here gendered male), to produce this spectral apparition of his mistress.

Ivan Kreilkamp's article, "'One More Picture:' Robert Browning's Optical Unconscious," traces the extended trope of photographic images in "Mesmerism" and "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came," and, in the process, inadvertently enables us to connect the poems to the Gothic in an additional surprising way. Kreilkamp's choice of quotations highlights the associations of early photographic technique with the occult. For example, in 1859 Oliver Wendell Holmes remarks on the photographic negative:

Out of this perverse and totally depraved negative, - where it might almost seem as if some magic and diabolic power had wrenched all things from their properties, where the light of the eye was darkness, and the deepest darkness was glided with the brightest glare, - is to come the true end of all this series of operations, a copy of Nature in all her sweet gradations and harmonies and contrasts. (Qtd. in Kreilkamp 433)

Holmes' Gothicizing of the photographic image (his insistence that the negative is perverse and depraved, as is the photographic process – that a magic or diabolic power had violently wrenched all things from their properties) supplies us with a sordid context for the mesmerist's assertion that he is imprinting his mistress with a calotypist's skill. Associations between the occult and photography were not uncommon in mid-Victorian England. Kreilkamp focuses on this relationship as he draws on more recent assessments of mid-Victorian photography, such as those by Jennifer Green-Lewis, who reminds us that "early photographers were trained in what were called 'the black arts'" (415) and

Siegfried Kracauer, who describes old family photographs in distinctly Gothic terms: “the image wanders ghost-like through the present, like the lady of the haunted castle....The photograph becomes a ghost” (412). In spite of the vocabulary of violence that still infuses popular discourse about photography (to shoot or capture a subject, to take a photograph) the trope of the photograph in Browning’s “Mesmerism” also obscures the implied violence at the root of this bid for masculine control. The spectacle is imprinted as if by magic, but the mesmerist’s language belies how the male gaze functions as a source of intended power. Even as the lens of the camera captures the image and fixes it on the page, the mesmerist has captured his victim in “the grasp of [his] steady stare” (7:35); her “body and soul” (8:37) [...] “In the clutch of [his] steady ken” (8:40). Without having to physically coerce her, the mesmerist gloats that he has “caught” her in his grasp, and she is unable to release herself from his clutch.

In a more direct comparison, Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote to Mary Russell Mitford comparing the “wonderful invention” of the Daguerreotype to mesmerism noting that “the mesmeric disembodiment of spirits strikes one as a degree less marvelous” (Kreilkamp, 413) than the photographic image. For Barrett Browning, photography and mesmerism, are simply inverted processes by which “spirit” and body were separated from one another. Mesmerism involved the releasing of an invisible spirit from a visible body, whereas photography involved the fixing of a visible, but spiritless, body: “It is not merely the likeness which is precious in such cases – but [...] the fact of the *very shadow of the person* lying there fixed forever!” (413). Both were a process of mystical disembodiment, distinguished only in degree. Her Gothic language, and her fascination with how a photograph “fixes” the very shadow of a person “forever” reflects

common mid-Victorian assessments of the new technology and may explain not only why Browning utilizes the comparison in his poem, but also how his use of the comparison serves to emphasize the power of a man to “fix” a woman within a permanently bounded representation. Aesthetic and relational violence mingle as the representation serves as both a sign and an enactment of control.

In both “My Last Duchess” and “Mesmerism,” the “fixed” women are forced to silently and steadily look at the men whose power keeps them in such a state. In “Mesmerism,” the speaker states that the woman who docilely floats “[...] before my countenance / answers me glance for glance” (11:55). She is a motionless image that is held in place “there” by the speaker’s gaze. Likewise, in “My Last Duchess” the Duke and the envoy spend their time reading the pictured countenance, gazing at the woman who has been reduced to a motionless image that is kept behind a curtain in the house. Feminist re-evaluations of “My Last Duchess,” such as those by Bristow, Maxwell and Hogarth, suggest that the returning gaze of the woman in the portrait, and the Duke’s obsession with attempting to control it, reveal ironically the limits of male power. However, while the Duchess’ “spot of joy” – that spot that was not elicited, and cannot be eradicated, by the Duke - mocks the Duke from beyond the grave, and haunts him as a reminder of his own inadequacy in her eyes, the woman being “commanded to advance” (11:51) in “Mesmerism” is shaped entirely in the image of the mesmerist’s fantasy. The Duchess’s “spot of joy” has its counterpart here in the “glow” that “breaks” (21:105) upon the mesmerized woman’s cheek. The aggression of the imagery in this case (a flame thrown into the woman’s face and breaking upon her cheek) bespeaks a violent assertion of will born of the mesmerist’s lack of confidence about whether or not she is,

in fact, sufficiently subject to and affected by his power. This uncertainty is partly indicated by the fact that his attempts at animating the conjured image with substance come in the form of questions: “For, there! have I drawn or no? / Life to that lip? / Do my fingers dip / In a flame which again they throw / On the cheek that breaks a-glow?” (21:101-5). Tellingly, the image then used to confirm his authority over the mesmerized woman reflects a Gothic sensibility at work:

Like the doors of a casket-shrine.
See, on either side,
Her two arms divide
Till the heart betwixt makes a sign,
“Take me for I am thine!” (23:111-15)

In language that transforms the woman’s arms into the gates that surround a corpse, the mesmerist, like the Duke, attempts to read the visual text he has created. As the half-spectral, half-corporeal woman opens her arms, the sepulchral doors reveal her heart, which, the mesmerist claims, makes a submissive “sign.” Here, the poem resembles “Porphyria’s Lover.” The void of Porphyria’s dead silence is filled with the speaker’s ventriloquizing fantasy of what he wants her to be thinking, feeling and saying. Likewise, the mesmerist’s corpse-like spectre, who we are told stands before him “without a word” (24:120), has her empty silence filled with the mesmerist’s “dream” (25:124) – one that imagines not only the woman’s obedience to his occult summoning, but, much more importantly, her new willingness to surrender herself to him. Not only does the mesmerist imagine that she has told him to “take” her, but he also fantasizes the justification for taking her - his possession of her, and her status as his “object” (13:62). Like Porphyria’s

lover's fantasy that she worships him, the mesmerist reads this necrophilic gesture as her willing surrender to him and imagines her unsolicited invitation: "Take me, for I am thine!" (23:115).

The emphasis on control of her will, mind, eye, and conduct speaks to the decidedly gendered dynamics of mesmerism and the debates that surrounded it in the 1840's and 50's, as well as the Gothic fascination with the topic. As Jerome Schneck notes, the most enduring image of mesmeric activity is an etching by Honore Daumier in which "the female subject sits in apparent passive repose before the hypnotist who gazes intently at her with his arms outstretched" (445). In both England and America, most literary representations of mesmerism involved male mesmerists exerting their influence over female subjects. Samuel Coale remarks that "the female stereotype of passivity and reception permeated the 1850s [...] it easily fit into the developing, middle-class Victorian vision of specific gender roles" (63). Several scholars have documented Barrett Browning's fascination with mesmerism and, later, with spiritualism, but only Karlin recognizes, if only in passing, the links between gender dynamics, issues of the will, and the Gothic: "This question of power – what Barrett Browning calls 'the subjection of the will,' [...] is at the heart of the Gothic dread (which is also a form of attraction) with which she regards mesmerism" (68). As her letters indicate, Barrett Browning's relationship with Harriet Martineau, and her participation in séances, reveal her attraction to such occulted activities. But her letters also indicate a sense of "horror" at the "abhorrent" thought of "the subjugation of the will and vital powers of one individual to those of another, to the extent of the apparent solution of the very identity" (Kenyon 1:219). Given the issues of individual will and domestic control that haunted Barrett

Browning because of her relationship with her father, it is not surprising that she registers horror at the thought of having her will violated. What is surprising, however, is how much correspondence in this era, both in England and America, reveals the horror that men register at the thought of having such a power.

Coale astutely points out that Hawthorne equates metaphysical and sexual violation, stating that he “abhorred what he saw as mesmerism’s violation of an individual soul” (64). In a letter to his future wife, addressing the issue of her potential submission to a mesmerist, Hawthorne states, “It seems to me that the sacredness of the individual is violated by it; there would be an intrusion into the holy of holies – and the intruder would not be thy husband!” (64). In his letter to Sophia Peabody, dated 18 October 1841, Hawthorne’s ardent belief in the validity of mesmerism is only outmatched by his fervent refusal to utilize such a power, he states that even if he possessed such a power over her, “[he] should dare not use it” (Coale 64). Hawthorne was not alone in his vehement condemnation of the use of mesmerism. Barrett Browning relates that a visitor of Harriet Martineau, Mr. Milnes, “is fully a believer...and affirms to having seen this same phenomenon in the East, but regards the whole subject with horror” (Kenyon 1:217). Barrett Browning’s choice of words suggests that the “horror” of mesmerism could be present on both sides of the gendered power dynamic that existed in most mesmeric activity. Browning’s own distaste for mesmerism is well documented, and DeVane’s assessment of Browning’s motivation for the poem has gone largely unchallenged: “‘Mesmerism’ expresses Browning’s belief in the sacredness of the individual soul; he feels that it must not be invaded” (201).

But what else was it about mesmerism that may have caused men like Hawthorne,

Milne, and Browning to particularly associate the activity with horror? After all, that word's other most familiar use is with regard to the effect of shock and terror in Gothic literature. Perhaps, like Guido's fumbling of the homosocial power structure at work, disclosed through his rather public exposure of its basis in ideology and violence, mesmerism's notorious emphasis on control over female will foregrounded an issue best left in the dark. Patriarchal control – and the more subtle forms it might take – functions most effectively when it is invisible and unspoken. Mesmerism's open emphasis on female passivity and masculine control drew attention to the gendered power dynamics that were being more generally recognized and contested during these years. This might account for the disdain that men like Browning had for the practice, but not necessarily for their sense of horror.

There is another way to read this sense of masculine horror. Perhaps it reflects an uncomfortable confrontation with the shameful secret that masculinity is dependent on and secured through female affirmation or quiescence. Acknowledging the requisite violation of the woman's will becomes horrific because it discloses the contingent imposition. The scene of mesmerism displayed the terms of a wider debate that forced to the surface the reality that if a man forces a woman to value him, he concedes his dependence on her for a sense of masculinity. While other Gothic villains resort to physical violence (or the threat of it) as a means of initiating domestic control and imposing their will on their female partners, the mesmerist exerts a psychic force upon his victim, to the same effect. As the words and actions of Browning's various Gothic men continually reveal in one way or another, they are deeply frustrated to realize that the submission they require in their female counterparts is precarious and is not being freely

performed. The feminine estimation of their worth, so crucial to their sense of private and public self, is always already haunted by its basis in direct or indirect coercion or in ideological prerogative. The shocked awareness of this contingency represents, in otherwise unstable personalities, a desperate crisis of masculinity.

Browning's emphasis on the psychology of these characters features their, exhibition of contradictory logic and self-delusion about the nature and efficacy of the control they are exercising. For example, here in "Mesmerism," the speaker's "command" for her "soul to advance" (11:51) is quickly rationalized so that she has "made escape" (11:53) as if from a prison. As with "Porphyria's Lover," the speaker must make himself believe that her free will is involved in choosing him, so that even as he revels in his power over her and in her obedience to his mental concentration, he reassures himself that her compliance has been voluntary. Far from being controlled, the woman is said to travel through rain and wind "o're broke shrubs / with a still, composed, strong mind," to be with him. This emphasis on her "still, composed, strong mind" is rather clearly a gesture attempting to contradict the prevailing notion that women were more susceptible to mesmerism than men because of their "weak-mindedness" and their "nervous affection" (Karin 68). The speaker must convince himself that she has no "care for the world behind" (18:90), but has, instead, forsaken it joyfully to be with him. And again, even as the mesmerist asserts that the woman's soul "reaches" to him (14:69), he knows that it is actually being "wound in the toils [he] weave[s]" (14:70). Thus, his rhetorical performance of a commanding masculine identity is dramatically undermined by his own admission that her increasing "joy" as she approaches (19:93) is predicated on the fact that she has "wide blind eyes" (19:94). In effect, she is in a trance, and oblivious

to his presence at all. Ultimately, then, the mesmerist's monologue reveals what we begin to see in "My Last Duchess" and "Porphyria's Lover": that only in a condition analogous to madness would a man take comfort in the glowing estimation of a living puppet or a lifeless corpse. To say this is not, however, to concede that Browning's mesmerist can after all be dismissed as insane. On the contrary, the real interest of such a representation of "psychological curiosity" lies in what its Gothic voicing of unsuppressed anxieties and fantasies shares with, and reveal about, supposedly normal assumptions about gendered power relations.

Some sense of that deeper significance in "Mesmerism" has even generated biographical speculation among Browning scholars. Daniel Karlin and Alison Chapman invite us to believe that Browning's relationship to Elizabeth was less chivalric rescuer than it was Svengalian tyrant⁵⁸. Drawing on Barrett Browning's letters to Browning and others, Karlin even asserts in rather Gothic-sounding language that "the speaker of 'Mesmerism' seems [to be] Browning's doppelganger, his dualistic, dark brother" (70). Karlin's article is useful in identifying the types of cultural dynamics that might have informed Browning's poetic sensibility in the mid-fifties, and for its implicit critique of a masculine identity that necessitates the complete domination over the female Other. Biographical interpretation of this material is perhaps less productive than locating it within a broader cultural topography of gendered social dynamics. Alison Winter draws attention to the fact that, by the time "Mesmerism" was published, "the mesmerism phenomena surrounding Britons at home and on the Continent were very different from those evoked in his poem" (240). The correspondence between Barrett Browning and Browning in 1844 and 1845 is filled with talk of mesmerism – its legitimacy, its dangers,

and its similarity to the rituals of courtship that the authors were engaged in. These letters reflect a broader cultural interest in mesmerism (and other developments in the “mental sciences” such as animal magnetism) that permeated both mid-Victorian England and America. But by 1855, the sensationalism surrounding mesmerism had died down, and the public fascination had shifted to what became known as “spiritualism.” This has led Winter to assert that “the proper context for Browning’s ‘Mesmerism,’ then, was the mid-1840s” (241), and to question the topical relevance of publishing it a decade later. Winter’s attempt to situate “Mesmerism” in the context of the mid-1840s debate about the mental sciences stems from her scholarly interest in the development of the phenomenon proper, and follows the trend of reading the poem biographically. In doing so, she assumes that the point of the poem is to address the debate on mesmerism as a psychic phenomenon. If, however, “Mesmerism” is also a poem about the instability of gender roles within mid-Victorian domestic ideology, then its publication in 1855 makes a great deal of sense.

The case of Caroline Norton is but one public indicator of the changes that were taking place in the domestic sphere. As Adam C. Roberts notes, after separating from an abusive husband, Norton found herself legally blocked from seeing her children and trapped in a system which allowed her estranged husband legal rights over her earnings (*Victorian* 130). He continues, “her vigorous campaigning led to the Infants Custody Act of 1839, which guaranteed her right of access” (130), and she continued to lobby for legal changes in the domestic sphere eventually publishing an open letter to the Queen in 1855 – the year that “Mesmerism” was published in Browning’s *Men and Women*. This is not to say that Browning was responding directly to Norton’s calls for reform, but it does

indicate that Browning's poem is published at a time in which domestic ideology, gender roles and, more specifically, the empowerment of women, were at the center of intense public debate. In England, organized public feminism burst onto the scene in the mid-1850's. By 1857 the Divorce Act was passed, and changes continued to occur, leading to the Married Woman's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882. Seen in this light, Browning's publication of the poem in 1855 is less a belated attempt to address a now passé debate about a popular psychic phenomenon than it is a pertinent commentary on the issues of masculinity, control and individual will within the domestic realm.

For example, in tracing the influence of Browning on Henry James, Gregory notes, "Dr. Sloper's increasingly ineffectual attempts to control his daughter, Catherine [...] foregrounds the uncertain position of the bourgeois paterfamilias expected to control his household without exhibiting a vulgar display of force" (Melodrama 151). Gregory's comment is a reminder of the apparent double bind in which men found themselves in mid to late Victorian England. If they did not control their household, especially its female members, they were seen as effeminate and ineffectual, but if they used force to maintain control they were considered vulgar and monstrous. Browning has represented almost every possible combination of situation and result under these configurations of masculinity: coarse men, like Porphyria's lover, who compensate for their lack of relational control through violence; refined men, like the Duke, who would never stoop to soil their hands with the deed but still "gave commands" so that "all smiles stopped"; apparently successful men, like the mesmerist, who claim to have mastered a technique that produces absolute compliance in his female victim without ever having to employ pressure; and desperate men, like Guido, who is punished both for failing to maintain

control of his household and for attempting to violently reassert his authority. What is so fascinating is that it makes no difference if the men represented are “successful” or not. All of them are haunted, maddened and transformed into various grotesqueries of masculine identity by the process itself. Each is a dramatic study in the psychology of men attempting to negotiate the social configurations of masculinity.

Each of Browning’s villains also reveals that his negotiation with those larger social forces is a particularly Gothic experience. As Eugenia C. Delamotte reminds us,

[...] the Gothic vision has from the beginning been focused steadily on social relations and social institutions and that its simultaneous focus on the most private demons of the psyche can never be separated from this persistent preoccupation with the social realities from which those demons always, in some measure, take their shape. (Preface vi)

Browning’s engagement with what his contemporaries called “psychological poetry,” his individual studies in abnormal psychology, and, more specifically, his recurrent depictions of “male manipulators bent on controlling and possessing a woman upon whose visual image the speaker emphasizes” (Kreilkamp 418) illustrate how the individual mind can be seen as a as a microcosm of larger social phenomena. Thus, Browning’s interest in “the psychology of a masculine need to hold fast a woman in a posture of devotion or submission” (419) extends beyond the exploration of an aberrant individual’s mind, and becomes an indictment of the society that helped to produce it. These critiques never excuse the villains or their terrifying actions – one never finishes reading “My Last Duchess” or “Porphyria’s Lover” feeling that the men are just as victimized as the women they dispose of. And yet the brilliance of these monologues, as

with the Guido sections of *The Ring and the Book*, is in the ability of Browning to focus the reader on the horrific acts of these men, and reveal by dramatic indirection, in the most subtle ways, something of the “rationale” behind such acts, and in doing so, point beyond the extreme case at hand to the more pervasive, mundane, and thus more insidious, rationale of power relations between genders. The fact that men are subject to specific sets of cultural expectations does not make them any less innocent when they crack under those social pressures, but what Browning’s monologues display so effectively is the uncanny resemblance between those codes of masculinity and a type of madness. The form of the dramatic monologue allows readers to hear the terrors of masculine interiority as it struggles – often violently – under the weight of particular social codes. As Melissa Valiska Gregory notes, “Browning at once intervenes in a Victorian debate about domestic violence (a debate which struck at the heart of nineteenth-century domestic ideology and heterosexual norms), and, moreover, implicitly argues that this problem is best explored through poetic representation” (“Violence” 492). The fact that “Browning’s highly transgressive explorations of domestic brutality agitated his Victorian readers, who felt violated at having been lured into contact with sexually transgressive speakers who violated bourgeois norms of behavior” (497) provides some indication of the effectiveness of this implicit critique.

Afterword: Looking Forward

This dissertation has necessarily confined itself to illustrating and interpreting the virtually unrecognized modal operation of Gothicism in major examples of Tennyson's and Browning's dramatic verse, and to arguing for its significance as the oblique representation of Victorian crises in masculine subjectivity. It has attempted to show, by way of these limited but significant examples, how combining the two major contexts of this study – Victorian dramatic verse and the Gothic – produces significant contributions to scholarly understanding in both fields of inquiry. Examining several dramatic poems by Tennyson and Browning through a Gothic lens has broadened the field of Victorian Gothicism beyond the confines of the novel and the ghost story to include poetry, even as the inclusion of those texts has initiated a re-evaluation of how and where the Gothic operates.

For example, in tracing Tennyson's use of Gothic settings, themes and situations in *Maud*, this study has demonstrated how the Laureate utilized a Gothic mode as a means of dramatically voicing the horror and madness experienced by men who struggled to adapt to the shifting codes of Victorian masculinity. In doing so it shifts the focus of studies such as Alison Milbank's *Daughter's of the House: Modes of the Gothic in Victorian Fiction* which astutely recognizes how the plight, and eventual escape, of the female heroine in the Radcliffean Gothic reveals the patriarchal order as "malignant and in need of replacement" (11). This study has posited a similar premise about how the Gothic can function as critique of and challenge to the patriarchal order though I have sought to complicate the indictment of patriarchal social structures by emphasizing the

ideological and at times physical violence those structures and systems enact on men. The dramatic form, even as it emphasizes the horrific nature of the speakers' actions by depicting them through a Gothic mode, enables readers to explore and understand the mental and emotional turmoil produced by the conflicting demands of patriarchal authority.

My project has also attempted to identify potential lacunae in both fields. Victorian verse is rarely mentioned in terms of its use of a Gothic mode, let alone its contribution to literary Gothicism. Not only do these poems help to bridge the apparent gap between the Gothic novels that are often considered to end by 1820 and the neo-Gothic texts of the *fin de siècle*, but their dramatic form provides revealing insight into the thoughts, motivations, and processes of male Gothic protagonists. Previous Gothic novels and plays provide the Gothic with the actions of maddened lovers and violent men, but the monologues of Tennyson and Browning offer glimpses into the often confused and contradictory interiority of such characters. These insights reveal a critique of hegemonic masculinity and indict the social structures that establish and maintain homosocial authority while simultaneously emphasizing the role of individual agency and personal struggle in the submission to, and enforcement of, these structures.

One question that arises for future inquiry is, of course, whether these same motifs and thematic bearings can be demonstrated in other dramatic works by these poets. There is at least some indication that the answer is yes. Because I have devoted less attention here to Tennyson than to Browning, an especially appropriate example to mention here is a text that exemplifies the dark and persistent undercurrent in the Laureate's canon: *The Lover's Tale*. *The Lover's Tale* is often considered a poem

exemplifying a noble and self-sacrificial love, yet such readings seem to ignore the Gothic aspects of the poem including an incestuous love interest, caverns of gloom, an obsession with death, hallucinatory visions that conflate the corpse of a funeral procession with the bride in a wedding party, a man who dashes his family to their death from a bridge before committing suicide, a beautiful woman, being buried alive, and a bizarre post-mortem midnight encounter from her obsessed and jilted admirer, step-brother and cousin, whose necrophilic visit brings her back to life. It also features that common Tennysonian figure of a young man whose unrequited love leads him to despair and isolation, but here, as in several Gothic novels, he wanders about in a half fantasized, half real wasteland eventually becoming a skeleton in a vile, rotting hostel, “Raving of dead men’s dust and beating hearts” (3.139). These are only some of the ways that a Gothic mode manifests itself in the poem, but they sufficiently illustrate a pervasive yet barely noticed use of Gothic elements in this early dramatic exploration of threatened masculinity.

Future analysis of *The Lover’s Tale* is important for several reasons. For example, recognizing the Gothic elements in *The Lover’s Tale* diminishes the perception that Tennyson’s engagement with the Gothic mode was a singular anomaly in writing *Maud*. Tennyson’s pre-occupation with *The Lover’s Tale* nearly spans his entire poetic career. He reminds his readers in an explanatory note that the majority of the poem was written in his nineteenth year, which would put composition at 1828. He was preparing to include it in his 1832 collection but, against the fervent pleadings of Hallam, decided to withdraw the poem on the grounds that it was “too full of faults” in spite of his confidence that the poem “might conduce towards making me popular” (qtd. in Ricks 326). Given its

similarity to the later and relatively unpopular *Maud*, perhaps Tennyson's hesitation was well founded. A few copies were circulated in 1833, but it was not until decades later, when the pirated copies of R.H. Shepherd gained some popularity that Tennyson felt the need to publish a version that limited whatever faults there were in the poem to his own. He joined the first three sections of the poem to "The Golden Supper," which had been published separately in 1869, and published them as a whole in 1879. *The Lover's Tale*, then, in its various manifestations, both inaugurates and sustains a series of experimentations with dramatic verse and a Gothic mode that explore men at their emotional and psychological limit. Tennyson began work on *The Lover's Tale* in 1828, he creates a similar, if slightly more modern, scenario in "Locksley Hall," written in 1835 and published in 1842. The exploration of masculine subjectivity in a Gothic mode continues in *Maud* (1855), "The Golden Supper" (1868) and the final version of *The Lover's Tale* in 1879. In other words, Tennyson worked on, and thought about, *The Lover's Tale* for most of his poetic life. This trajectory establishes the extent to which this subject matter, its Gothicized content, and its dramatic expression remained of continuous significant interest to Tennyson. *The Lover's Tale* also provides an important compliment to *Maud* for the ways that it is both similar to and different from the response to threatened masculinity as depicted in that poem.

Examining some of the ways that contemporary critics (Tucker, Day, Fontana) have identified Gothic elements in *The Lover's Tale* simultaneously confirms the extent to which Tennyson utilized the Gothic mode and foregrounds the critical disparaging of the Gothic even when it is recognized in such poems. Most importantly, however, is how radically interpretive claims shift by acknowledging the Gothic elements in the poem.

Reading *The Lover's Tale* through a Gothic lens reveals that what is often interpreted as Julian's last selfless act, is actually a final bid for control over Camilla by making her an object to be exchanged between men in an effort to re-establish his shattered illusion of patriarchal authority.

Looking beyond Tennyson and Browning, I began to consider Oscar Wilde's narrative lyric "The Harlot's House." In this poem, Wilde uses a Gothic mode in representing a series of female forms as "strange mechanical grotesques" (7), "ghostly dancers" (10), "wire-pulled automatons, / Slim silhouetted skeletons" (13,14), "phantom lover[s]" (20), even describing one as a "horrible marionette" (22) that only exists "like a living thing" (24). While the speaker of the lyric is male, the force of the social critique resides in the depiction of the harlots as dehumanized things that are subject to the control of social forces larger than themselves. Straddling Gothic superstition (ghosts, skeletons, phantoms) and industrial tyranny (mechanical grotesques, wire-pulled automatons, clockwork puppet), the images work in tandem to emphasize the type of living death experienced by the female "shadows" of the poem. In other words, instead of dramatically Gothicizing the male speakers in a critique of patriarchy, Wilde uses lyric expressiveness and Gothicizes the female subjects to achieve similar ends.

Space and critical focus have necessitated limiting my analysis to the specifically gendered dramatic utterances and responses of men, but certainly if there are perverse generic crossings, it might be fruitful to look for possibilities in gender "crossings" as well. Alison Milbank notes that the "'revelation' of [gendered] power relations is certainly present in the Gothic novel, but it takes different forms depending upon the choice of a male or female protagonist from whose viewpoint events are interpreted" (8).

Having established a critical framework that both recognizes and analyses male authors' use of a Gothic mode to dramatically voice maddened or violent masculinity, a possibility for future study includes investigating how Milbank's emphasis on gender and point-of-view applies to the ways a Gothic mode operates in Victorian poetry more generally. For example, are their dramatic monologues by female writers that utilize a Gothic mode to investigate some aspect of feminine interiority? What elements from the Gothic do they draw upon and are the poems used as a form of broader social critique, as is the case with Tennyson and Browning?

Susan Conley has identified at least one possibility in her article "Burying the Medusa: Romantic Bloodlines in Christina Rossetti's Gothic Epistle" (2002). Conley's article argues that Rossetti's "The Convent Threshold," like *Maud*, is best understood when its generic hybridity is taken into account. She sees the poem as a mixture of dramatic monologue, and "an heroic epistle mediated by Gothic romance" (98). In tracing the effects of the "visceral Gothic landscape" (101) and the "Gothic trope...of 'live burial'" (99) Conley notes how "Rossetti's heroine occupies the 'threshold' of a space marginal to Victorian society...which enables a cultural critique that extends not only to social formations but also to literary discourse" (98). Whereas Tennyson and Browning provide social critique by dramatically voicing the effects of liminal, or unfixed, gender norms in terms of failing and frail masculine interiors, Rossetti utilizes a similar form and a Gothic mode in order to demonstrate how her female speaker recuperates liminality as a method of empowerment.

My own study is a contribution, then, to a relatively confined but significant reevaluation of Victorian poetry, one which opens up an array of seemingly endless

gender and genre combinations in Victorian Gothic verse. The complexity of the possible combinations is perhaps best exemplified by U.C. Knoepfmacher's "Projection and the Female Other: Romanticism, Browning and the Victorian Dramatic Monologue."

Knoepfmacher takes as his central poem what he refers to as "Browning's 1864 monodrama 'James Lee's Wife'" (100). Knoepfmacher does not recognize a Gothic mode in the poem, he places it alongside "My Last Duchess" and "Porphyria's Lover" as an example of a woman who

has become obliterated in James Lee's mind and hence has become more radically excluded than the extinguished Porphyria and the Last Duchess whose outward forms are at least remembered by the male minds who drained their vitality. (101)

Yet here, instead of "ironiz[ing] the act of projection by which a devouring male ego reduces that Female Other into nothingness" (103) Browning attempts to give dramatic voice to the feminine mind. To be sure, any semblance of a Gothic mode is relegated to the last stanza in which James Lee's wife fantasizes about her own image haunting her distant husband's mind so much so, that he fades into "a thing like [her]" (2.368). It takes its place, however next to Tennyson's "Mariana" as an example of Gothicized poetic explorations into the female mind by male poets.

In the course of this study, I was drawn to a website for Gothic literary studies that produced a list: "The Gothic of Non-Gothic Writers in the Nineteenth Century." It was a short, but insightful bibliography of articles and book chapters that identify various authors not normally considered Gothic but having worked at least occasionally in what I would call a Gothic mode. Some obvious choices are on the list, such as Rider Haggard,

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Christina Rossetti, but there is also scholarship on the unlikely choices of George Eliot, Felicia Hemans and Matthew Arnold. This scholarship may help answer some of the emerging questions I mention above. In any case, these articles, however few, confirm that the intersecting fields of the Gothic, gender and Victorian poetry are a vibrant new area of scholarship, and that the investigation into this area has only just begun.

Endnotes

¹ See: William C. Holbrook “The Adjective *Gothique* in the Eighteenth Century” *Modern Language Notes* 56 (1941): 498-503. Alfred Longueil “The Word ‘Gothic’ in Eighteenth-Century Criticism” *Modern Language Notes* 38 (1923): 453-60, and Mark Madoff “The Useful Myth of Gothic Ancestry” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 9 (1979): 337-50.

² Unlike Richter, Botting recognizes the intersections between poetry and the Gothic mode, but, like Punter and Gamer, limits this recognition to poets within the Romantic era.

³ For further explorations into how this dynamic intersected with issues of Victorian Literature see James Eli Adams *Dandies and Desert Saints*, Herbert Sussman, and Donald E. Hall, *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age and Fixing Patriarchy: Feminism and Mid-Victorian Male Novelists*.

⁴ See Richter for a table of dates and genres (140).

⁵ Significantly, Richter notes that, “the neo-Gothic was the most ‘serious’ version of romance in the 1890s, engaging challenging intellectual and moral themes rather than serving as mere escape literature” (141). This seriousness is one of the reasons that the bulk of the scholarship on the Victorian Gothic has been attracted primarily to examining the complexities of the fin de siècle.

⁶ Punter first notes the shift in the term’s deployment. During the 1760s the notion of the Gothic as archaic, barbarous, un-civilized was re-deployed against its usual associations of disparagement and co-opted into a nationalistic rhetoric that championed an ancient barbarism that “possessed a fire, a vigor, a sense of grandeur which was sorely needed in English culture” (6). The crucial text in this regard was Bishop Hurd’s *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762), in which he states,

The greatest geniuses of our own and foreign countries, such as Ariosto and Tasso in Italy, and Spenser and Milton in England, were seduced by these barbarities of their forefathers; were even charmed by the Gothic Romances. Was this caprice and absurdity in them? Or, may there not be something in the Gothic Romance peculiarly suited to the views of a genius, and to the ends of poetry? (qtd. in Punter 7)

These “forefathers” are never fully identified by Hurd, but Punter lists four major areas of literature that regain prominence under the banner of this rhetoric: “the truly ancient British heritage insofar as any of it was known in the eighteenth century” (7) (Thomas Gray’s knowledge of old Welsh poetry, or Thomas Percy’s 1770 translation of P.H. Mallet’s *Northern Antiquities* for example), the revival of the ballads (spurred on by Percy’s 1765 collection, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*), medieval poetry (reinvigorated by Thomas Tyrwhitt’s 1775-78 edition of Chaucer’s works), and lastly,

“the major work of Spenser and of the Elizabethans” (7). Apart from the ghosts that migrate from the ballads to the Gothic novel proper, and the various plots and characters that were lifted from both, Jacobean and Elizabethan drama, this aspect of the poetic history of the Gothic only serves to reveal the multi-valianced way the term was deployed throughout the eighteenth century for both conservative and radical ends.

⁷ Significantly she references Hurd, Addison and Gildon – all of whom discuss the term as it applies in poetry.

⁸ McIntyre quotes Lee: “[Gothic novels are] romances which are the last puny and grotesque descendents of the great stock of Italian tragedies, born of the first terror-stricken meeting of the England of Elizabeth with the Italy of the late Renaissance.” Significantly, in further linking Elizabethan plays to Gothic novels, Lee also recognizes what Edward Said would later call, England’s orientализing of Italy: “These frightful [villains] of the ‘White Devil’ and of the ‘Duchess of Malfy’ [sic] [...] are mere fantastic horrors, as false as the Counts Udolpho, the Spalartos, the Zastrozzis, and all their grotesquely ghastly pseudo-Italian brethren of eighty years ago” (7)

⁹ In addition to plot similarities, McIntyre’s article details how some props (such as the waxen figures posing as corpses) were simply lifted from plays such as *The Duchess of Malfi* and inserted into works like *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Paul Lewis attempts to revive critical interest in McIntyre’s article by citing her as the original source for his comparison of *The Atheist’s Tragedy* to *The Castle of Otranto* in a 1978 article in *Notes and Queries*. In spite of this attempt, his article simply joined hers in its obscurity.

¹⁰ The play popularity in Australia through the performances of Emma Waller (Wadsworth 70). James Stark introduced the play to the United States on August 24, 1857 at the American theatre in San Francisco (71), though Waller is responsible for the play’s enduring popularity in America.

¹² As Christopher Parker notes, “Not until the 1850s [...] did the ‘Woman Question’ become widely discussed and then generally led to a wider consideration of gender roles” (2). Likewise Davidoff and Hall remark that in this era, masculinity and femininity “were constantly being tested, challenged, and reworked both in imagination and in the encounters of daily life” (*Family Fortunes* 430).

¹³ The scenes that it was used for and the elements that were employed are significantly Gothic in setting and in tone: monodrama was “employed in particular scenes in regular opera. The grave digging scene in Beethoven’s *Fidelio* is the classic instance, but there is also the dream in his *Egmont* music, and the incantation scene in Weber’s *Der Freischütz*.” (Culler 28)

¹⁴ In commenting on the similarities between these expressive forms and the Gothic, Steven Cox notes that all three share an extremism that attempts to “embody exactly those features of the psyche, the social order, or the cosmos that are least susceptible to representation and least liable to be controlled and assimilated” (7). Masculinity is one such feature. Even femininity can be represented as “lack,” but masculinity remains the invisible standard of the system itself.

¹⁵ Though for the Gothic novel, the accusation was the mixture, or wholesale importing of genres and writing styles from Germany.

¹⁶ Yet, as Williams, Gamer, Punter and others rightly point out, both Wordsworth and Coleridge (and most of the other major Romantic poets) employed the Gothic mode to varying degrees in their own verse.

¹⁷ The sculptor’s health diminishes as the statue is completed, and when it is complete, and comes to life, the artist dies of shock. It is as if his life drains away in proportion to how much hers grows. The sculptor’s health diminishes as the statue is completed, and when it is complete, and comes to life, the artist dies of shock. It is as if his life drains away in proportion to how much hers grows. This, almost vampiric, relationship between the artist and his sculpture is cleverly reversed by Oscar Wilde in his foray into the Gothic mode, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

Catherine Maxwell reads most of what I refer to as Browning’s Gothic dramatic monologues as a variation on Ovid’s myth, pointing out that Browning employs the myth in order to show how such a plan (to convert women into “artifacts” that reflect the worth of the owner) goes askew.

²⁰ Shatto is referring to Tennyson’s own account of the madhouse scene: “The whole of the stanzas where he is mad in Bedlam, from ‘Dead, long dead’ to ‘Deeper, ever so little deeper,’ were written in twenty minutes” (qtd. in Shatto 209).

²¹ For example, “Isobel Armstrong has argued that Browning uses the traditional notion of the knight’s quest to register a psychological violence that is ‘created by a world of masculine values, of linear progress, of the goal which ‘proves’ identity.” (Poetry 316)

²² Richter, himself, utilizes a Marxist critique in his analysis of the Gothic. His admonition is not “that the gothic did not perform significant cultural work [but rather that] we just need to be careful about what sort of work it was doing” (67).

²³ For an extensive annotated bibliography of Tennyson criticism, including most of the early reviews, see Glanville. For a limited collection of reviews spanning 1831-91, see Jump.

²⁴ For example, John Forester's 1855 review in "The Literary Examiner" affirmed the lack of a "unified narrative" and saw Tennyson's monodrama as a "series of highly finished lyrics that leads the reader through a succession of moods" (qtd. in Glanville 96).

²⁵ As well, Hallam Tennyson's *Memoir* (1897) records some of his father's thoughts on this principle in general: "in a certain way, no doubt, poets and novelists, however dramatic they are, give themselves in their work" but that "the mistake people make is that they think the poet's poems are a kind of 'catalogue raisonne' of his very own self, and all of the facts of his own life, not seeing that they often only express a poetic instinct, or judgment on characters real or imagined, and on the facts of life real or imagined" (Vol I. 402).

²⁶ John D. Jump describes the depth to which the English public identified with the speaker in *In Memoriam*. He relates an anecdote about a message Tennyson received from the Duke of Argyll which informed the poet of the extent to which the Queen, in the early months of her widowhood, found comfort in the poem...even to the extent of replacing "widow" for "widower" and "her" for "his" in the lines of "Tears of a Widower" (8). This type of identificatory practice with the speaker in *Maud* was part of Bagehot's fear.

²⁷ Another telling example of this trend is W. David Shaw's excellent book, *Tennyson's Style*. Shaw not only sees *Maud* as "fragmented and hallucinatory" (168) and a "virtuoso medley of hysteria and catharsis" (169) but also states that "it is not enough to speak of merely of Tennyson's wildness or ferocity; it is rather a matter of his sheer terror in the poem" (189). Shaw's point is autobiographical, and the terror he references is Tennyson's own terror about madness and suicide. But he also identifies the "sheer horror" of 1.919, 922 (184) and the disturbing imagery of "corpse's 'blossom[in] in purple and red' (1.923)" (184). Simply put, he identifies some of the most Gothic imagery in the poem but does not make a connection to the Gothic's aesthetic sensibility.

²⁸ While Irene Beesmyer has noted the spatial displacement in *Maud* she does not see this as a particularly "Gothic" problem.

²⁹ While a large portion of Gothic studies is colored by and interwoven with psychoanalytic theory, this dissertation is more interested in pursuing the literary manifestations of the Gothic in Tennyson's dramatic poems. As well, this project is focused on literary depictions of men who are framed in monstrous terms, rather than texts that emphasize the monstrousness of women.

³⁰ This idea is developed further in Irene Beesmyer's article. Beesmyer quotes Pocock and concludes that "the inability to tie oneself to land could produce the frenzy, degeneracy and ultimate irrationality demonstrated so poignantly in *Maud*'s speaker" (174).

³¹ For a detailed analysis of the term's usage see Longueil and Holbrook.

³² Tucker notes that the words “The fault was mine” “repeat what the brother has said, yet obviously they tell the hero’s truth too” (414).

³³ The notion of the Victorian emphasis on self-mastery is widespread, but is handled most deftly in Sussman and Adams.

³⁴ The terminology used here comes from Abraham and Torok’s chapter, “The Lost Object – Me: Notes on Endocryptic Identification” found in *The Shell and the Kernel*.

³⁵ For an argument that emphasizes the instability of the speaker and its effects on interpretive claims about *Maud* see Marilyn J. Kurata,

³⁶ Locke was contravening Sir Robert Filmer’s defense of absolute monarchy which Filmer saw as being rooted in a type of primal paternal authority. Norman O. Brown’s brief comparison of these two figures is relevant here, because Filmer’s and Locke’s theories represent precisely the social shift represented in *Maud*. Filmer rooted social organization in the laws of primogeniture, whereas Locke espoused the equality of men by nature. In other words, for Filmer, the foundation for social organization was limited status passed on through paternal authority, whereas for Locke, it was universal status established through fraternal bonds. Locke’s rather Gothic invocation of the “domineering phantom” of paternal authority that seems to linger about in spite of the new codes built upon fraternal bonds finds its dramatic articulation in *Maud* in both the individual and social realms.

³⁷ Bossche also remarks on how the speaker “associates Maud with the chivalric order both because she has been betrothed to him from birth and because she sings the ‘chivalrous battle-song’ that first induces his desire for a heroic leader in order to dispense with the ‘man I am’ (1.383,396-97)” (77).

³⁸ The invocation calls to mind Frank Sayers monodrama *Oswald* in which a Gothic Chieftain feels that his own sense of manhood is threatened because he did not die on a field of battle.

³⁹ James states : *The Ring and the Book* is so vast and so essentially a gothic structure, spreading and soaring and branching at such a rate, covering such ground, putting forth such pinnacles and towers and brave excrescences, planting its transepts and chapels and porticos, its clustered hugeness or inordinate muchness, that with any first approach we but walk vaguely and slowly, rather bewilderedly, round and round it, wondering at what point we had best attempt such entrance as will save our steps and light our uncertainty, most enable us to reach our personal chair, our indicated chapel or shrine, whence within. (Gard 571)

⁴⁰ Though different in approach and focus, studies by Williams, Smith, Brinks, Heiland, and Botting all concur with the notion that the Gothic exposes masculinity as a construct haunted by the denial of its own ruptures and lack.

⁴¹ Significantly, the reviewer notes that that Browning's dramatic depiction of Guido has what "is not found in the exaggerated villains of the novelists" (323) – namely, something to admire in spite of "all his degradation" (323).

⁴² This assessment may seem to contradict John Tosh's influential study *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain* which states that "patriarchal villains are in short supply" (6). Tosh, however, recognizes that this is a result of the methodological approach chosen for his study: "the overall effect is to foreground the intimate father at the expense of the tyrannical father" (6).

⁴³ Browning's poem is based two sources. The first is what Browning referred to as the "old yellow book" – a collection of seventeenth-century pamphlets and manuscripts concerning the case that had been bound together which he providentially discovered while in Italy, and a process he describes in Book I of *The Ring and the Book*. The second (often referred to as the "Secondary Source") was an Italian manuscript titled, "The Execution by Beheading of the Wife-Killer Guido Franceschini" (1698). Five other pamphlets describing the case have since been found, and while Browning would not have had access to (or knowledge of) these documents, they speak to the public fascination with the case.

⁴⁴ Examples of pamphlet titles include *Strange and Lamentable News from Dullidg-Wells* (1678), *The Unnatural father* (1621) and *Two Most Unnatural and Bloodie Murthers* (1605). Likewise two popular ballads were titled "The Bloody-Minded Husband" (1690) and "The Inhuman Butcher" (1697).

⁴⁵ This, of course, does not preclude the other reasons for the form's deployment. Writers of such plays also made them to feed an insatiable public hunger for gossip, spectacle and morbid subjects.

⁴⁶ James Whale's 1931 film *Frankenstein* posits that the creature is violent and destructive because Dr. Frankenstein's bumbling assistant dropped the healthy brain he was supposed to retrieve, and instead brings back a criminal – "abnormal" brain.

⁴⁷ While Judith Halberstam uses this term in her 1995 text, *Skin Show: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*, I am employing the term in a somewhat different manner. While she is interested in separating the "stories of mad monks, haunted castles, and wicked foreigners" (3) that permeated the later eighteenth century from the "nineteenth-century Gothic tales of monsters and vampires" (3), I am offering a link between them – a cultural moment in which the division between man and monster was particularly permeable. As well, while her technological trope is invested in "a particularly modern emphasis upon the horror of particular kinds of bodies" (3), I am

identifying ideological mechanisms that function to produce particular types of terror both *in* and *through* masculinity as a social construct.

⁴⁸ In the midst of the debate surrounding “the precedent for putting wives to death, / Or letting wives live, sinful as they seem” (1:219-20), one of the voices shouts to “Quote the code / Of Romulus and Rome!” (1:222-23). Romulus and Remus were the savage twin brothers who “founded” Rome, and who were said to have been nursed by a she-wolf.

⁴⁹ Browning has altered this fact. *The Old Yellow Book* informs us that Guido was, in fact, the third son. The fact that his two older brothers were priests and unable to produce an heir for the continuance of the family line still places the historic Guido in the “role” of the eldest male.

⁵⁰ See: Melissa Valiska Gregory, “Robert Browning and the Lure of the Violent Lyric Voice: Domestic Violence and the Dramatic Monologue” (2000), and Joseph Bristow, *Robert Browning* (1991) especially 64-66.

⁵¹ The term is taken from *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, by Robert Louis Stevenson, p 76.

⁵² Ian Jack notes that “it is possible that the Duke mentions that the artist was a religious to rebut any suspicion that he was jealous. On the other hand, as J.B. Bullen has pointed out to us, a book reviewed by Browning in July 1842 contains the following observation: ‘It is not undeserving of remark that this [entering a religious order] was not an uncommon mode of escaping punishment for love offenses in that age. Alessandro Pandolfo, threatened on account of his passion for Lanora di Toledo de’ Medici, turned capuchin’” (186).

⁵³ See *Gothic Studies* 8.1 (May 2006). The entire issue is dedicated to the complex and varying relationship of Italy to the Gothic. While recent scholars have sought to examine the Gothic’s relationship to Italy in more historicist terms (Miles, Watt), Massimiliano Demata’s quote from the introductory essay is representative of how Italy functioned within and shaped Gothic novels: “Italy was represented as a place of violence and passion, ruled by a feudal and despotic nobility and under the influence of a degenerate Catholic clergy; its landscapes were pictured with castles, churches and ruins whose labyrinthine and claustrophobic architecture was the [Gothic] novels’ perfect physical and psychological setting” (1).

⁵⁴ As Mason summarizes, “‘Extracts form Gosschen’s Diary’ purports to be the transcript of the MS memoir of a German priest called to the death-cell of a young man condemned for the murder of his mistress” (255). The often quoted passage in relation to Browning is as follows:

Do you think there was no pleasure in murdering her? I grasped her by that radiant, that golden hair, I bared those snow-white breasts, - I dragged her

sweet body towards me, and, as God is my witness, I stabbed, and stabbed her with this dagger, forty times, through and through her heart. She never so much as gave one shriek, for she was dead in a moment, - but she would not have shrieked had she endured pang after pang, for she saw my face of wrath turned upon her, - and she knew that my wrath was just, and that I did right to murder her who would have forsaken her lover in his insanity.

I laid her down upon a bank of flowers, - that were soon stained with her blood. I saw the dim blue eyes beneath the half-closed lids, - that face so changeful in its living beauty was now fixed as ice, and the balmy breath came from her sweet lips no more. My joy, my happiness, was perfect. (*Blackwood's Magazine*, 3, 1818, 596-8.)

Mason and Morrison's work details many of the similarities between Wilson's text and Browning's poem, yet neither note the similarity between "Extracts" and Browning's *The Ring and the Book* – namely the relentless stabbing of the female victim.

⁵⁵ While Both Morrison and Wilson make the connection between Wilson's Gothic tale and Browning's poem explicit, neither one takes the next step – i.e. neither one calls "Porphyria's Lover" a Gothic poem. As well, neither scholar suggests that the poem's lineage in Gothic writing informs any interpretive claims on the text. Nor do they suggest that Browning's poetic experiments in the Gothic mode would have any impact on how the Gothic is viewed in general, and more specifically, how it manifested in mid-century Victorian England.

⁵⁶ In the same article, Melchiori compares Porphyria to Pompilia noting that they "both infringed the class barriers, and they both defied the rules of accepted sexual morality" and that "it is the double offense against the sexual and social codes which makes these two women the predestined victims of the undoubtedly nasty characters into whose hands they fall" (1).

⁵⁷ Note also the similarities to "Porphyria's Lover": the woman is "proud" and might be entertaining "stately" guests, like the gathering that Porphyria leaves, indicating that issues of class were at stake; both women are summoned during a stormy night resulting, albeit through different means, in their death, and Hawthorne's mentioning the possibility of Alice leaving in the middle of worshipping at church to bow herself to Maule finds its corollary in the speaker's fantasy that Porphyria "worships" him.

⁵⁸ Nina Auerbach makes similar biographical claims for Browning's tyranny in her reading of *The Ring and the Book*. See "Browning's Last Word."

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