Chapter – 5

‘THE SPECTRE IN THE MIRROR’

A gilded mirror filled up the space between two windows, curtained amply with blue damask. In this mirror I saw myself laid, not in bed, but on a sofa. I looked spectral; my eyes larger and more hollow, my hair darker than was natural, by contrast with my thin and ashen face. It was obvious, not only from the furniture but from the position of windows, doors, and fireplace, that this was an unknown room in an unknown house.

(V.216)

I

Finding oneself in strange surroundings and looking at the mirror to see a face other than one’s own are experiences that often haunt the heroines in women’s gothic fiction. After attending a confession in the Catholic Church in Villette, Lucy Snowe is quite literally blown away by storm and rain and loses consciousness on the streets. She wakes up to an alien experience in a strange environment. Facing a mirror, she sees the spectral image of self. As she begins to recognize the objects in the room as pieces of furniture and knick-knacks from her godmother’s house in Bretton, Lucy becomes increasingly skeptical about her own identity and sanity. The haunting of the gothic heroine by her spectral Other plays upon the recurrent motif of the ‘double’ – a dreadful notion of the collapse of wholesome identity and the breakdown of conventional notions of a unitary self. Two kinds of fears, largely paradoxical by nature, haunt the gothic heroine: the fear of an alienating separateness from the rest of the world and the fear of unity with some unknown Other. As the dividing line between the self and the world has had a special relevance to the psychology and social condition of women, this interpretation of the psychosomatic tenets of Gothicism provides an explanation of the appeal the genre has had for women writers and readers.
The concept of doubling or multiplicity is literally realized in the gothic, where self transforms into selves. In the words of Todorov, “The multiplication of personality, taken literally, is an immediate consequence of the possible transition between matter and mind: we are several persons mentally, we become so physically” (Todorov 116). The limit between subject and object is effaced, as things slide into one another in a metonymical action of replacement.

All these revolve around the difficulties of perception and cognition, the question of vision and the control of the eye/ I of the subject. The increasingly problematic differentiation in the gothic between the ‘I’ and the ‘not-I’ is originated in the ambiguities of vision. ‘Paraxis’ is the term used by Rosemary Jackson to illuminate the visual and psychological confusion created by a notion of the ‘double’. ‘Par’ – ‘axis’ signifies that which lies on the other side of the principal axis of vision. It is also a technical term employed in optics. A paraxial region is an area in which light rays seem to unite at a point after refraction; in this region, object and image seem to collide, but in fact neither object nor its image genuinely resides there – it is just a blank space, a ‘lack’ of anything definite. Thus, the paraxial region could be taken to represent the spectral arena of the fantastic, whose imaginary world is located somewhere indeterminately between vision and desire, the real and the imaginary.

The encounter of the self with the gothic world often leads to the transformation (of the self) into its opposite, either into the ‘Other’ or the hidden double of the self. Thus, the Other is in fact, a face of the self. The isolation of the gothic protagonist is frightening, because as the boundary between self and Other disappears, the protagonist is unable to distinguish between what is ‘me’ and what is ‘not-me’, or to make out whether such distinctions really make any difference.
In the 1930s, Lacan introduced the concept of the ‘mirror stage’ (*Ecrits*, 1936), the psychological rite of passage that takes the self from the undifferentiated place of desire in the imaginary realm into the socially organized world of the symbolic order. In this phase, the individual self begins to take shape through a paradoxical recognition of Otherness. In perceiving the reflected image in the mirror as simultaneously ‘me’ and ‘not-me’, the individual self begins to make sense of the world in terms of boundary enforcement, separation and loss. Thus, according to Lacan, the self is actually created through a split – a being that can only conceptualize itself when it is mirrored back to itself from the position of another’s desire. In the words of Lacan, “The unconscious where the subject is not itself, where the ‘I’ of a dream can be someone else and the object and subject shift and change places, bears perpetual witness to this primordial splitting”. 1

The many partial, dual, multiple selves portrayed in the Gothic violate the cherished definition of the self as a coherent, indivisible and continuous whole. It is precisely this subversion of the coherence of self that constitutes the most radically transgressive function of the Gothic. Later, Modernism would take up this very concept in all its complexities particularly after Freud, taking into account the multiple selves within the individual self and also multiple layers of the unconscious or the subconscious. Whereas themes involving the self, the ‘I’, deal with problems of consciousness, themes involving the Other, the ‘not-I’, deal with problems generated by desire and the unconscious. As Bersani puts it: “The sign of desire’s dominance is the end of unity and totality, and the transformation of the portrait into several portraits at once partial and mobile”. 2 The relation of self to Other is mediated through desire, and gothic narratives tell of various versions of desire, usually in transgressive forms.

The Gothic, as observed by Rosemary Jackson, acts out subversive desires and in doing so “also conducts a dialogue within itself” (Jackson 96). Early gothic romances and
their introduction of supernatural agents reveal a longing for an idealized bourgeois social order to replace the feudal system which was in the process of being destroyed by emergent capitalism. As Gothic undergoes transformations, it develops into a subtly radical literary form, interrogating social contradictions. It is progressively turned inwards to concern itself with psychological problems, used to dramatize uncertainty and conflicts of the individual in relation to a difficult social situation. 18th century Gothic confines the world to a place where there exists a singular and intensely subjective self; everything else in that world is Other, an enemy to the integrity of the self. Victimization and isolation of the individual are the central features of such a world and doubling becomes the essential reality of the self. Once the protagonist enters this world, the line of separation between self and Other wavers and the coherence of individual identity begins to collapse. According to Joel Porte, an essential element of gothic romance is the presence of the quintessential moment when “guilt and innocence have changed places; the evil ‘other’ is oneself”. In the 18th century, women’s gothic strives to acknowledge, however covertly, a violent, sexual, desiring, and angry dimension of even conventionally ‘good’ women. Indoctrinated with the contemporary social and moral ideology that segregated women into angels and demons, women gothic novelists could not afford to present an individual woman’s psychic split except in two distinct halves embodied in two distinctly different individuals. The evil Other could not be fully acknowledged as the hidden part of the self, concealed behind the ‘I’, simply because it is not considered a part of the self at all, but an absolute Other. This epistemological confusion in 18th century women’s gothic gives rise to fantasies of dualism, tales of people ‘in pieces’, breaking up a unified notion of the ‘I’ both structurally and thematically, with things more than meet the eye.

In the 19th century, gothic fiction becomes increasingly complex and subjective. Signifying the alienation of the human subject from the culture and language in which he /
she is located, such tropes as doubles, alter egos, mirrors and representations of psychic incoherence increasingly destabilize the boundaries between neurotic fantasy and reality. Gothic characters are no longer in control of the passions, desires and fantasies that had been regulated and kept in check in the 18th century. Individuals become divided products of both reason and desire, subjects of obsession, narcissism and self – gratification. As James B. Twitchell observes: “… a simple awareness of consciousness itself implies division… [it] means that there are at least two parties, the observed and the observing” (Twitchell 231).

The double also has a particular application to 19th century gothic fictions as a means of demonstrating the notorious double standard of morality that forced women into a fragmentary existence; she becomes a composition of numerous images, both self and not-self, that she simultaneously desires and fears to be. Thus, a closeted mirror image, the subversive presence of a deviance erupts from behind the mask of social acceptability. According to Gilbert and Gubar, “In projecting their anger and dis-ease into dreadful figures, creating dark doubles for themselves and their heroines, women writers are both identifying with and revising the self–definitions patriarchal culture has imposed on them” (Gilbert & Gubar 85). Dialogues between self and Other are increasingly acknowledged as being colloquies with the self. Thus, according to Otto Rank, “The double turns out to be a functional expression of the psychological fact that an individual with an attitude of this kind cannot free himself from a certain phase of his narcissistically loved ego development. He encounters it always and everywhere” (Rank 80). Frederic Jameson defines the Other as “whatever is radically different from me, whatever by virtue of precisely that difference seems to constitute a very real and urgent threat to my existence” (Jameson 140). Indeed, because the Other is an externalization of the conflicts plaguing the self, its appearance only exaggerates internal tensions. The gothic world becomes a horrific maze in which the
protagonists pursue identities they cannot accept; it creates a fusion of fear and desire to the object of enthrallment, which is both Other and a part of the self.

As the literary form of a feminized discourse on women’s split existence, women’s gothic participates in the patriarchal enterprise of both castigating and deifying women. We are presented repeatedly with the gothic anti-heroine and the dead/undead gothic mother (who, as a benevolent presence, plays a crucial role in the exploration of the heroine’s true identity): libidinal sexuality (as epitomized by the anti-heroine) poised against unimpeachable chastity (represented by the mother/maternal figure). The presence of characters mirroring each other in contrast is something important and frequent in women’s gothic texts. The doubled parental figures recurring throughout Mrs. Radcliffe’s works suggest a compulsion to erase the bad and reify the good, while the Sister Agnes / Signora Laurentini split in one woman (MU) suggests a similar need to eradicate the virgin/whore dichotomy operating in such a discourse. A woman like Emily is advised by her father to conform to social system and conceal her emotions; paradoxically, the carnivalesque possibility of unrestrained passionate indulgence surreptitiously works upon her, tempting her into sympathizing with and re-enacting the history of the passionate Signora Laurentini. The conflict between these dual possibilities of the self characterizes the nature of Emily’s terror and confusion. As she encounters the mad nun Agnes, Emily’s disquiet is twofold: Agnes’s story unhanges Emily’s sense of security and certitude by implicating her father, the venerable St. Aubert, with someone other than Emily’s mother; in a more disturbing note, Agnes’s story of passion, anger and murder also hints at a moral and psychological kinship between Emily and the dark woman. The nun repeatedly addresses Emily as ‘Sister’, thus drawing her into the circle of sinful, fallen women:

You are young – you are innocent! I mean you are yet innocent of any great crime! – But you have passions in your heart, -
scorpions; they sleep now – beware how you awaken them! –
They will sting you, even unto death! (MU 574)

Terrified by Agnes’s hint of dangerous potentials within herself, Emily weeps and Agnes responds:

’… so young, and so unfortunate! We are sisters, then indeed. Yet there is no bond of kindness among the guilty’, she added, while her eyes resumed their wild expression, 'no gentleness, - no peace, no hope!' (574)

In some way, the happy endings of gothic romances that portray the good riddance of the evil Other woman, depend on the punishment and exorcism of the restless feelings evoked by the narrative. Anger, rebellion, passion and filial ingratitude – the logical resultants of women’s long grievance at domestic confinement, are shown emphatically as belonging to the evil woman, who is subjected to severe retribution and finally, to death. Ironically, it is her encounter with the dark Other that makes the gothic heroine aware of her own potent self. As Helena Mitchie puts it: “The question ‘who is the Other woman’ transforms itself on the surface of the mirror into the questionable statement ‘The Other Woman is myself’ ”.4

Gothic gives an expression of uncertainty as to the genesis of the dark Other, introducing doubt as to whether it is self-generated or completely external to the subject. During the 19th century, fantasies were structured around dualism to reveal the internal origin of the Other. The demonic becomes a manifestation of unconscious desire within the self. Themes of the ‘I’ and the ‘not-I’ interact strangely, expressing difficulties of knowledge, problems of vision and guilt over desire. The Other becoming an externalization of part of the self, the demonic pact between self and Other comes to be synonymous with a negative version of desire for the infinite. It expresses itself as a violent transgression of all human limitations and social taboos prohibiting the realization of desire, as in Dacre’s Zofloya.
From a rational and monological point of view, Otherness cannot be represented except as foreign, irrational, evil. As explained by Rosemary Jackson: “The ‘other’ expressed through fantasy has been categorized as a negative black area – as evil, demonic, barbaric – until its recognition in the modern fantastic as culture’s ‘unseen’” (Jackson 173). The relation in Zofloya between a white woman and a black male servant points at the common bond of social marginalization that brings the two together as accomplices in their joint mission of subversion and transgression of patriarchal law and authority.

Zofloya so often appears in response to Victoria’s thoughts, that it seems her imagination has conjured him up, even though he also exists independent of it. He first appears in her dreams after her long immersion in wicked fantasies culminates in a sensation of being “under the influence of some superior and unknown power” (Z 135). The increasing strength of Victoria’s evil desires coincides with an increasing obsession with Zofloya who haunts her dreams so vividly that “hastily awaking, scarcely could she assure herself that Zofloya stood not at the side of her bed!” (144). Whether he originates from within or without, there seems to be no definite barrier between the Moor and Victoria’s psychic world:

… sometimes she wandered with him over beds of flowers, sometimes over craggy rocks, sometimes in fields of the brightest verdure, sometimes over burning sands, tottering on the ridge of some huge precipice, while the angry waters waved in the abyss below. (143)

The abruptness of Zofloya’s frequent appearance and disappearance suggests that the perils beyond the sleeping Victoria’s bed into which Zofloya is constantly leading her are the same perils lurking within her heart. As the Moor suggests:

I am but the humble tool, the slave of your wishes; your co-operation with me can alone render me powerful; but fly me,
disdain my assistance, and despise my friendship I sink
abashed into myself, and am powerless! (162)

The power of evil within the Moor is activated only by Victoria’s agency. She has to invoke the powers of darkness within her in order to be powerful, much like Lady Macbeth invoking the powers of darkness to possess her and arouse her to evil action. Traditionally represented in Zofloya in the figure of the Devil, the power of evil is thus actually a power of the human heart itself, as Zofloya professes to Victoria: "… your very thoughts have power to attract me … They are bold and spirited, they convince me that you partake of myself, …." (178).

Victoria internalizes Zofloya’s evil influence to bring about the eventual destruction of her own physical and psychic integrity; Zofloya draws her out of conventional boundaries, whereby she is positioned along with her diabolic double:

… the contrast between them, as they moved along, was peculiarly forcible; the figure of Victoria, slender and elegantly proportioned, arrayed in flowing white, with her raven hair streaming over her shoulders; that of Zofloya so gigantic, and differently attired, yet seeming at intervals, by the dubious rays of the lamp, and the effect of strong shade, increased to a height scarcely human. (190)

Both natural and supernatural bodies share a similar ability to transcend boundaries. Victoria’s violent passion is a marriage of sadistic pleasure and masochistic self-destruction, suggestive of her own conflicted status as femme fatale. At once horrified by and attracted to her own Otherness as epitomized by the Devil, Victoria fails to reconcile her own existence to the Otherness; she accepts death as the final loss of identity, her ultimate solution to the struggle within her self.

II

In women’s gothic, there is a progressive internalization and recognition of fears generated by the self. These include anxieties of fragmentation, division and split, encounters
between versions of the self. The schizophrenic, according to British psychiatrist R.D. Laing, can only establish a conviction of being real “by feeling himself to be an object … in the world of someone else”. The result is an extreme split in personality. On the one hand, there is the object–self, exposed to the world; on the other, there is the withdrawn, invisible self – invisible at times, even to the subject. The nature of psychic alienation created by an internalization of Otherness is summed up in terms of mirror reflections by Sheila Rowbotham:

... I used to wonder which bit was really me. Where was I in all these broken bits of reflection? The more I tried to grasp the totality, the more I concentrated on capturing myself in my own image, the less I felt I knew who I was. The mirror held a certain magic. The picture started to assume its own reality … I defined my own possibility in relation to the face I saw in front of me … (Rowbotham 93)

This optical confusion leading to a loss of coherence within the self, is the situation the heroine often finds herself in women’s gothic.

As the term ‘paraxis’ (that which lies on the other side of the principal axis of vision) has already suggested, the imaginary lies right along the axis of the real. According to Freud, this area is one of concealed desire. This uncanny realm is the site of unconscious projection of those feelings, wishes and objects which the conscious mind refuses to recognize; the only way of expelling these disturbing elements from the self seems to lie in locating the same in another person or thing. Women’s gothic explores the uncanny encounter between self and self, whereby projections of various images of the self are held up to vision. Each projection being simultaneously part of the self and outside the self as well, the many reflections of the fragmented ‘I’ represent both masochistic and narcissistic impulses of the subject. Like a collage of faces slowly merging into one another, forming a blurred impression of a singular
face, the many reflections of desired and feared selves project the repressed anxieties and aspirations of the perceiving ‘I’.

In *Emmeline*, the story of the heroine’s girlhood days and her subsequent progress come disturbingly close to that of Lady Adelina. Both lose their mothers early, reach puberty as “poor orphans” with governesses who are callous and unfeeling. Both the girls grow up in wild, mountainous regions in seclusion and know nothing of the world outside. Adelina falls prey to her immaturity, weakness of spirit and vanity. She falls a victim to a bad marriage and it leads her to the arms of Fitz-Edward, her fatal lover who gets her pregnant. Broken in body and soul, Adelina serves as a distorted mirror-image of Emmeline; in Adelina’s plight, Emmeline can foresee her own, if she were to marry the rash Delamere or agree to elope with him. Cast in a veil of woe, Adelina’s unhinged mind is a space where Emmeline sees her worst fears enacted: the isolation, the trauma of being branded as a fallen woman, a scourge to society where fathers, husbands and brothers sternly forbid, condemn and punish any transgressive female desire. Indeed, Emmeline quite unwittingly steps into Adelina’s shoes as Delamere, seeing her with the latter’s newborn, rashly misjudges and accuses Emmeline of adultery. Though they end up with different destinies, Adelina mad and miserable, Emmeline sane and happily engaged to Godolphin, both have to go through a shadowy world of dread, doubts, insecurity and inner turmoil.

Similarly, in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, the Marchioness de Villeroi, Madame Cheron and Signora Laurentini / Sister Agnes serve as good and bad maternal figures to Emily St. Aubert. The miniature of Emily’s poisoned aunt (the Marchioness) uncannily resembles her and functions as a mirror. Even the mad nun Agnes confuses Emily by informing her that Emily is the daughter of the late Marchioness. It goes to the heroine’s credit that she learns to gaze into the picture with a clear perception and accurately determines her own identity.
Both Madam Cheron and Signora Laurentini have been involved with Montoni. Madame Cheron brags to Emily that she never judges people by their countenance but by their actions (MU125); yet this elderly lady forgets her prudence and marries a dashing and handsome Italian stranger, expecting to live the life of a princess in Venice. In an ominous act of replacement, she walks to the altar originally intended for her niece, proclaiming:

I shall now celebrate my marriage with some splendour, … and to save time I shall avail myself of the preparation that has been made for yours, which will, of course, be delayed a little while. (142)

The portraits of the Marchioness de Villeroi and Signora Laurentini serve as the two faces of Woman that patriarchy holds up for its perusal. Emily gets fascinated by both, though differently in each case. As she muses over the features of her dead aunt, Emily realizes:

… she knew not where to detect the charm that captivated her attention, and inspired sentiments of such love and pity. Dark brown hair played carelessly along the open forehead; the nose was rather inclined to aquiline; the lips spoke in a smile, but it was a melancholy one; the eyes were blue, and were directed upwards with an expression of peculiar meekness, while the soft cloud of the brow spoke of the fine sensibility of the temper. (104)

The delicate melancholy of the blue eyes and the fragile sensibility of countenance underlined in this description of the dead Marchioness seem to be an exact reflection of Emily’s own. No wonder she gets confused about her own identity at seeing the picture. On the other hand, the portrait of Signora Laurentini evokes a different sensation as Emily gazes at it:

It represented a lady in the flower of youth and beauty; her features were handsome and noble, full of strong expression,
but had little of the captivating sweetness, that Emily had looked for, and still less of the pensive mildness she loved. It was a countenance, which spoke the language of passion, rather than that of sentiment; a haughty impatience of misfortune – not the placid melancholy of a spirit injured, yet resigned. (278)

Like the white and the black swan of the fairytale, the fates of the Marchioness and the Signora entwine in a sad saga of violence and treachery. Neither was allowed to marry the man of her own choice; both became associated with the same man, as wife and as mistress, respectively; while the “gentle goodness and unimpassioned manners” of the wife ceases to please the Marquis, “the captivations of the Italian” mistress (658) ensnares him all the more into the dangerous game of seduction and betrayal. Thus the virgin / whore dichotomy plays upon the existence of the two women, who turn on each other as adversaries, whereas their real opponent would be found in the patriarchal system that victimizes both of them. When Emily learns that the music that haunted her at the Chateau de Villeroi was played by Sister Agnes (formerly Signora Laurentini), she learns that her family (including herself) is connected to the nun’s violent tale of thwarted love, jealousy, adulterous passion and murder.

Through these three quasi-maternal figures who play such crucial roles in her life, Emily encounters the violence hidden in the apparently disciplined system of patriarchy; it turns women into hapless victims, doubling each other in a tragic repetition of treachery, oppression and death. Emily fears to admit the fate of such women as her own. She cannot conceive that she too could be forced by a patriarch who would want to give her away in a financially advantageous marriage; neither can she admit that she too could passionately love a man, only to be deceived by him. As incidents in the novel subsequently push Emily perilously close to such positions, her sense of wholesomeness falters and she is on the verge
of a breakdown. Fortunately, destiny prepares a different life for her. Still, the phantoms of dread and insecurity stalk her in dreams, casting shadows over her blissfully settled life.

In the words of William Patrick–Day:

The characters in the Gothic fantasy cannot accept their own double natures … In order to fight the unadmitted and dangerous urge to unification, the protagonist may direct violence or hostility outward, particularly toward a double upon whom the unwanted ‘other’ half of the self is projected. Violence or repression inevitably turn back upon the protagonist, though, because they are really directed at the doubled nature within. (Day 77)

The contrasting characteristics of Victoria and Lilla in Zofloya serve as an illustration of this dialogic tension. Victoria lusts for Henriquez in whose eyes she is “masculine”, “harsh and fierce”, an “untameable hyena”. Henriquez is enamoured of his petite and lovely thirteen year old orphaned betrothed, Lilla. Lilla is blonde, whereas Victoria is dark; she is innocent, passive, good and complying while Victoria is the opposite; “delicate, symmetrical, and of fairy-like beauty”, Lilla’s “angelic countenance” expressing a “seraphic serenity of soul” (Z 133), she is the ultra-feminine bourgeois ideal of womanhood, the angel of the hearth. Victoria, on the other hand, embodies the unrestrained, domineering, aristocratic woman – vain, insensible, lustful, libidinously aggressive and violent. A profoundly symbolic situation in the novel shows the two women, hunter and prey, enter the castle, hand in hand, “the tender Lilla with her right hand holding one of Victoria’s, and passing the left round her waist” (169). An ominous reminder of a similar situation in Coleridge’s Christabel, 6 where the innocent maiden Christabel invites the beautiful Geraldine (an evil sorceress in the disguise of a distressed damsel) into her castle, the scene in Zofloya focuses on the inextricable link between the two facets of a fragmented identity. No wonder that Henriquez recoils with “instinctive horror” as Victoria “with an assumed softness” caresses Lilla. The
scene evokes a terrible and perversely sadistic picture of “the snowy dove fondled by the ravenous vulture” (194), in his disturbed mind. The enactment of female sexual desire, voracious and sadistic, is considered the greatest threat to ‘natural’ femininity.

Lilla’s mind is “pure, innocent, and free even from the smallest taint of a corrupt thought” (133). On the other hand, Victoria’s ‘masculinity’ refers to her murderously violent streak, her passionate propensity to seize what she wants by wielding the knife as calmly as any man. The degree to which the two women are depicted differently shows how the body of Woman can be elevated and idolized in fragile figures of chaste innocence as that of Lilla, or degenerated into an unfeminine and unnatural body like that of Victoria through physical and emotional violence. As Dacre demonstrates, both the virtuous and the vicious body are equally mutable and the cause of their destruction is love or lust, i.e. female sexual desire. Tortured by Lilla’s pristine charm, her intense whiteness and blondeness, Victoria feels her own body take on an alien nature, as she is forced to see herself in the indifferent gaze of Henriquez:

‘Ah! Would,’ cried the degenerate Victoria, ‘would that this unwieldy form could be compressed into the fairy delicacy of hers, these bold masculine features assume the likeness of her baby face!’ (Z 213- 14)

To despoil the blonde hair and white bosom of Lilla is to attack the domestic ideal of femininity and nurturing motherhood (both of which elude Victoria). So the passionate, powerful and carnivalesque body of Victoria confronts the poised, passive and diminutive body of Lilla as the two women struggle for possession of the same man.

The confrontation between Victoria and Lilla is one of the most bizarre in women’s gothic, loaded with unnatural violence, sexual sadism and perversity. Lilla’s “snowy arm”, “alabaster shoulders”, “flaxen tresses”, ”polished bosom” and “eyes, of heavenly blue”
present her as a fetishized virgin, “a miniature semblance of the Medicean Venus” (223). In her pathetic appeals for mercy to Victoria, Lilla’s presentation of herself as an unprotected orphan reminds of Emmeline and the entire range of orphaned gothic heroines. Victoria’s violent and pitiless slaughtering of her rival brings out a tumultuous end to one half of her self. Even as she comes down from the mountain after the murder, she feels possessed by the spirit of her victim and for a moment, turns into a ghostly image of the dead woman:

A certain trepidation of spirits that she had never before experienced, caused her to rush along with even greater rapidity, if possible, than she had used in her way thither. (226)

She cannot escape the feeling that she is pursued by “the mangled form of Lilla”, “those fair tresses dyed in crimson gore, that bleeding bosom” haunting her distracted vision. It is only through a similarly violent death that Victoria finds a release from a fragmented self, as “a mangled corpse, she was received into the foaming waters” (267).

Lucy Snowe, the heroine of Villette, suffers from a double vision all her life. Both her visions of fancy and reality make her see versions of herself into the women who cross her path in life. The configuration of female characters around Lucy is equally expressive of her quest for identity and her self-estrangement. No other woman in the text has any identity except as Lucy herself bestows on her. But neither is Lucy free of them, since all these women represent aspects of herself. Significantly, none of these self-reflections presents Lucy Snowe in her entirety, as the roles they represent do not ascribe to women the initiative, the intelligence, or the urge to tell their own stories.

The tale of Miss Marchmont, “a maiden lady of our neighbourhood” (V 43) as Lucy describes her, wealthy, grey-haired, “grave with solitude”, is a reflection of the older Lucy,
the narrator of *Villette*. Miss Marchmont’s state of psychic stagnation and confinement affects Lucy too, as she narrates her predicament at Miss Marchmont’s household:

Two hot, close rooms thus became my world; and a crippled old woman, my mistress, my friend, my all. Her service was my duty – her pain, my suffering – her relief, my hope - her anger, my punishment – her regard, my reward … All within me became narrowed to my lot. (45)

Miss Marchmont, in her life of reminiscences, has also confined young Lucy to a life of psychic stagnation. Ironically at the novel’s end, the reader is made to realize that the entire text of *Villette* is a long reminiscence of the narrator Lucy, triggered by her memory of parting from Paul Emanuel. Just as the heart-sick Miss Marchmont, bereaved in love, reflects Lucy’s sense of remembrance and loss, the untamed ‘cretin’ whom she looks after during the long vacation at the Pensionnat is an aspect of her own repressed self.

The childhood scenes of *Villette* contain hints of a mysterious emotional identification between Paulina Home and Lucy. Little Polly is a projection of Lucy’s most gratifying self-image, a symbol of her own wish-fulfilment. In an idealized form, Polly’s “hoar-frost” and “pure, fine flame” (standing for restraint and passion) recapitulate the fire and ice of Lucy’s nature. Lucy objectifies herself into Polly and then coolly observes this self-image. Polly’s grief as a lonely child cast among strangers, acts out Lucy’s. Similarly, Polly’s premature love for the adolescent Graham Bretton is at once a displacement and a pre-figuration of Lucy’s relationship with him. Indeed, there is a display of Lucy’s auto-eroticism through her position as Polly’s companion, as a watcher of Polly’s grief at her parting from Graham; thus Lucy reminisces:

‘Come to me’, I said, wishing, yet scarcely hoping, that she would comply … She came, however, instantly, like a small ghost gliding over the carpet. I took her in. She was chill; I
warmed her in my arms. She trembled nervously; I soothed her. (41)

Originating in the Bretton family’s patronizing attitude towards her, Lucy’s self-pity is manifested in holding and consoling Polly, a reflection of her own love for Graham. In embracing the small, ghostlike Polly, Lucy is warming, in part, her own chill, caressing her need to be “tranquillized and cherished”. As children, Lucy and Polly are much alike. “If anyone knew me”, Lucy says at one point in the novel, “it was little Paulina Mary” (398). Both are distinguished by extreme self-control and reticence, both love Graham and lose him only to find him again; both receive letters from him and respond with a letter carefully rewritten to conceal the passionate turmoil within. Lucy says of Paulina:

I wondered to find my thoughts hers: there are certain things in which we so rarely meet with our double that it seems a miracle when that chance befalls. (366)

As far as Lucy’s perception is concerned, Paulina is, indeed, Lucy’s perfected double.

Another gratifying projection of Lucy’s reflected self is the self-absorbed Ginevra Fanshawe. Like Lucy, Ginevra is the daughter of a poor man, but with influential family connections. Lucy disdains Ginevra’s resourcefulness and her expertise in getting herself precious gifts she cannot afford on her own, even though Lucy’s narrative reveals that some of her own dresses were gifted by the Brettons and that, later, Paul Emanuel gifted her a school.

Lucy’s tendency to portray herself as a ‘gentleman’ to Ginevra suggests that in this relationship, she seeks to shun the woman’s position, conferring it to Ginevra, her alter-ego; to Ginevra’s silly prattles and coquettish gestures, she acts the ‘wise Timon’. However, Lucy’s disapproval of Ginevra can hardly conceal her hidden fascination for the girl’s beauty,
a constant reminder of Lucy’s own lack. The inevitable link between self-abnegation (associated with Lucy) and self-absorption (associated with Ginevra) is revealed at the Pensionnat where Lucy and Ginevra are inevitably paired together. As Lucy acknowledges: “… while we wrangled daily, we were never alienated” (307). Lucy is a frugal eater – a measure of her self-effacing tendency, but she generously feeds Ginevra, who devours her unwanted ‘pistolets’ with a hearty appetite. In her narrative, Lucy confesses:

I don’t know why I chose to give my bread rather to Ginevra than to another; nor why, if two had to share the convenience of one drinking–vessel, as sometimes happened ---- … I always contrived that she should be my convive, and rather liked to let her take the lion’s share, whether of the white beer, the sweet wine, or the new milk … (307)

Narcissistic, self-gratifying and resourceful by nature, Ginevra is the much-needed bolster to Lucy’s self-erasing ego. She must attribute to Ginevra all the jealousy she cannot allow herself to feel towards Paulina Mary as Graham’s love-interest. Ginevra dismisses Paulina as a “conceited doll” and finds “sickening” the domestic bliss of the Brettons and the de Bassompierres. Lucy’s evaluation of Ginevra’s jealous irritation is a self-appraisal in disguise as she tells Ginevra: “It would not have been so if the object of attention had been changed: if you had taken Miss de Bassompierre’s place” (355). Ginevra is acting out Lucy’s repressed jealousy and Lucy can understand its implications quite naturally.

Lucy’s affiliations with Madame Beck go deeper than surveillance. Paranoid and voyeur, obsessed with spying and being spied on, together they are versions of a singular self. In Madame Beck, Lucy confronts her own aspirations for control and proprietorship. Each woman gazes upon the other’s surveillance and in one recollection, Lucy reveals the sexual angle of Madame Beck’s voyeuristic mission:
I will not deny that it was with a secret glee I watched her. Had I been a gentleman, I believe madame would have found favour in my eyes, she was so handy, neat, thorough in all she did… I stood, in short, fascinated; (151-52)

The way Lucy relishes Madame Beck spying on her reveals her fascinated admiration for the woman and her administrative efficiency. Madame Beck’s weakness for Graham mirrors Lucy’s own frustrated love for him. A rather sensitive situation in the novel involves the two women, the elderly lady looking at the mirror and turning away in despair; the younger one watching her do so, standing at a safe distance, a voyeur to and a sharer of the former’s frustration:

… as she passed a dressing-table with a glass upon it, she looked at her reflected image. One single white hair streaked her nut-brown tresses; she plucked it out with a shudder. In the full summer daylight, her face, though it still had the colour, could plainly be seen to have lost the texture of youth; and then, where were youth’s contours? Ah, madame! Wise as you were, even you knew weakness. Never had I pitied madame before, but my heart softened towards her, when she turned darkly from the glass. (133-34)

Madame Beck’s vulnerability before the mirror reflects Lucy’s own recognitions, at various moments, that her appearance is unlikely to attract a man.

While Lucy sympathizes with Madame’s frustration in love, she spiritedly faces her as a rival. In her desperate encounter with Madame Beck who wants to restrict her movements and prevent her meeting with Paul Emanuel, Lucy defies Madame’s Medusa gaze and autocratic administration, as she strikes back: “… in your hand there is both chill and poison. You envenom and you paralyze” (593). Lucy’s full vision of her opponent, whose “habitual disguise, her mask and her domino” come out as “a mere network reticulated with holes” (594), is also a moment when Madame Beck’s façade of autocracy shatters and Lucy
recognizes and asserts her own power of defiance. As Lucy comes out of the paralyzing stupor induced by Madame Beck’s claustrophobic surveillance, she comes to her true senses. Paul’s love enables Lucy to find her own standing, making possible the rejection of an alien Other internalized as the repressed part of her self.

Like Lucy and Ginevra, Madame Walravens – the old, domineering, avaricious hag of a woman, and Justine Marie, the passive, innocent and suffering nun, are the contrasted twin mirror image, showing that obsessive egotism and masochistic self-abnegation are two faces of the same self-enclosure. This relation is presented symbolically in the fact that in the eerie mansion of Madame Walravens at Rue des Mages, in front of Lucy’s eyes, Justine Marie’s picture on a wall suddenly opens like a secret door, revealing the malevolent, old woman: an ingenious version of both the mysterious portrait of Gothic romance revealing the heroine’s identity, as well as her discovery of an unsuspected door to open out and reveal a hidden self.

Charlotte Brontë gives the trope of the double an unconventional twist by turning Paul Emanuel into another of Lucy’s second selves. At one point Paul even forces Lucy to look at the mirror and see the physical ‘affinity’ between them:

Do you observe that your forehead is shaped like mine – that your eyes are cut like mine? Do you hear that you have some of my tones of voice? Do you know that you have many of my looks? (487)

Like Lucy’s outward ‘reserve’, Paul’s irritable actions conceal the ‘inner flame’ he shares with her. When Paul reveals to Lucy that his capacity for love “died in the past”, buried under the earth, he is mirroring the scene in which Lucy buries the symbol of her love for Graham, his letters, under the pear tree in the garden of the Pensionnat. Thus associations, doublings and identifications mirror back the images of Lucy’s suppressed emotional self.
The most enigmatic and multi-dimensional mirroring of Lucy’s ‘Otherness’ is represented through the potent image of the ghostly Nun. Just as the demonic fury of Vashti mirrors Lucy’s dormant passion, the Nun projects the haunting of her repressed desire. Seen first when Lucy receives Graham’s letter, the Nun (by legend, a transgressor against her vow of celibacy, buried alive for her ‘sin’), symbolizes Lucy’s sexual desire. The Nun appears a second time when Lucy is dressing for a night out with Graham, and a third time, to mirror Lucy’s gaping desire as she buries Graham’s letters in a hole at the foot of the pear tree. Significantly, the next time Lucy sees the spectral Nun, she is with Paul, who, all along, has been subconsciously inciting her desire. No wonder that Paul tries to convince her: “Whether this nun be flesh and blood, or something that remain when blood is dried and flesh wasted, her business is as much with you as with me, probably” (488). Lucy is compelled to read the Nun as a text with meaning; ironically, the novel reveals that the Nun has no meaning apart from Lucy’s compulsions to read her as a spectral presence with personal significance to her. An image of Lucy’s passionate impulses as well as her guilty repression, the Nun represents Brontë’s subversion of the Gothic tradition that sees the good Other woman as separate from the evil Other woman, the buried saint as separate from the buried sinner. The necessary connection between these two exaggerated and false images of Woman is made obvious in the novel by blending the image of the Nun with both the saintly Justine Marie and the passionate, transgressive nun of the convent legend. Lucy must exorcise both these distortions of woman’s true nature in order to put an end to her own self-division. One of the dangers of living out the conventional life of a woman is that it renders one spectral, unreal, ‘none’, as Ginevra Fanshawe asks Lucy: “Who are you, Miss Snowe?” (406) and “… are you anybody?” (408). The association of conventional womanhood with ghostliness (like the series of pictures on womanhood, seen in the gallery) makes Lucy’s savage destruction of the Nun’s effigy on bed, as an enraged assault on those ideals that render women “bloodless,
brainless nonentities” (264). In her furious attack on the Nun, Lucy acts a double of Vashti, who, like Dacre’s Victoria, has been associated with the wild, unfeminine, Bacchanalian sublime of vengeance and power. Likewise, Lucy’s attack on the ideal of feminine passivity (the ‘Nun/None’) reveals a ‘masculine’ spirit. Ironically, the object of the attack turns out to be a bluff image created by a man; donning the robe of a nun, Alfred de Hamal used to have clandestine rendezvous with Ginevra in the convent. A man masquerading as a spectral woman, de Hamal is in reality ‘womanish’, delicately built, effeminate and pretty. Lucy’s attack on de Hamal’s costume is an assault on her inner spectre: her androgynous nature that deprives Lucy of fulfilment in a world that has no name for such a nature. Like Vashti in whom Lucy finds “something neither of woman nor of man” (339) or the Nun, whose veil of femininity conceals a masculine identity, Lucy’s conflicted nature is a mystery to herself; it renders her, in the eyes of society, a ‘none’, an un-definable blank in the scopic (related to visuality) field of desire.

In Wuthering Heights, the lovers, Catherine and Heathcliff, think of each other as an essential component of his / her self; each encounters the other as a necessary part that fills up and gives wholeness to the self. This bond is represented primarily through visual images. It is a form of confrontation with the Other during the mirror stage. Lacan sees this process of self-identification as a mirroring in the sense that the subject identifies and defines his Self in the image of the Other. It is precisely this desire for recognition of self in Other that prompts Catherine to envision her identity in Heathcliff; “… he’s more myself than I am” (WH 80), she says to Nelly. Later she adds, “He’s always, always in my mind: not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself, but as my own being” (81). It alludes to a vital capacity to move out of one’s limited existence and establish the act of being, through an Other.
After Earnshaw’s death, as the daughter of the house, Catherine becomes a spiritual orphan as Heathcliff is a literal one, brought from the streets to the household by Mr. Earnshaw. No one excepting the housekeeper Nelly Dean bothers about them. Both (Catherine and Heathcliff) are allowed to run wild; both become outsiders to the tightly defined domestic structure, which does not quite easily ‘let them in’. Sandra Gilbert’s illuminating remark in this context highlights the spiritual doubling of the two, as she states:

Heathcliff represents an alternative version of masculinity, the maleness of the younger son, that paradigmatic outsider in patriarchy. But at the same time Heathcliff is ‘female’ on the level where younger sons and bastards and devils unite with women in rebelling against the tyranny of heaven, the level where orphans are female and heirs are male, … monsters female, angels male. 7

Heathcliff is the masculine component of Catherine’s nature that society has taught her to repress. It appears that the memory of symbiotic oneness with Heathcliff in the oak-paneled bed of childhood at the Heights is the most potent in Catherine’s life. Heaven, for her, can only be imaged as a return of the repressed, a resurrection of the childhood bed and regression to a womblike existence with one’s fragmented self. It seems quite natural that Nelly Dean describes Catherine in her death-bed as “like a child reviving” (WH 148). Catherine’s salvation comes in escaping a society that can accept her only if she denied a vital part of her nature and assumed an alien, superficial one. Similarly, Heathcliff’s estrangement from her alienates him from himself to the point where his brutalities become mere mechanical and hollow gestures of a man who, in starving and withdrawing himself from his own body, becomes, like Catherine in her pregnancy, his own executioner.

Georges Bataille has explained eroticism as the tension between life and death of self. Life means discontinuity, the confinement of each individual to a separate, isolated existence. Death means continuity; in death, each individual is united with the rest, sunk back into the
sea of non-differentiation. Heathcliff represents the deepest, spontaneous self in Catherine which, denied, becomes perverse, cruel and self-destructive. The desire of inseparability from Heathcliff merges into Catherine’s desire to be “among the heather on those hills” where she can be ‘herself’, “half savage and hardy, and free” (WH 116). The extent of Catherine’s alienation becomes clear from her reaction when Edgar approaches her in the sick-bed:

At first she gave him no glance of recognition; he was invisible to her abstracted gaze. The delirium was not fixed, however; having weaned her eyes from contemplating the outer darkness, by degrees she centred her attention on him, and discovered who it was that held her. (117)

For Catherine, the ‘outer darkness’ represents another reality which she is about to enter permanently, to recover her coherence of being. In her lifetime, Catherine’s existence is divided between Edgar and Heathcliff. In a way, the two men also serve as further reflections of her fissured self. Edgar is the conscious Ego, conforming to the codes of patriarchy, social position and respectability. Heathcliff, on the other hand, represents her subconscious Id, rebellious, savage and indomitable. Presented through the eyes of the housekeeper Nelly Dean, the similarity of the two men’s death strengthens this sense of doubling. As Edgar died ‘blissfully’, he “never stirred or spoke again; but continued that rapt, radiant gaze, till his pulse imperceptibly stopped and his soul departed” (238). As Heathcliff died, Nelly tried “to close his eyes: to extinguish, if possible, that frightful, life-like gaze of exultation before any one else beheld it. They would not shut” (277). Even the position of their graves, one on either side of Catherine’s, establishes this unitary existence of the fragmented parts of the self, achieved only through death. As Lockwood observes:

I sought, and soon discovered, the three headstones on the slope next the moor: the middle one grey, and half buried in heath: Edgar Linton’s only harmonised by the turf and moss creeping up its foot: Heathcliff’s still bare. (279)
III

One of the problems of vision that women gothic novelists explore is the dilemma of the self unable to perceive anything but its own reflection. Reflection is one of the many forms of repetition as a major convention in gothic romances. Repetition, reflection, refraction – all the modes establishing the essentially divided structure of the self are employed in these fictions, not only in terms of themes and characters, but narrative structure as well. Each narrative is a double of another, thereby “opposing the novel’s closed, monological forms with open, dialogical structures, as if the novel had given rise to its own opposite, its unrecognizable reflection” (Jackson 41). It amounts to a series of stories doubling and reflecting each other, all of which are, in fact, the same story.

In Smith’s novel, Emmeline’s story is mirrored by the narratives involving Mrs. Stafford, Adelina and Augusta Delamere. Entrapped in much the same plight of social subordination, the tales of these women repeatedly establish the uncertainty of women’s position, parental tyranny and pitfalls of marriage. Augusta Delamere is a subdued image of Emmeline. Their physical features are much the same as Augusta’s husband, Lord Westhaven notes: “You have the same features as Miss Mowbray, with darker hair and eyes” (E 324). Like Emmeline, who is vehemently disliked by Lady Montreville, Augusta is also severely slighted by the same lady, her mother; partial to her proud and haughty elder daughter “for her great resemblance to herself”, Lady Montreville feels for Augusta “but a very inferior share of affection” (102). Always living under the notion of being inferior, the timid and apprehensive Augusta naturally comes close to her cousin Emmeline and even starts admiring her for her grit and determination in facing all odds: “You have more fortitude and resolution than I have” (161).
Both Mrs. Stafford and Adelina, raised with every advantage, educated and accomplished in a way not allowed to Emmeline, have married badly and lived to regret their choice. The portrayal of the two ladies, as they first appear to Emmeline, is so alike that they literally reflect each other. Mrs. Stafford,

… appeared to be not more than five or six and twenty: but her person seemed to have suffered from sorrow that diminution of its charms which time could not yet have effected. Her complexion was faded and wan; her eyes had lost their lustre; and a pensive and languid expression sat on her countenance. (80)

Adelina is equally languid, pale and wan, as her first appearance in the text proves clearly:

If it were possible to personify languor or dejection, it could not be done more expressively than by representing her form, her air, her complexion, and the mournful cast of her very beautiful countenance. (214)

It is significant that Emmeline and Mrs. Stafford befriend the unhappy Adelina and look after her during her troubled pregnancy and post-natal depression. Emmeline constantly expresses active sympathy for women in distress, not simply because she is the conventional heroine of sensibility, but for the fact that all the related stories of these women reflect back her own social and psychological predicament.

In The Castle of Wolfenbach, Victoria Weimar (the Countess of Wolfenbach), Mother Magdalene (the nun) and Countess Berniti (the heroine’s biological mother) are the maternal figures who play major roles in helping the heroine Matilda both materially and spiritually, through their benign presence. The stories of these women re-enact Matilda’s own story of sexual persecution, paternal oppression, betrayal and loss.
Emily St. Aubert is doubled by Blanche de Villefort in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* as the narratives involving the two ladies mirror each other. Both the girls grow up in seclusion, Emily in the pastoral bliss of La Vallée, Blanche in the protected atmosphere of the convent; both have benign, sensible fathers who warn their daughters against reliance on “first impressions”. Both are flanked by maternal figures who are brazen, materialistic and prefer the superficial pomp and glory of high society as against the soothing seclusion of nature. Both Blanche and Emily love nature and open air. As for Emily, the castle of Udolpho is a veritable prison-house and she thinks of the monastery and the sisterhood of nuns as possible refuge. Ironically, for Blanche, the convent is like a prison, shutting her away from freedom and nature, as she exclaims:

> I have been shut in a cloister from the view of these beautiful appearances, which were designed to enchant all eyes, and awaken all hearts … Never, till this evening, did I know what true devotion is; for, never before did I see the sun sink below the vast earth! (MU 472)

Like Emily, she is often cheered out of melancholy reflections by “the face of living nature” (475) and composes verses on such experience. Both make castle-turrets, room of their own. Both are apprehensive voyeurs, exploring the spaces they inhabit, encountering unknown fears and extricate themselves providentially out of those. Blanche is thus a miniature image of Emily, bereft of the complexities, trials and tribulations of the former’s experiences. Emily’s “heroism” (Moers) shines uncontested when held against such bland replicas of 18th century sensibility.

In *Villette*, the context of doubling repetitively mirrors back Lucy’s sense of loss in an uncanny alliance with her psychic and visual consciousness. The incidents that occur when Lucy is fourteen are exactly re-enacted when she is twenty-three. After the distressing isolation of the long vacation at the Pensionnat – comparable to the “unsettled sadness” (V 4)
of her relative’s home when she is fourteen, Lucy finds herself with her godmother “happier, easier, more at home” (245) than she has been for years. She is again pampered by Mrs. Bretton and treated to sight-seeing and entertainment by Graham. Again Paulina usurps Lucy’s place, as earlier. It is remarkable how both Polly and Lucy are accidentally met by Graham who acts as a rescuer for both, guiding Lucy away from stalkers in the streets of Villette and saving Paulina from fire and stampede in the opera-hall. When Lucy returns to her “own little sea-green room” (361) at La Terrasse, she finds the seraphic Polly installed there; it is a repetition of her girlhood days in Bretton House when one night she goes up to her bedroom and finds that without any prior notice, a crib and a chest have been added for another child’s (Polly’s) use. Both Lucy and Paulina have their desires somewhat satisfied by Graham’s kind attention and benevolence. Lucy describes Graham’s letters and attentions to her as a “goodly river on whose banks [she] had sojourned, of whose waves a few reviving drops had trickled to [her] lips” (387). After Paulina’s return, the river bends “to another course” and indulgently pours its bounty, as Graham pouring out generous drops of wine to Paulina’s eager lips suggests:

She continued to look up exactly with the countenance of a child that longs for some prohibited dainty. At last the Doctor relented, took it down, and indulged himself in the gratification of letting her taste from his hand; his eyes, always expressive in the revelation of pleasurable feelings, luminously and smilingly avowed that it was a gratification; and he prolonged it by so regulating the position of the cup that only a drop at a time could reach the rosy, sipping lips by which its brim was courted. (372)

Even at a climactic point in Lucy’s narrative, the ghostly effigy of the Nun in Lucy’s bed recalls the child Paulina, newly separated from Graham, a disconsolate image of haunting loss, creeping like a little ghost into Lucy’s bed at Bretton.
Doublessness makes *Villette* subversive and shifting in perspective. The displacements and substitutions in the narrative are a reminder that gothic fiction is the preserver of repression and the uncanny, which, in Freud’s words, “is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old—established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression” (SE vol. xvii, 241). *Wuthering Heights* presents a belief that duality is within the self, within nature, within society and language. This gives rise to the sense of a lost state of wholeness “generated by the state of division as a haunting insight”. 9 As Freud points out, the repressed that seems to recur most frequently within the family unit is precisely the spectre of the fragmented self (SE vol. xvii, 220-49). It seems to mean that an individual within a family is a sum-total of shifting and fragmented roles which he / she continues to play variously, till replaced finally by the next generation.

In order to achieve her lost wholeness and freedom of soul through death, Catherine Earnshaw effectively destroys herself. She leaves her mirror–image daughter, bearing the same name and eerily re-enacting another version of the same feminine destiny. As she grows up, the young Cathy longs to explore the forbidden and distant moors, just as her mother, free to roam about in the moors, longed for the finery of the Grange. Just as Catherine Earnshaw is confined at the Grange after being attacked by the Lintons' dog and comes back to the Heights groomed as the next Mrs. Linton, her daughter is imprisoned at the Heights by Heathcliff who forces her to marry his son. In the second generation, Catherine marries Linton Heathcliff, whose languid sophistication degenerates him both mentally and physically, leaving her free to marry Hareton. Growing up at the Heights, Hareton resembles the uncouth, young Heathcliff; but he is also the son of Hindley Earnshaw and hence, the legitimate heir; by marrying him, Catherine is restored to her natural place. The mother moved from the Heights to the Grange, the daughter moves the opposite way. While her headstrong mother genuinely struggled for autonomy, the more docile Catherine merely
plays at disobedience making “real and imaginary adventures” (WH 167) within the walls of her father’s estate. Obedient as ever, she promptly surrenders her love-letters on Nelly’s instruction. Society repudiated Catherine Earnshaw’s androgynous tendency; her daughter successfully accommodates herself within society as culture’s child, a born lady. Catherine Earnshaw rebelled against her father; her daughter is profoundly dutiful and caring. She runs away from the Heights only to get back to her ailing father, a striking contrast to the escapes of her mother and aunt from the world of fathers and elder brothers. The daughter is also a cook, nurse, teacher and housekeeper – the relentless narcissist of the first generation transforming into an epitome of Victorian feminine propriety in the next. She nurses Linton, brews tea for Heathcliff, helps Nelly in the kitchen, teaches Hareton to read and replaces the wild blackberries at Wuthering Heights with flowers from Thrushcross Grange. The undefinable relation between Heathcliff and Catherine has been re-placed in nature after their death and they are replaced by Hareton and the younger Catherine, a proper couple.

Born in the same year as Hindley, Nelly is his foster sister and thus excuses “his behaviour more readily than a stranger would” (67). A shadowy reflection of the Heathcliff-Catherine relationship, the memory of her sibling bond with Hindley comes back to Nelly with “a gush of child’s sensations” (102) as she passes a sign-post on the Gimmerton Road, a favourite haunt of herself and Hindley as six year old playmates. As the past rushes back to Nelly, she raises her own phantoms of memory at that moment:

… as fresh as reality, it appeared that I beheld my early play-mate seated on the withered turf: his dark, square head bent forward, and his little hand scooping out the earth with a piece of slate. ‘Poor Hindley!’ I exclaimed involuntarily. I started: my bodily eye was cheated into a momentary belief that the child lifted its face and stared straight into mine! (102)
The way things in this novel change places or seem to turn into one another – human into animal, civilized into brutish, ghost into person and person into ghost, challenges the very notion of stability or certitude; as a mediator between nature and culture, Nelly Dean too, occupies two different spaces simultaneously: within the story in which she is involved, and out of the story, towards Lockwood, her civilized listener.

Frequently used in women’s gothic, devices such as repetitions and reflections weave a pattern round a central symbol: the mirror. This transparent medium is potent enough to create images of selves and shadows of selves as well. Mirrors give an idea of space behind the visible, introducing dark areas beyond the scopic (within the realm of visibility) range. It suggests the instability of the ‘real’ within the frame of the looking-glass and offers unpredictable metamorphoses of self into Other. Increasingly preoccupied with problems of vision and visibility, much of the gothic fiction by women is structured around spectral imagery. Mirrors, glasses, reflections, portraits, eyes are motifs often used in such literature, emphasizing the shifting, blurring, wavering nature of perception. The blank space of the mirror invites a deep gaze into it and often this act is reciprocated by an image of the Other, an alien and paradoxically, a part of the self, gazing back.

In the words of Simone de Beauvoir, “All her life the woman is to find the magic of her mirror a tremendous help in her effort to project herself and then attain self-identification” (Beauvoir 645). In woman specially, the image seen in the mirror is often identified with the narcissistic ego. As such, narcissism is a form of self-love; narcissists “never forget themselves. They prefer a larger stage to the intimacy of the alcove… they need eyes to gaze at them, ears to listen to them; as personages, they need the greatest possible audiences” (646). It is with such ideas that the elated Victoria utters “an exclamation of pleasure and surprise” as Berenza takes her to his mansion, wherein “a sumptuous and brilliantly illuminated chamber” dazzles her eyes; “covered with large resplendent mirrors”,
the walls of the brilliant room “variously” reflect “her simply attired but graceful figure” (Z 66). Reflecting her narcissistic self-mage in increasing numbers, the mirrors act as ego-boosters, further inflating Victoria’s excessive self-love and libidinous ego.

In another such situation, Lucy Snowe gazes in fascination at her insatiably narcissistic counterpart, as Ginevra Fanshawe and herself stand before the mirror; thus Lucy recalls the moment:

Putting her arm through mine, she drew me to the mirror. Without resistance, remonstrance, or remark, I stood and let her self-love have its feast and triumph: (V 186)

Standing together before the mirror, Ginevra and Lucy are two images related together by opposed psychic syndromes. Lucy is obsessed with self-effacement, whereas Ginevra is consumed with self-love. Narcissism and self-deprecation being two faces of self-obsession, Lucy often cannot see or recognize herself in the mirror, while Ginevra always sees only herself.

Materially static by nature, the mirror has a magical fluidity within its space --- to contemplate oneself in a mirror often gives rise to all the ambivalence and apprehension a viewer feels about him/ her self. Reflections can always contain danger, either of narcissism or of self-knowledge. As Emmeline, “with faltering steps and trembling nerves” goes to meet Lady Montreville, she is made to wait in “an anti-room, which was superbly furnished and covered with glasses, in which Emmeline had leisure to contemplate her pale and affrighted countenance” (E 155). The numerous images of a pale, alien face looking back at her, intensifies Emmeline’s sense of isolation, fear and dejection.

*Villette* makes us increasingly aware of the uncannily persistent emphasis on vision. Such is the extent of Lucy Snowe’s self-alienation, that it leads to an obsessive notion of
evasiveness and self-denial in front of the mirror. Attending a concert with the Brettons, Lucy sees their group reflected in a large mirror and deciphers the images in the following manner:

A handsome middle-aged lady in dark velvet; a gentleman who might be her son -- the best face, the finest figure, I thought, I had ever seen; a third person in a pink dress and black lace mantle.

I noted them all -- the third person as well as the other two -- and for the fraction of a moment, believed them all strangers, thus receiving an impartial impression of their appearance. But the impression was hardly felt and not fixed, before the consciousness that I faced a great mirror, filling a compartment between two pillars, dispelled it: the party was our own party. (V 274 - 75)

This sense of seeing oneself as another is one of the experiences that Freud lists as uncanny in his seminal essay on the subject. Relating his own unnerving experience of seeing himself, for a moment unrecognizable, in a mirrored train-compartment door, Freud states that uncanniness is the essence of such an experience. The familiar becomes unfamiliar through the unexpectedness of such experience, temporarily generating an eerie perspective on the self. After her traumatized experience in the Catholic confessional, Lucy Snowe faces a storm outside and falls unconscious on the streets of Villette. Once more she is rescued by Dr. John and taken into the Bretton household. On waking up, Lucy goes through an uncanny experience, as the seemingly unfamiliar surroundings turn familiar to her, while she gazes at its reflected image in the mirror; her past rushes back to her and she feels bewildered:

Bretton! Bretton! and ten years ago shone reflected in that mirror. And why did Bretton and my fourteenth year haunt me thus? (220)

To return to the past, as Lucy literally does here, is to journey into a spectral world that calls into question the stability and substantiality of her identity. The same spectre of loss
confronts Lucy in the mirror as once more, her desired space in the Bretton family is usurped by Paulina Mary; for the second time, Lucy confronts her double (a wish-fulfilling version of herself) in a mirror in La Terrasse:

Repairing to my own little sea-green room, there also I found a bright fire, and candles too were lit: a tall wax light stood on each side the great looking-glass; but between the candles, and before the glass, appeared something dressing itself-- an airy, fairy thing—small, slight, white—a winter spirit. (361-62)

The white-clad Nun of the Rue-Fossette repeatedly haunting Lucy is another “winter-spirit” like Paulina Mary, a reflection of pain and loss generated by Lucy’s morbid self-repression. Effectively, when Lucy thinks she has lost the last opportunity of seeing Paul, she perceives herself in a piece of mirror. As she gazes at her own reflection, “It said I was changed; my cheeks and lips were sodden-white, my eyes were glassy, and my eye-lids swollen and purple” (V 594). Lucy’s feeling of perpetual loss at Paul’s absence makes her interpret her own image in the mirror as a replica of the spectral Nun of the Pensionnat: ‘sodden-white’ with ‘glassy’ eyes, reflecting a blankness in the spectrum of desire.

As it appears, seeing their faces in the mirror is not a pleasant experience for heroines in women’s gothic texts. Catherine Earnshaw’s rejection of wifehood and motherhood issues from a severe feeling of loss of her pristine self. The weakening of her grasp on the world is most specifically shown by her inability to recognize her own face in the mirror. Explaining to Nelly that she is not mad, Catherine notes that “it’s night, and there are two candles on the table making the black press shine like jet” (WH 114). Ironically, there is no “black press” in the room, only a mirror in which Catherine sees and gets terrorized by her own image; Nelly Dean reminisces on her interaction with a distraught Catherine:
‘Don’t you see that face?’ she inquired, gazing earnestly at the mirror. And say what I could, I was incapable of making her comprehend it to be her own; (114)

The uncanny image Catherine sees in the mirror is both alien and hideously familiar; it is an image of who and what she has really become in the world’s terms: Mrs. Linton, the lady of Thrushcross Grange, as Nelly insists her to acknowledge. Thus, the disparity between her intrinsic sense of self and her image created by society destabilizes Catherine’s sense of identity. Her fractured vision captures a distorted self image in the mirror which she can only escape through self-extinction.

Like the mirror, the veil is also a deceptive screen that exudes ambiguity regarding appearance and reality. Evoking a feeling of the uncanny, the veil gives out the idea of something hidden underneath suddenly erupting into vision, thus generating unexpectedness and fear. On the other hand, the veil also conceals submerged passions and desires, forcibly repressed by society and yet dangerously smouldering within.

In The Mysteries of Udolpho, the black veil acts as a recurrent leitmotif, linking all the missing clues in the heroine’s quest. The silvery rays of the moon gleaming upon Emily’s veiled countenance give her “the contour of a Madona, with the sensibility of a Magdalen” (MU 184). It morally associates her with the black veil of the dead Marchioness, her aunt: another such epitome of feminine purity, goodness and suffering. Indeed, in quite a sinister gesture, the garrulous maid Dorothee tries to drape Emily in the black veil of the dead Marchioness, as she visits her room in the Chateau de Villeroi:

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

A distinctly sinister hint that disturbs Emily’s agitated soul, the situation brings to mind Freud’s association of the *Unheimlich* with “everything that ought to have remained … secret and hidden but has come to light” (SE vol. xvii, 345). Like the mystically enigmatic or seductively alluring veil, the uncanny is something that reveals itself only in order to re-veil. The significance of the veil as uncanny lies precisely in this dualism. It uncovers what is hidden and by doing so, effects a disturbing transformation of the familiar into the unfamiliar. The black veil of the dead Marchioness initiates Emily into the world of sexual passion and suffering. On the other hand, the black veil also associates her with the terrible fate of Signora Laurentini as Emily uncovers in the castle what she thinks to be a veiled portrait of the lady, but falls senseless, seeing a wax skeleton behind the veil (MU 248). Thus the veil enhances a feeling of ambivalence about female identity. The inevitable association between Emily’s dead aunt and Signora Laurentini (the good and the bad woman) is emphasized in the silver crucifix, the prayer book and the lute that Emily finds in the dead Marchioness’s room – things that are also associated with Sister Agnes, the mad nun (the changed identity of the ‘sinful’ Signora). The nature of shifting female identity that the veil suggests is also emphasized by Beauvoir, as she professes:

To say that woman is mystery is to say, not that she is silent, but that her language is not understood; she is there, but hidden behind veils; she exists beyond these uncertain appearances. What is she? Angel, demon, one inspired, an actress? … no answer is adequate because a fundamental ambiguity marks the feminine being ..  (Beauvoir 471)

For Emily, fear lies behind the veil, not only because of its ambiguity as a medium of concealment, but largely because as an uninitiated virgin, she is at once terribly attracted and
repulsed by the hidden violence, death and destruction concealed within female sexual passion.

The most fearful aspect of the veil is the amorphousness it suggests about human identity. The anxiety about the lack of a stable subjectivity is enhanced by the transforming aspect that the veil suggests. As an ambivalent physical marking of femininity, a veil not only conceals the female body and face, but marks the body as asexual. It serves as a camouflage that belies the actual sexuality of a woman. Thus in *Zofloya*, the veil metamorphs the masculinized body of Victoria into the fairy delicacy of Lilla, as she is bent on winning the love of Henriquez away from Lilla; for a degenerate, unwieldy and dark woman like Victoria, the process of dissimulating her frail and fair counterpart suggests the primacy of performance over fixed notion of identity. Victoria ‘performs’ the role of her fair rival pretty well as she wears “a veil of Lilla’s, and such parts of her dress as might suit indiscriminately either the one or the other” (*Z* 218). In *Masquerade and Civilisation*, Terry Castle comments on the disturbing nature of ambiguity within the act of masquerade:

> The masquerade … predicated the hallucinatory merging of self and other; it set up magical continuities between disparate bodies. (Castle 101-02)

The subversive exploits of women like Victoria reveal the dialogic struggle within female subjectivity. Acting upon the dubious nature of vision, individual identity undergoes a complete transformation: the ‘I’ becomes the ‘Other’ and in *Zofloya*, the catalyst is erotic desire. Victoria wears the identity of Lilla, makes love to a deluded Henriquez and drives him to death by his own hand.

As the foppish de Hamal’s device of masquerade, the Nun’s veil in *Villette* deceives the human eye to emphasize the shifting perspective of gender identity and metamorphoses.
However, the veil also conceals what is absolutely and essentially the ‘Other’, a phantom, which is pure absence, a perpetual blank in the framework of desire, a ‘none’. What Lucy finds out as she shreds the veiled effigy of the Nun to pieces, is that the veil conceals nothing but emptiness. It is this paradoxical complexity in the veil motif that gives rise to the disjunction between signifier and signified, between image and identity.

Dreams have long functioned in Gothic literature as important sites of meaning, wherein highly charged signifiers interact with ambiguous signifieds. In his *Interpretation of Dreams* (SE vol. v), Freud claims that a dream is a text to be deciphered and that dreams also reveal the deepest wounds in the psyche. In women’s gothic fiction, dreams reflect an inherent sense of lack, pain and fear, strewn with anxieties of loss, confused vision and fractured self.

Both Emmeline and Adelina suffer from identity crisis which pursues them in dreams. Adelina’s anguished vision encounters the angry gaze of her "brother William" (E 268), seemingly condemning her for sexual transgression. As an appendix to Adelina’s dream, "uneasy images" pursuing Emmeline in sleep are products of her suppressed fear, as she dreams of:

Godolphin wildly seeking vengeance of Fitz-Erward for the death of his sister. Then, instead of Fitz-Erward, Lord Delamere appeared to be the object of his wrath, and mutual fury seemed to animate them against the lives of each other. To them, her uncle, in all the phrenzy of grief and despair, succeeded; overwhelmed her with reproaches for the loss of his only son, and tore her violently away from Godolphin, who in vain pursued her. (426)

Angst-ridden, bewildered and terrified, both women visualize guilty images of themselves as ‘fallen’ woman and ‘fatal’ woman, condemned and accused by powerful patriarchal authorities.
According to Morris Dickstein’s observation, “Filmmakers realized early on that the darkened theater and the flickering images created a kind of dream space” (Dickstein 67). The ‘flickering images’ in dreams portrayed in women’s gothic communicate, quite frequently, destabilized notions of self. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, the passionate ravings of Sister Agnes, her criminal confessions, the hint that she gives Emily about a probable liaison between her father and the dead Marchioness, agitate Emily so much that even in sleep she suffers from nightmare in which “a vision of the dying nun” makes her “awaken in horrors” (MU 651). A lurking suspicion of adultery committed by her father leads to Emily’s crisis of identity. She fears herself to be the illegitimate daughter of the Marchioness. An intense fear of adult sexuality and self-repression lead to Emily’s dream-vision of the dying nun, a haunting image of suffering and extinction.

Dreams are also sites of repeated trauma and re-enactments of wound that live on indefinitely in the psyche. Catherine Earnshaw’s dreams re-enact over and over again the severing of her original union with Heathcliff. In her dream, Catherine visits heaven and feels unhappy there because she is not with Heathcliff. Thrown out of heaven, she wanders on the moors around the Heights, unable to accept the world of the body or the world of the spirit. As she confesses to Nelly, “I’ve no more business to marry Edgar Linton than I have to be in heaven” (WH 80); so claimed, Catherine’s vision of heaven proves to be similar to the condition of her marriage to Edgar. According to social codes, she should find happiness in such a marriage, yet she finds none because the cost of the marriage is the denial of her second self. Acting as a mirror to her subconscious, Catherine’s dream holds up the image of her divided self.

In his discussion on the ‘double’, Otto Rank perceives: “In the living human being … there dwells, like an alien guest, a weaker double … whose realm is the world of dreams” (Rank 6). What renders the dream sequences in women’s gothic particularly significant is the
relationship it bears to cultural taboos. Freud regards anything uncanny as provoking dread, as being subject to cultural taboo. Dreams act as mirrors to the individual subject, projecting his / her suppressed self. The series of dreams haunting Victoria in Dacre’s novel are of such nature. In her first dream, Victoria finds herself as a voyeur, gazing into the private world of Henriquez and Lilla. Smitten by jealousy, she turns away and sees the devil Zofloya, emerging from “a group of shadowy figures” (Z 135) and extending his arms towards her. Face to face with her own devilish self-image terrifies Victoria and she wakes up. In the second dream, Victoria stops the marriage between Henriquez and Lilla by offering her pledge of constancy to the devil in exchange of the fulfilment of her desire:

In an instant she occupied the place of Lilla; and Lilla, no longer the blooming maid, but a pallid spectre, fled shrieking through the aisles of the church, while Berenza, suddenly wounded by an invisible hand, sunk covered with blood at the foot of the altar! Exultation filled the bosom of Victoria; she attempted casting her eyes upon him, she beheld him change to a frightful skeleton, and in terror awoke! (136)

In her dream, Victoria perceives herself going the devil's way, turning her feminine self into spectre, as she transforms into an unsexed, unnatural being, the devil’s mistress. The third dream mirrors Victoria’s guilty mind as, transfixed in her disturbed sleep, she sees herself as murderess, her bloody victims escape her to heaven, leaving her in darkness with “a heart beating violently and a throbbing brain” (144).

The multiple notions of self imaged in women’s gothic fiction are tortuous as well as complex. Anxiety, despair, doubt and numerous other complexities about the nature of the self are hardly the exclusive prerogative of any one sex or class; “but to give visual form to the fear of self, to hold anxiety up to the Gothic mirror of the imagination” (Moers 107), is more common in the writings of women than of men. The reason, as Ellen Moers offers it, is “that nothing separates female experience from male experience more sharply and more early
in life, than the compulsion to visualize the self” (107). Seeking piecemeal images of self in the gaze of others adds to the problem of confused vision of the heroine in women’s gothic. Without an organic notion of wholeness, she seems to stand in a hall of mirrors, where, like the Princess in Christina Rossetti’s poem, her eyes meet myriad versions of self: spectral, wavering images, reflecting

Self to right hand, self to left hand,
Self in every place,
Self- same solitary figure, self-same
Seeking face. ("A Royal Princess")

Groping through this cluster of images, her mission is to ‘seek’ her true face in a crowd of spectres.
Notes


6. “So free from danger, free from fear, / They crossed the court: right glad they were.”


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