Chapter-4

'THE ARRESTING GAZE'

She fixed on him a mournful and enquiring eye. ‘Do not look thus on me,’ said he, turning away and pressing her hand; ‘I cannot bear those looks’. (MU 503)

I

The "enquiring" gaze of Emily St. Aubert makes her prodigal lover cringe before her. He cannot meet those "looks" which act as a mirror to his own sense of fallen worth. This represents an iconic moment in women’s gothic, when the man is caught unaware, shorn of his power and glory and stands exposed under the heroine’s powerful gaze.

According to Lacan, the male gaze is one which can resist the male psychic fear of "castration". The viewer / subject’s pleasure in looking without being seen defers his necessary confrontation with the fact of castration-anxiety, because such undisturbed looking confronts the subject with a sense of completeness associated with the pleasure of the gaze at the ‘mirror stage’. But the returning look from the place of the ‘other’ (object of the gaze) disrupts that sense of wholeness. If the woman ‘looks back’, she revokes castration anxiety in the male psyche, her gaze, in a way, creating the petrifying effect of Medusa eyes. Thus, male desire prohibits the woman a counter – gaze, which is fearsome; it gets through the façade of invincibility men hold up for women to adore and fear. But as Foucault points out, "Whenever there is power, there is resistance". Subjectivity can be recognized as the site where the generations of power and the possibilities of resistance are played out. Even David Rodowick, following Freud, reveals that the act of vision includes not only the ‘act’ of the look, but also the ‘return’ of the look from the object’s point of view.
The perspective on reality presented from the standpoint of the subordinated seems to offer a less conventional and a different view than the socially established one. In addition to their propensity to experience rebellious emotions, women, like all subordinated people, are relatively adept at identifying such emotions, in themselves and others. This is because of their social responsibility for caretaking, including emotional nurturance. It has required them to develop a special ability in recognizing hidden emotions and comprehending the genesis of those emotions. ‘O could I know’, as Emily thinks of Montoni, ‘what passes in that mind; could I know the thoughts, that are known there…’ (MU 243) Much of the gothic heroine’s time is spent in such subtle analysis of the men around her. Joanna Russ points to this phenomenon as a glorification of “what most real women spend their time doing”. In real life, she says, this task is “usually necessary, but boring”; (45) in gothic, the glamour of “Over – Subtle Emotions” (46) exalts the heroine, engaged perpetually in deciphering the men around her. This ability to read emotions is a skill that gives women a special advantage both in understanding the mechanisms of domination and in envisioning freer ways to live. The female gothic novel depicts its young heroines as women who ostensibly appear to be conforming to their acceptable roles within the patriarchy; yet, subtly and invariably, they always look through the keyhole, search for loopholes in the strictures of patriarchal regulation, find out chinks in the male armour and actually subvert the father’s power at every possible occasion. This chapter intends to explore the nature of female gaze as a covert instrument of power in deciphering, measuring and combating male aggression in female gothic.

The genre of women's gothic constitutes what Diane Long Hoeveler terms as "victim feminism" (Hoeveler 7), an ideology of female power through pretended and staged weakness. The position that Mrs. Radcliffe and her followers advocate throughout women’s
gothic novels is a form of passive aggression presented through the female protagonists. This makes way for a subtle subversion of power strategy through the tactful use of notions of femininity such as coyness, passivity, submissiveness and care as devices to achieve power. When the observer is a woman, the perspective is of a different sort. The psychology of women has consistently been described as different (from that of men) in its greater orientation toward relationships and interdependence; this implies a more relative and contextual mode of judgment and a different level of moral understanding. The male imagination gets inspired by individual achievement. Power and separation help the man to secure an identity achieved through work, but they leave him at a distance from others, who seem in some sense, out of his sight. According to Hegel, autonomous selfhood develops through the ability to affect others by one’s acts. Hegel explained that in order to exist for oneself, one has to exist for an ‘other’, and that in desiring an ‘other’, one wants to be recognized as an individual. 4 This view of relationship corresponds to Wollstonecraft’s portrayal of an ideal of mutual companionship and intellectual friendship. A similar ideal manifests itself in the wish–fulfilment dreams of women’s gothic romance, which relegate power struggles to the heroine’s confrontation with the villain, whereas her interaction with the hero portrays a reciprocation of tender sentiments.

II

The male *bildungsroman* in the 18th and 19th centuries was more or less a masculinist ideological project intended to depict the patriarchy as a benign force (as Dickens presents in *Nicholas Nickleby* through the benevolent Cheeryble brothers who help the penniless young Nicholas to save his family from the vicious and selfish interests of his uncle and achieve material and social security). On the other hand, women's gothic novels positioned the
patriarchal system as a duplicitous, inscrutable, imposing power structure. The ambivalence and apprehensiveness pervading these works generate precisely from the cynical portrayal of what a woman has to do in order to survive in such a world. The very covertness of female power, the nature of its disguise, the omission of its overt reference are interesting, as subversion, indirection and disguise are natural tactics of the resisting weak, subtle strategies for managing the most intense assertions of power.

Power is the ability to impose one’s self on another or to defend one’s self from imposition. Women’s gothic novels suggest more ways in which women’s writing may be both the locus of compensating fantasies and the site of resistance. It is power, not as domination, but as ability that converts a woman into a heroine. One of her characteristic strategies is to subvert masculine control by quietly exercising feminine capability, a form of agency for resisting dominant social disciplines. This builds up an alternative vision of female power, for, as Natalie Zemon Davis has observed: “Power can lodge in dangerous nooks and crannies.” The danger men describe in their stories of intimacy is a danger of entrapment or betrayal, being caught in a smothering relationship or humiliated by rejection and deceit. In contrast, the danger women portray in their tales of achievement is a danger of isolation, a fear that in standing out or being set apart by success, they will be left alone. The heroine in women’s gothic is in search of an ideal Other, a counterpart to help her fulfil her mission of self-aggrandizement. Ironically, the Other that society offers is someone who does not allow her an equal footing. So, she tries out a covert gaze into male psyche in order to gauge her own desire.

This brings us to the complicated notions of female desire. Women gothic novelists were writing in a society which was not in the habit of taking into account the concept of female desire. Considered as a strictly tabooed idea, female desire was looked upon as something non–
existent. In gothic novels, women writers give an outlet to female desire, though in a covert form. This makes a huge difference precisely in re-visioning women’s experiences to produce ways of articulating the different facets of feminine psychic formations, sexuality and devising ways of combat against a gynophobic culture.

Somewhat ambivalent by nature, female desire consists of elements that are pleasurable and masochistic at the same time. According to Beauvoir: “We should regard as an original fact this blending of urgency and apprehension which is female desire: it is the indissoluble synthesis of attraction and repulsion that characterises it” (Beauvoir ch.ii). Freud proclaims that desire persists as an effect of a primordial absence and it therefore indicates that in this area, there is something fundamentally impossible about satisfaction itself. It is this fact that seems to lie behind Freud’s statement that “We must reckon with the possibility that something in the nature of the sexual instinct itself is unfavourable to the realisation of complete satisfaction” (SE vol.xi, 188-89). Pain and insatiability are the triggers that evoke desire. As far as women are concerned, desire for another is always fraught with associated pitfalls as is natural for any tabooed object. ‘Taboo’ is the category into which are placed those anomalous areas of life which resist conventional explication and which therefore simultaneously demand to be shunned and to attract by virtue of their fatal interest. The fundamental structure of taboo, as Freud points, is this evocation of emotional ambivalence, driving the mind into a state of attraction and repulsion. Gothic heroines, in their probing gaze within male psyche, are often troubled by such feelings of ambivalence generated within their own perception.

Such a curious mingling of aversion and attraction marks Emmeline’s apprehensive gaze towards her cousin Lord Delamere, the rash, handsome youth, hopelessly in love with her against all odds. His striking appearance, generous candidness and absolute natural superiority in
comparison with other gentlemen of his status and above all, his unwavering passion for Emmeline influence her favoured gaze:

.... for the comparison between the people she had lately been among, and Delamere, was infinitely favourable to him. Such unabated love, in a man who might chuse among the fairest and most fortunate of women, was very seducing;

(E 125)

Following the dictates of sensibility, Emmeline struggles to keep prudence ahead of passion; yet, her unconscious fascination for Delamere manifests itself in her pencil-sketch of the young man which accidentally falls into his hand:

A piece of silver – paper doubled together enclosed another; he opened it – it was a drawing of himself, done with a pencil, and slightly tinged with a crayon; strikingly like; but it seemed unfinished, and somewhat effaced. (140)

A product of Emmeline's fascinated gaze at Delamere's masculine appeal, the "somewhat effaced" character of the sketch bears evidence of a conscious feminine suppression of roused passion. But Emmeline's captivated gaze is also mixed with fear for the darker side of his nature – his haughtiness, the stubborn and selfish vehemence of his passion, his proneness to suspicion and his ungovernable temper: Emmeline's judgmental eye cannot but take into account these dangerous characteristic traits of her precocious lover:

The regard she was sensible of for Delamere did not make her blind to his faults; and she saw, with pain, that the ungovernable violence of his temper frequently obscured all his good qualities, and gave his character an appearance of ferocity, which offered no very flattering prospect to whosoever should be his wife. (105)
Self – involved, passionate, prone to grab his sword for settling the score of his many grievances, Delamere’s phallic energy is too dangerous in Emmeline’s eyes and frightens her away from him. In contrast, she fancies Godolphin, the tender-hearted sentimental hero, “a fortunate compound of the insinuating softness of Fitz – Edward with the fire and vivacity of Delamere”(269); a personification of the best of both worlds, Godolphin is female desire come true, a balance of sexual attractiveness and delicate sensitivity, rarely found in reality.

Emmeline’s gradual attraction towards Godolphin is overtly manifested in a scene which portrays her as a voyeur to the latter’s private moments. Arriving at the Isle of Wight, Emmeline takes a look at his house from outside:

A sand walk led round the lawn. Emmeline followed it, and it brought her close to the windows of a parlour. They were still open: she looked in; and saw, by the light of the fire, for there were no candles in the room, Godolphin sitting alone. He leaned on a book, which there was not light enough to read; scattered papers lay round him, and a pen and ink were on the table. Emmeline could not forbear looking at him a moment before she approached the door. She could as little command her curiosity to know on what he was thus deeply thinking.

(295–96)

No wonder that Smith’s heroine favours the civilized bourgeois refinement of Godolphin as against the brutally phallic impetuosity of the aristocratic Delamere; and yet throughout the novel, she gets intermittently weakened by the latter’s irresistible attraction; her iron will to keep a stern distance from him wavers time and again, whenever she sees him in distress, such as in the following situation:

… tho’ she was immovably determined against receiving him again as a lover, she had not been able to steel her heart against his melancholy appearance; his palid countenance, his
emaciated form, extremely affected her. And when he approached her, bowed with a dejected air, and offered to take her hand -- her haughtiness, her resentment forsook her -- she trembling gave it, and expressed in incoherent words her satisfaction at seeing him better;… (373–74)

Delamere’s self – consuming passion meets the inevitable end of a violent death in duel and Emmeline chooses the safer hands of Godolphin as her husband. Still, even as a married woman, Emmeline’s retrospective gaze is often dimmed at the reflection of an unquiet Delamere: "… the tears of rapture with which the greatness of her own happiness sometimes filled her eyes, were mingled with those of sorrow for his untimely death." (476) Though she marries the smart, coolheaded, softhearted naval officer, Emmeline’s wistful gaze at the tragic fate of her violent lover exposes her enduring fascination for him.

In The Mysteries of Udolpho, a shared love of nature and fine arts results in Emily’s admiring gaze into the sensitive soul of the gentle Valancourt through a book of verses:

She sought for one, in which Valancourt had been reading the day before, and hoped for the pleasure of re–tracing a page, over which the eyes of a beloved friend had lately passed, of dwelling on the passages, which he had admired, and of permitting them to speak to her in the language of his own mind, and to bring himself to her presence. (MU 58)

Thus Valancourt, as a fancied figure of romance, repeatedly appears in Emily’s vision as, separated from him, she is being transported to Udolpho; on her way through green pastures, winding rivers, craggy mountains and steep pathways,

...her fancy often gave her the figure of Valancourt, whom she saw on a point of the cliffs, gazing with awe and
admiration on the imagery around him; or wandering pensively along the vale below, frequently pausing to look back upon the scenery, and then, his countenance glowing with the poet’s fire, pursuing his way to some overhanging height. (168)

Emily’s fancy is too close to that of Gray’s wanderer – poet (Gray, *Elegy*), iconic figure in the discourse of romantic sensibility. Even so, part of her heart remains defensive against Valancourt’s charming sensitivity. Wary and vigilant, her eyes detect early signs of moral weakness in him, as she spots her lover flirting with society women at a party:

…her emotion may be imagined when, as she stood with her aunt, looking at one of the groups, she perceived Valancourt; saw him dancing with a young and beautiful lady, saw him conversing with her with a mixture of attention and familiarity, such as she had seldom observed in his manner. (130)

Valancourt’s guilty response to her gaze, his “altered countenance…on perceiving her” (131), confirms the truth to Emily’s troubled eyes. Much later, when Emily becomes an heiress and returns to her late father’s estate, she finds the aura of romance related to Valancourt completely tarnished as he stands, exposed to her, a man entrapped by vices like gambling and lust:

The lights, which were hung among the trees, under which they sat, allowed her a more perfect view of the countenance she had so frequently in absence endeavoured to recollect, and she perceived, with some regret, that it was not the same as when last she saw it. There was all its wonted intelligence and fire; but it had lost much of the simplicity, and somewhat of the open benevolence, that used to characterize it. (502)
Ironically, Emily is more susceptible to the villain Montoni’s image than to that of her lover. Her very first view of Montoni makes an intense effect of his powerful presence in her mind:

This Signor Montoni had an air of conscious superiority, animated by spirit, and strengthened by talents, to which every person seemed involuntarily to yield. The quickness of his perceptions was strikingly expressed on his countenance, yet that countenance could submit implicitly to occasion; … His visage was long, and rather narrow, yet he was called handsome; and it was, perhaps, the spirit and vigour of his soul, sparkling through his features that triumphed for him. Emily felt admiration, but not the admiration that leads to esteem; for it was mixed with a degree of fear she knew not exactly wherefore. (122)

Montoni’s masculine swagger and uncommon personal magnetism impresses Emily so much that she is surprised at his courtship of her aunt; according to her, “…that Montoni, with his discernment, his figure, and pretensions, should make a choice of Madame Cheron -- appeared most wonderful.” (133)

Emily’s prying eyes might be unconsciously gazing into the duplicitous "pretensions" of the false suitor, but a hint of mild ruefulness at his unnatural choice of the aunt instead of the niece may be read influencing her gaze in this scene.

For a long time, Emily is as ignorant of the intentions of Montoni as she is of the ground plan of the castle of Udolpho; the little she glimpses at, both repels and attracts her. In a highly overwrought mental state, her imagination magnifies his power over her as she continues, secretly watching him, both amazed and appalled:

The fire and keenness of his eye, its proud exultation, its bold fierceness, its sullen watchfulness, as occasion, and even slight occasion, had called forth the latent soul, she had often
observed with emotion; while from the usual expression of his countenance she had always shrunk. (157)

Not only does Emily tend to open unlocked doors and venture into mysterious passageways, she repeatedly reminds Montoni of her presence by sending her servant with messages to him, visiting him herself, and on one occasion, throwing her arms around his knees to implore mercy for her aunt. To the humiliation of the beautiful Emily, Montoni takes little notice of either herself or her aunt (Madame Montoni) as objects of erotic interest. He is much more preoccupied with politics and power. If anything, he serves as a restraint on the passions of his wild associates, so that Emily “considered his presence as a protection, though she knew not what she should fear” (186). The unspecified assault which Emily so fears derives partly from within, from the "disordering" of her mind by repressed and uncomprehended desire. The intense emotional tension tormenting Emily as she obsessively tries to read the enigmatic Montoni’s facial expressions and body language has a sexual resonance. As she keeps on watching him at various moments, she is inevitably drawn by his magnetic appeal:

Emily observed that, at the mention of any daring exploit, Montoni’s eyes lost their sullenness, and seemed instantaneously to gleam with fire; yet they still retained somewhat of a lurking cunning, and she sometimes thought that their fire partook more of the glare of malice than the brightness of valour, though the latter would well have harmonized with the high chivalric air of his figure, in which Cavigni, with all his gay and gallant manners, was his inferior. (171--72)

Mrs. Radcliffe tells us more than once that Emily found Montoni and one or two of his friends “uncommonly handsome” despite their dark complexion and fierce expressions. Gazing out of the window, she observes a party of horsemen dressed in uniform and bearing daggers,
and hopes, “she scarcely knew why, that Montoni would accompany the party…” (302). Following the poisoned chalice episode, Montoni orders solitary confinement for Emily and her aunt; even then, as the castle suddenly gets besieged and news of Montoni’s probable death in combat reaches Emily, it gives her spirits “a sudden shock, and she grew faint as she saw him in imagination expiring at her feet.” (316)

Throughout the novel, Emily’s subconscious fear that she might get increasingly attracted to the enigmatic Montoni, seems to haunt her. This fact comes out in the open only once, as the rejected and jealous suitor Count Morano reads Emily’s subconscious and indignantly proclaims his discovery in the following manner:

‘Emily,’ said the Count, ‘why will you reduce me to adopt this conduct? How much more willingly would I persuade, than compel you to become my wife! But, by heaven! I will not leave you to be sold by Montoni. Yet a thought glances across my mind, that brings madness with it. I know not how to name it. It is preposterous – it cannot be – yet you tremble – you grow pale! It is! It is so; - you -- love Montoni ! ’ cried Morano, grasping Emily’s wrist, and stamping his foot on the floor. (265)

Protesting and fearing too much, Emily can only hope to conceal her attraction to Montoni from herself, by imagining such a horrible crime on his part, as the possible murder of Signora Laurentini, that would make him truly unworthy of her admiration. Even so, unlike Valancourt’s vices, which make Emily sternly and sadly recoil from him, the real and imaginary sins of Montoni both repel and thrill her, making way for a subconscious sexual arousal. Even after she gets settled in her idyllic estate with the tamed Valancourt as her husband, Emily wistfully casts a retrospective gaze at her fantastic adventures in Udolpho, the dark, brooding figure of Montoni looming large in her fancy:
Montoni, too, often rose to her fancy, such as she had seen him in his days of triumph, bold, spirited and commanding; such also as she had since beheld him in his days of vengeance; and now, only a few short months had passed— and he had no longer the power, or the will to afflict; - he had become a clod of earth, and his life was vanished like a shadow! (580)

Like a teenage girl’s fantasy figure, an epitome of sheer libidinous masculine energy, Montoni captivates and enthralls Emily as long as she remains in Udolpho, and continues haunting her daydreams for the rest of her life.

Desire is like a smouldering fire in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, kindling the uninitiated gaze of Emily with an urge for exploring the forbidden territory of adult sexuality, greed and lust; in *Zofloya*, the naked intensity of unrestrained female desire brings chaos and destruction. Desire is collateral with power- lust in Victoria, whose sexual sadism renders men impotent and petrified before her. It starts with the intellectual sensualist Berenza, in whose enamoured gaze Victoria finds cordial for her unsatiated narcissism:

...the age of Berenza was five and thirty: his person was majestic, and his countenance, though serious, possessed a sweetness of expression, that riveted and delighted the eye: but it was not this so much that engaged the attentions and allured the fancy of the young Victoria – no, it was the flattering remark that herself exclusively attracted his regards – regards, which the natural haughtiness, and apparent coldness of his character, rendered peculiarly gratifying to her vain mind. (Z 28)

Totally focused on the fact that Berenza’s wealth and social position will be her coveted goal, Victoria’s searching gaze wants to read him inside out:
...she watched, with scrutinizing eye, every movement, every look; she listened to and weighed every word he spoke; then, combining the whole, discovered ere long the secret which pressed upon his feelings. (77)

While saving Berenza’s life from a midnight assault, Victoria gets wounded; she takes a masochistic pleasure in her severe pain, as she gazes at Berenza’s anxious face and becomes sure than she has won him: “the triumph she experienced then, when she beheld his violent anguish, more than repaid her for the pain she felt” (83).

After five years of uneventful married life, Victoria is all of a sudden roused from her apathy by a new passion with the arrival of her brother – in – law Henriquez, and his Moorish servant Zofloya. She is badly smitten by the youthful Henriquez; in comparison, the much older Berenza becomes obnoxious to her eyes – “gazing upon him with admiration, in an instant [she] drew ungrateful comparisons between their persons, to the disadvantage of him in whom her soul should have discerned no fault”(129). For the first time in life, lust makes Victoria irrational, open to forbidden fancies. In frustration, she contemplates her first crime, the murder of her husband and in answer to her subconscious desire, Zofloya appears, ready to serve her.

Zofloya resounds with subtly erotic celebrations of the male body. Victoria’s lustful gaze on Henriquez is paralleled by that of Megalena Strozzi (Berenza’s ex – mistress), when in a remarkable instance of gender – role reversal, she feasts her eyes on the bare body of Victoria’s estranged brother, the sleeping Leonardo and desires him as her new sex – object:

…she softly approached to contemplate him – his hands were clasped over his head, and on his cheek, where the hand of health had planted her brown – red rose, the pearly gems of his tears still hung – his auburn hair sported in graceful curls about his forehead and temples, agitated by the passing breeze – his vermeil lips were half open, and disclosed his polished teeth -- his bosom, which he had uncovered to admit
the refreshing air, remained disclosed, and contrasted by its snowy whiteness the animated hue of his complexion.

Beautiful and fascinating, though in the simple garb of a peasant, did the wondering female consider the youth before her. Struck with lively admiration, she knew not how to quit the spot… (103)

In the figure of Zofloya, the novel explores the most taboo of all human sexual desires in Romantic Era England, the passionate desire of a beautiful white woman for the black male body. Victoria’s transgressive desire for Henriquez in some measure acts as a cover for the recognition of a more transgressive desire for his black servant. Once a slave, Zofloya occupies the position of the tempter and Victoria gradually comes to look at him as an object of intense desire. Zofloya’s body, consistently treated as spectacle, objectifies him for Victoria. The dream in which he first appears to her is a manifestation of Victoria’s own subconscious desire for this awesome prince of darkness; in her dream, Victoria saw:

..... a Moor, of a noble and majestic form. He was clad in a habit of white and gold; on his head he wore a white turban, which sparkled with emeralds, and was surmounted by a waving feather of green; his arms and legs, which were bare, were encircled with the finest oriental pearl; he wore a collar of gold round his throat, and his ears were decorated with gold rings of an enormous size. Victoria contemplated this figure with an inexplicable awe, and as she gazed, he bent his knee, and extended his arms towards her. (136)

Time and again, Victoria attempts to comprehend the true nature of the enigmatic Moor, and gets more hypnotically drawn to him, as on this occasion:

…gazing upon the attractive Moor, she saw such unconquerable fascination, that her eyes sought the ground, as fearful to express the conscious emotion of her bosom. (148)
She desires the indistinguishable pain and pleasure that his presence brings her. Indeed, it is Victoria’s own desire that empowers Zofloya to approach her. This is a coded version of female agency for sexual fulfilment, as Victoria herself conjures up the materiality of her demon lover, and urges him to help and possess her, reversing the familiar trajectory of male desire. This becomes more palpable in the cave of the banditti, where Victoria extends her hand as Zofloya leads her to a retired nook for rest. She almost submits herself to him as she offers her hand:

He took it with tenderness, yet delicate reserve, and raised it to his lips – his manner but increased to ardour the feelings of Victoria. The dying embers at the further side of the cavern cast round a dusky light – the form, the features, and, above all, the luminous eyes of Zofloya appeared more than human – they shone with a brilliant fire – resistless fascination dwelt about him. Victoria, as he held her hand to his lips, gazed upon him with admiration and gratitude, and her high wrought emotion vented itself in a flood of tears! (239)

This scene of potential seduction is resonant with Victoria’s self – abandonment to Zofloya, which is a form of her sexual appeasement.

Left to her own isolated imaginary world of imagination, Mary Shelley’s Mathilda constructs an ideal image of her estranged father and nurtures it into adulthood. She fondly imagines how he will act, feel and speak when they meet. The danger of such speculative vision is that it creates the illusion of an object that often has little relation to reality. It is in more or less similar terms that Nancy Chodorow analyzes a daughter’s gaze at her father:

… a daughter looks to her father for a sense of separateness and for the same confirmation of her specialness that her brother receives from her mother. She… is willing to deny her father’s limitations… as long as she feels loved. She is more able to do this because his distance means that she does not really know him. The relationship, then, because of the
father’s distance and importance to her, occurs largely as fantasy and idealization, and lacks the grounded reality which a boy’s relation to his mother has.6

Long before her father returns to England, Mathilda constructs his image from a picture, a letter (written to her aunt by her father where he expresses a wish to reclaim his daughter once he returns), and some past history on which she consistently broods:

... the idea of my unhappy, wandering father was the idol of my imagination. I bestowed on him all my affections; there was a miniature of him that I gazed on continually; I copied his last letter and read it again and again. Sometimes it made me weep; and at other times I repeated with transport those words, - ‘One day I may claim her at your hands’ (M14)

Like an adolescent's pin–up hero, this image possesses the ideal qualities she desires in her father. In her favourite daydream, Mathilda dresses herself as a boy (seemingly, to overcome her sense of lack as a girl), and goes to seek her father. Like Ellena in Mrs. Radcliffe’s The Italian, she would wear his miniature on her breast and when he recognized her, sometimes in a desert, sometimes in a populous city, at a ball or on a vessel (exotic and romantic backgrounds conjured up by her visions of fancy), he would always speak the same words: “My daughter, I love thee!” (14). Words, such as these, profess the daughter's earnest craving for the love of an absent father. The fantasy of the daughter shapes her relationship with the father as essentially dyadic, devoid of realistic encroachment by other people. The father returns only when Mathilda is sixteen and in full bloom of her youth. Like a lovelorn maiden, she keeps on gazing into her father's latest message to her aunt, where he expresses his eagerness to meet his daughter. In her memoir, Mathilda relives those fond moments of agitation and mental turmoil:

I read those words with devouring eyes; I kissed them, wept over them and exclaimed, ‘He will love me!’......All sleep and appetite fled from me; I could only read and re – read his
letter, and in the solitude of the woods imagine the moment of our meeting. (15)

In Mathilda’s secluded life, her father exudes a romantic glamour and an aura of the unknown. As he talks to her about his past life, his passion for her mother and his travels in distant lands, it all seems deliciously strange to the daughter and her gaze on her father is both “attracted and enchanted” (16). One recalls similar reactions of Desdemona as she listens to Othello’s military exploits in distant lands and awestruck, casts her eyes on the Moor, her revered hero. In Mathilda’s eyes, she and her father are bound in a mutually exclusive relationship, whereby each one entirely possesses the other:

I was always happy when near my father. It was a subject of regret to me whenever we were joined by a third person, yet if I turned with a disturbed look towards my father, his eyes fixed on me and beaming with tenderness instantly restored joy to my heart. (18)

Mathilda fancies herself a Psyche (the nymph in Greek myth, who fell in love with Eros, the God of Love), living “for awhile in an enchanted palace, amidst odours, and music, and every luxurious delight” (18); this "enchanted palace", to Mathilda, is her idyllic paternal home, now that the loving father is there. However, this aura of happiness and fulfilment is destroyed as Mathilda attracts a suitor, an eligible young gentleman who asks for her father's permission to court her. Mathilda notes her father's drastic change after the suitor's sudden and mysterious withdrawal. In her memoir, she notes:

I saw his brows contracted, his eyes fixed in sullen fierceness on the ground and his voice so gentle and so dear made me shiver when he addressed me. (19)
No longer the loving god Eros, he suddenly becomes "the king of Hell" to her. She gets a fitful glimpse of her father’s guilty passion as she innocently refers Alfieri’s "Myrrha", a tragedy on father–daughter incest, to him; thus, she recalls:

I chanced to cast my eyes on my father and met his: for the first time the expression of those beloved eyes displeased me, and I saw with affright that his whole frame shook with some concealed emotion that in spite of his efforts half conquered him. (20-21)

She compares herself with “Proserpine who was gaily and heedlessly gathering flowers on the sweet plain of Enna, when the King of Hell snatched her away to the abodes of death and misery” (19–20). All these mythical and literary allusions of romantic–tragic pairs in Mathilda’s narrative bring out her own subconscious desire for her father, the iconic man she first sets her maiden eyes on.

In Wuthering Heights, Catherine Earnshaw has to make a choice between the two men in her life; she makes the wrong choice as she has to choose between incompatible social realities (spiritual freedom and material prosperity) for a married Victorian woman. Gazing at her two suitors, she can very well judge that they are as different as chalk and cheese. The housekeeper Nelly Dean also observes the same thing as she notes:

Doubtless Catherine marked the difference between her friends, as one came in and the other went out. The contrast resembled what you see in exchanging a bleak, hilly, coal country for a beautiful fertile valley… (WH 71)

With Heathcliff, her childhood playmate, Catherine feels herself free from social norms and conventions; not a daughter, sister or a wife, she fancies instead that she is an individual enjoying an idyllic escape from repressive social roles. On the other hand, she is seduced by Edgar Linton’s money, position and manners. She feels deeply that Heathcliff is “more myself
than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same; and Linton’s is as different as a moonbeam from lightning, or frost from fire” (80); yet she exchanges the fire of Heathcliff for the frost of Linton, because she wants the best of both worlds. She wants passion and respectability, but such a combination is not possible for successfully socialized Victorian women.

A confirmed narcissist, Catherine always has had her own ways; she looks at everything from only her point of view. As Nelly Dean observes: “...it was nothing less than murder in her eyes for anyone to presume to stand up and contradict her” (87). Catherine differentiates her own desire for Edgar and Heathcliff as between the convenient and the essential; thus she confesses to Nelly Dean:

My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods: time will change it, I’m well aware, as winter changes the trees. My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath: a source of little visible delight, but necessary. (81)

Catherine makes her choice on a belief that she knows the two men thoroughly enough to be able to control them according to her whim. Considering only her own interest, she wants to believe that “though everybody hated and despised each other, they could not avoid loving me” (113). But her narcissistic gaze is weak enough to misjudge both the men in her life; Edgar, thought of as apathetic, weak and effeminate, turns out to be an authoritative patriarch under his façade of softness, while Heathcliff, “an arid wilderness of furze and whinstone” (97) shapes himself into a calculative, confident and brutish young man, returning to take his girl and revenge. Catherine pathetically clings to her own version of Heathcliff by proclaiming in her sick bed: “That is not my Heathcliff. I shall love mine yet…” (143); ironically, she has learned too
late that the wounded gothic villain (as Heathcliff has become) cannot also play the role of the soft and complying sentimental hero (which she wants him to be).

Catherine’s faulty gaze is shared by Isabella who gets enamoured of Heathcliff to such an extent that she rebels against her family, defies her brother’s warnings and elopes to marry Heathcliff. Roused by Heathcliff’s raw masculine virility, Isabella hero – worships him. In her fascinated eyes, Heathcliff is the dark, brooding Byronic hero, with a heart of gold beneath a fierce exterior. Heathcliff sarcastically comments on her lack of insight and moral blindness in abandoning her family for him:

‘She abandoned them under a delusion’, he answered; ‘picturing in me a hero of romance, and expecting unlimited indulgences from my chivalrous devotion. I can hardly regard her in the light of a rational creature, so obstinately has she persisted in forming a fabulous notion of my character and acting on the false impressions she cherished.’ (135)

It is only after her marriage that Isabella’s eyes are opened with a shock to Heathcliff’s actuality. Gazing at her husband, she feels amazed, as the brutal truth about his extraordinary hatred and vehemence strikes her: ‘Is Mr. Heathcliff a man? If so, is he mad? And if not, is he a devil?’ (124). --- She knows best the answer.

Lucy Snowe, the school – mistress in Villette is the archetypal observer all her life. A self – confessed recluse by nature and social position, she acknowledges two lives: the life of thought and the life of fancy. Her gaze on life in general corresponds to these dual entities in herself. Like the wise Timon, as Ginevra Fanshawe playfully calls her, Lucy casts a judgmental eye on everyone around her. On the other hand, she continually tries to blindfold her innate, personal gaze, inflamed by repressed emotions. The man who rouses these emotions to a painful intensity is Graham Bretton, her long – lost childhood crush, who reappears in her life as
Dr. John, the guide and saviour on her first night in Villette. Lucy’s admiring gaze pays princely tributes to her knight – errant:

I saw that he was young, distinguished, and handsome man; he might be a lord, for anything I knew: nature had made him good enough for a prince, I thought. (V 78)

Much later in the Bretton household, looking at a water-colour portrait of the boy Graham, Lucy, for the first time, confesses to the reader, her childhood crush on the son of her godmother Louisa Bretton:

I well remember how I used to mount a music – stool for the purpose of unhooking it, holding it in my hand, and searching into those bonny wells of eyes, whose glance under their hazel lashes seemed like a pencilled laugh; and well I liked to note the colouring of the cheek, and the expression of the mouth. I hardly believed fancy could improve on the curve of that mouth, or of the chin; even my ignorance knew that both were beautiful, and pondered, perplexed over this doubt: ‘How it was that what charmed so much, could at the same time so keenly pain?’ (222)

The pleasure in Lucy’s enraptured gaze on Graham is always mixed with such pain, because he is a distant star, unattainable and elusive, as Lucy looks at him standing on the garden steps, at the school – fête, “the light from a window” illuminating his manly features:

His well – proportioned figure was not to be mistaken, for I doubt whether there was another in that assemblage his equal. He carried his hat in his hand; his uncovered head, his face and fine brow were most handsome and manly. His features were not delicate, not slight like those of a woman, nor were they cold, frivolous, and feeble; though well cut, they were not so chiselled, so frittered away, as to lose in power and significance what they gained in unmeaning symmetry. Much feeling spoke in them at times, and more sat silent in his eye. Such at least were my thoughts of him: to me he seemed all this. (192)
However, Lucy’s rational eye cannot but note the various imperfections in her clay-footed god: his boosted male vanity at Mme. Beck’s amorous advances cannot evade Lucy's observation:

I have met him coming out of her presence with a mischievous half–smile about his lips, and in his eyes a look as of masculine vanity elate and tickled. With all his good looks and good – nature, he was not perfect… (130)

His moral blindness in seeing a sensibility heroine of “exquisite superiority and innate refinement” (159) in the lightheaded and coquettish Genevra Fanshawe also comes to her notice. Lucy cannot overlook his self – absorption in advising her to “cultivate happiness" as a cure for her neurotic hallucinations; she also perceives Graham's complacent enjoyment of self-importance as the prized and pampered son of the Bretton family, a king to his mother and to Paulina Home, his sweetheart: “He stood tall on the hearth, a figure justifying his mother’s unconcealed pride” (227). An uncanny reminder of the authoritative, phallic presence of Mr. Brocklehurst, the oppressive clergy in Jane Eyre [“...I looked up at – a black pillar ! – such, at least, appeared to me, at first sight, the straight, narrow, sable – clad shape standing erect on the rug:” (JE 47)], Graham Bretton wants his women to be docile, delicate and submissive; the daring challenge of female passion repulses him as Lucy notices during the passionate performance of Vashti in the theatre, which they visited together.

Lucy enjoys her power of gaze; wearing her mask of indifference and her social invisibility as a shield, she feels self – possessed in her gaze at Graham Bretton and proclaims:

I liked entering his presence covered with a cloud he had not seen through, while he stood before me under a ray of special illumination, which shone all partial over his head, trembled about his feet, and cast light no farther. (229)
According to Kate Millett's observation: “The enormous deprivation of her existence causes Lucy to resemble a ghetto child peering up at a Harvard man – envy, admiration, resentment and dislike; yet with a tremendous urge to love – if it were possible to love one so removed, so diffident, so oppressive, so rich, disdainful and unjustly superior in place” (Millett 141).

Lucy observes Graham directly while he sees her in the mirror of his own egotism. Lucy’s frustration comes out in her conversation with Paulina in whose eyes, Graham is “all sacred”. In her candid confession to Lucy, Paulina reveals her awestruck fascination for Graham:

’...I feel a sort of fear when I look at his firm, marble chin, at his straight Greek features. Women are called beautiful, Lucy; he is not like a woman, therefore I suppose he is not beautiful, but what is he then? Do other people see him with my eyes? Do you admire him?’

Lucy’s reply brings out the irony behind two modes of gazing – gazing at and gazing into, as she states:

’I never see him. I looked at him twice or thrice about a year ago, before he recognized me, and then I shut my eyes; and if he were to cross their balls twelve times between each day’s sunset and sunrise, except from memory, I should hardly know what shape had gone by.’ (564)

When Polly is puzzled by this statement, Lucy amplifies her idea of inner vision and moral blindness: “I mean that I value vision, and dread being struck stone blind”(564). By repressing her passion for Graham, Lucy has in effect blinded herself in order to win the patronizing friendship and approval of Dr. John. Still, at the midnight carnival in the park of
Villette, where Lucy experiences a cathartic journey to her own psychic reality, she confesses to the reader her undiminished capacity to love Graham Bretton, all her life:

I believe in that goodly mansion, his heart, he kept one little place under the skylights where Lucy might have entertainment, if she chose to call... by long and equal kindness, he proved to me that he kept one little closet, over the door of which was written ‘Lucy’s Room’. I kept a place for him too – a place of which I never took the measure, either by rule or compass: I think it was like the tent of Peri – Banou. All my life long I carried it folded in the hollow of my hand – yet, released from that hold and constriction, I know not but its innate capacity for expanse might have magnified it into a tabernacle for a host. (607)

This confession invalidates Lucy’s earlier claim to the resigned objectivity of the retrospective gaze in her autobiographical memoir. Coming almost at the end of her narrative, this avowal highlights the disconcerting complexity of visual perspectives in *Villette*.

Unlike Graham Bretton, who never bothers to look at Lucy as a being with a mind and a pair of eyes of her own, Paul Emanuel, the choleric professor at the pensionnat “bursts open” Lucy’s insularity and invades into her "sanctuary", as she realizes to her discomfort: “a palêtot, and a bonnet grec filled the void; also two eyes first vaguely struck open, and then hungrily dived into me” (170). M. Paul can read Lucy’s eyes, her face and gestures, and responds to the spark of her inner being, instead of the shadowy presence of her social appearance. It is a new experience for Lucy who observes with some amazement to herself:

You are well habituated to be passed by as a shadow in Life’s sunshine: it is a new thing to see one testily lifting his hand to screen his eyes, because you tease him with an obtrusive ray. (443)
While a retrospective gaze at an unattainable idol hallows Graham in Lucy’s vision of him, Paul is perceived throughout her memoir with the eyes of the young Lucy Snowe. In her narrative, an aged and mature Lucy can afford to describe the turbulent phase of her relationship with Paul, because she can take comfort in looking ahead to the declaration of their mutual love in the later part of her reminiscences.

At first, Paul strikes Lucy as malicious, hostile, a despotic intriguer:

A dark little man he certainly was; pungent and austere… he seemed a harsh apparition, with his close – shorn, black head, his broad, sallow brow, his thin cheek, his wide and quivering nostril, his thorough glance and hurried bearing. Irritable he was…(165)

However, soon Lucy penetrates through his mask and discovers the face within. Unlike the authoritative surveillance of Mme. Beck, Paul’s spying is associated with generosity and bestowing of gifts like books and chocolates. He forces Lucy to accept a last minute challenge of a major male role in the school – play, but it ultimately gives Lucy an avenue for asserting herself in her androgynous best; besides, Lucy takes up this challenge not in response to a command, but an appeal, which strikes a chord within her:

…looking up at M. Paul, and seeing in his vexed, fiery, and searching eye, a sort of appeal behind all its menace – my lips dropped the word ‘oui’. For a moment, his rigid countenance relaxed with a quiver of content: (172)

Graham’s princely charisma and heroic self – assurance fascinate Lucy, while his callous unfeelingness hurts her. M. Paul’s despotism disgusts her, but she gets amused by his impetuous energy and childlike naivety:

M. Paul amused me; I smiled to myself as I watched him, he seemed so thoroughly in his element – standing conspicuous in presence of a wide and grand assemblage, arranging,
restraining, over – aweing about one hundred young ladies. He was, too, so perfectly in earnest – so energetic, so intent, and, above all, so absolute:… I knew that it was his love of display and authority which had brought him there – a love not offensive, only because so naïve. (278)

At the concert, Lucy is at once tickled and impressed at Paul’s imposing personality and organizational skill:

The redundancy of his alertness was half – vexing, half – ludicrous: in my mind I both disapproved and derided most of this fuss. Yet, in the midst of prejudice and annoyance, I could not, while watching, avoid perceiving a certain not disagreeable naïveté in all he did and said; nor could I be blind to certain vigorous characteristics of his physiognomy, rendered conspicuous now by the contrast with a throng of tamer faces: the deep, intent keenness of his eye, the power of his forehead – pale, broad, and full – the mobility of his most flexible mouth. He lacked the calm of force, but its movement and its fire he signally possessed. (288)

Unlike the confident poise of Graham the "cool Briton", the sanguine Spanish warmth of Paul’s impetuosity does not intimidate Lucy. His belief in Lucy’s “fiery and rash nature" gives her a warmer image of herself, while his pugnacious temperament forces her into direct encounters. One evening at the Hotel Crécy her open anger at Paul’s outrageous rudeness, followed by her subsequent forgiveness wins from him a smile that she presents to the reader as a marvel accomplished by herself:

He smiled. You should have seen him smile, reader;... I cannot affirm that I had ever witnessed the smile of pleasure, or content, or kindness round M. Paul’s lips, or in his eyes before. The ironic, the sarcastic, the disdainful, the passionately exultant, I had hundreds of times seen him express by what he called a smile, but any illuminated sign of milder or warmer feeling struck me as wholly new in his visage. It changed it as from a mask to a face: the deep lines
left his features; the very complexion seemed clearer and fresher; that swart, sallow, southern darkness which spoke his Spanish blood, became displaced by a lighter hue. I know not that I have ever seen in any other human face an equal metamorphosis from a similar cause. (423)

Illuminating his contrast to Graham, this smile breaks the masklike rigidity of M. Paul's face and shapes up the contours of a fallible and accessible human being. Consciously or otherwise, Lucy’s gaze implicates this contrast between the two men in her life, who are often seen and felt by her through certain fetishistic perception – Graham, always illuminated under the brilliant haze of the sun, his ruling planet; his blue eyes and leonine locks dazzling, he oozes a godlike aura. Paul, on the other hand, is marked in his mundane and somewhat grotesque ‘lunettes’, and cigar – typically masculine and revolting at the same time.

As she comes to perceive Paul’s depth of knowledge and spiritual wisdom, Lucy's own vision of life gets bountifully enriched. She acknowledges this bliss with gratefulness:

...his mind was indeed my library, and whenever it was opened to me, I entered bliss...his tomes of thought were collyrium to the spirit’s eyes; over their contents, inward sight grew clear and strong. (506)

In contrast to the emotional blindness that falls to Lucy’s share in loving Dr. John, in Paul’s eyes she can trace her own desire. It incites her to come out of her masochistic repression and give words to her passion: “My heart will break!” (638). In Lucy’s enamoured eyes, Paul becomes her Christian hero, a saviour of her tortured soul, and Lucy perceives him as a Christ figure, harrowing hell as he overpowers Mme. Beck and rescues Lucy from her absolute authority. Lucy's tribute to her Christian hero resembles that of a devotee towards Christ, the
Saviour: “He was roused, and I loved him in his wrath with a passion beyond what I had yet felt” (639).

According to Lucy’s point of view, Graham would grant her a “small closet” in his heart, while M. Paul gifts her a whole school, making her the sole proprietress of the establishment and of his own heart. As Beauvoir puts it, “Woman seeks in divine love first of all what the amoureuse seeks in that of man: the exaltation of her narcissism; this sovereign gaze fixed attentively, amorously, upon her is a miraculous godsend” (Beauvoir ch.v). Lucy seeks in the eyes of her blessed lover a vindication of her own appearance, a consistent source of inferiority complex all her life:

‘Do I displease your eyes much?’ I took courage to urge: the point had its vital import for me. He stopped, and gave me a short, strong answer – an answer which silenced, subdued, yet profoundly satisfied. Ever after that, I knew what I was for him; and what I might be for the rest of the world, I ceased painfully to care. (641)

Unlike Jane Eyre who leads the blinded Rochester to an understanding of inner vision, Lucy Snowe gropes her way in the dark until she is led by Paul Emanuel to a proper assessment of herself and her place in the world. This makes for a significant change in the nature of her gaze between the two sections of her reminiscent narrative. The change is due to a shift from memory that is painful, evasive and contradictory: the retrospective gaze that holds the portrait of John Graham Bretton, to another mode of memory that permits an honest return to first impressions, caressingly lingering on M. Paul’s outrageous eccentricities, his admirable and endearing gestures of nobility. Together, these two modes of gaze reveal two aspects of desire: the element of loss and that of appeasement.
Nancy Miller analyses how psychology and fiction have supported the customary reading of women’s ambitions and desires as erotic or romantic, thereby severely limiting their range of self-expression in either social discourse or daydreams. According to Freud:

"In young women erotic wishes dominate the phantasies almost exclusively, for their ambition is generally comprised in their erotic longings; in young men egoistic and ambitious wishes assert themselves plainly enough alongside their erotic desires" 7; Miller finds a challenge to this restrictive view and an alternative approach in women’s novels, where according to her:

.... egoistic desires would assert themselves paratactically alongside erotic ones. The repressed content,.... would be, not erotic impulses, but an impulse to power: a fantasy of power that would revise the social grammar in which women are never defined as subjects; a fantasy of power that disdains a sexual exchange in which women can participate only as objects of circulation. (Miller 41)

But normally, the magical wand of power is kept out of women’s reach as society fears that power in uneasy hands will turn the social hierarchy upside down, bringing in darkness and chaos. So, women have to carry out the Promethean task of usurping power through guile and subterfuge, as “the most essential form of accommodation for the weak is to conceal what power they do have.” 8 This brings us to the concept of "masquerade", a handy weapon for the underdog.

Mary Ann Doane speaks of the masquerade as a performance:

The masquerade, in flaunting femininity, holds it at a distance. Womanliness is a mask, which can be worn or removed. The masquerade’s resistance to patriarchal
positioning would therefore lie in its denial of the production of femininity as closeness, as presence – to – itself, as, precisely, imagistic..... By destabilizing the image, the masquerade confounds this masculine structure of the look; masquerade is a type of representation which carries a threat, disarticulating a male system of viewing. (Doane 81–82)

Similarly, Luce Irigaray speaks about women acting as ‘feminine – feminine’. This is not a male – defined woman, a mixed stereotype of passive docility and sensuous attractiveness, but one who has learned to mimic that stereotype in order to break away with the gendered constructions codified by patriarchy. Central to the notion of mimicry for Irigaray is the technique of masquerade, an attempt to play the gender game as if one were self – consciously deflating the very role of submissive femininity one would appear to be assuming (Irigaray 32, 76), in order to deceive the men who long for submissive and helpless women.

According to Joan Rivière, women who “wish for masculinity may put on a mask of womanliness to avert anxiety and the retribution feared from men.” As Rivière suggests, “Womanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it…” 9 Under the guise of an apparent submission to dominant social codes, the masquerade is a subversive resistance to patriarchal norms. As Beauvoir notes, “....like all the oppressed, women deliberately dissembles...all [who] depend on the caprices of a master, have learned to turn toward him a changeless smile or an enigmatic impassivity; their real sentiments, their actual behavior, are carefully hidden” (Beauvoir 243).

Women thus learn “to lie to men, to scheme, to be wily;” to put on “an artificial expression;” to be “cautious, hypocritical,” “to play – act”. Mary Hays too, argues in favour of
women being duplicitous to win their way; her militant defense on behalf of women is presented in the following manner:

And if indeed, women do avail themselves of the only weapons they are permitted to wield, can they be blamed? Undoubtedly not; since they are compelled to it by the injustice and impolicy of men. Petty treacheries – mean subterfuge – whining and flattery – feigned submission – and all the dirty little attendants, which compose the endless train of low cunning; if not commendable, cannot with justice be very severely censured, when practiced by women. Since alas! – Necessity acknowledges no law, but her own! 10

Throughout the gothic texts, woman paradoxically positions herself as the image of femininity in order to conceal that she has masculinized her subjectivity in a desperate bid to attract and hold the authenticating male gaze. Gothic heroines are forced to be duplicitous in order to survive. In the gothic world, according to Diane Long Hoeveler, “If a woman is not duplicitous, she will be defamed, slandered, and constructed into oblivion by the same forces that will take her estate, her family, and finally her life” (Hoeveler 207).

The women in Zofloya strategically use their sexuality to enchant or command men, and it is this process of mastery that gives them pleasure. The language of erotic pleasure in this text is that of domination and submission. One male after another is seduced, which leads them to their loss of power and control. The women use the mask of submission to disguise their insurrectionary aims. Thus under the artful guise of “an artificial delicacy and refinement,” the seductive Megalena Strozzi satiates “the tumultuous wishes of her heart” (Z 105) of seducing Leonardo, the handsome, virginal youth. Dacre indicates that women’s sexual agency of initiating and manipulating ‘pure’ men into ‘voluptuousness’, disrupts the categories of natural sexual difference, since Megalena is temporarily masculinized by the husbandry metaphor and Leonardo is feminized as pure and fertile in the following manner:
With a novel delight, superior to aught she had ever felt at any former conquest, did the artful Florentine behold her triumph: she had sown (as she believed) the first germs of love and passion in a pure youthful breast; she had seen those germs shoot forth and expand beneath the fervid rays of her influence, and she enjoyed the fruits with a voluptuous pleasure. (106)

But simultaneously, Megalena is acting the role of a ‘true’ woman, feigning devotion and dependence in order to maintain her control. As Berenza’s ex—mistress, she is furious to discover Victoria as his new love—interest and plans to get him murdered by Leonardo. Acting the injured virtue in distress, she incites the novice youth to commit the deed:

Perceiving that, though his cheek glowed with indignation, and his eyes with ardent love, that still he spoke not, determined, then, to work him to the pitch she required, she resumed: ‘Oh, Leonardo! If, in love for thee, I have out stepped the bounds of delicacy and decorum, oh! Let me not, therefore,’ with faltering voice, she pursued, ‘let me not be with impunity outraged or trampled on by others!’

‘No, no, no!’ cried the overpowered Leonardo, raising her in his arms; ‘no never, sweet mistress of my soul, while I have life! He, who offends thee, dies!’ (118)

Megalena’s artful ways in grabbing power is carried on in a more audacious, grandiose and diabolical scale by the heroine Victoria. Working on the enamoured Berenza’s delusion of her nobility and grace, she persuades him of the love she does not feel by imitations of sentimental melancholy:

…her eyes, no longer full of a wild and beautiful animation, were taught to languish, or to fix for hours with musing air upon the ground; her gait, no longer firm and elevated, became hesitating and despondent. She no longer engrossed the conversation; she became silent, apparently absent, and plunged in thought. (78-79)
While proposing marriage to Victoria, Berenza makes the mistake of explaining that he had not done so earlier because of his hesitation over her mother’s adultery and her family’s disgrace. Shocked at this severe hurt to her inordinate pride and self – esteem, Victoria’s fiercely independent soul turns to “sudden hatred and desire of revenge” (126). Playing the devoted wife, she “harmonise[s] her features, and clothe[s] them with smiles” (127), but her eyes are set on murder, as she gazes at her husband:

Victoria fixed upon him her eyes, pregnant with an unusual expression, for busy were her evil thoughts against him.

Why is that look, my love?” inquired Berenza. ‘I look upon thee as I love thee!’ answered Victoria. (127)

The act of ‘performance’ in masquerade involves pretence, dissimulation, assuming a role, whereby a distance is implied between the ‘act’ and the ‘real self’ concealed behind it. Victoria, the sexually predatory woman, excels in such a camouflaging performance in the role of the devoted wife to deceive Berenza. Slow-poisoning him in order to bring a gradual and painful death, Victoria’s gaze of exultation at her victim is as lethal as that of a Circe, Lamia or Medusa:

With unshrinking soul, and eye unabashed by the consciousness of guilt, Victoria joined at supper the innocent family circle. The high blush of animation flushed her dark cheek with more than usual fire; her eyes sparkled, but it was with a fiend – like exultation, and her nerves seemed new strung for the execution of her dreadful purpose. (157)

Playing Circe to her enthralled victim, she seduces and coaxes Berenza to drink more and more of the poisoned wine from her hands:

…instantly concluding that wine, while it exhilarated him for the moment, must still tend to parch up the vital heat, she induced him to drink plentifully of it, thereby causing it to
answer the double purpose of blinding him to his actual danger, and hastening his death. (171)

The emotional blinding of the deluded Berenza ironically reminds of a much earlier situation when Victoria meets a masked Berenza at a carnival in Venice and he leads her, blindfolded, to his mansion.

After the murder of Berenza, Victoria becomes drunk with power and a sadistic desire to cause mayhem. Berenza's brother Henriquez kindles her desire and she proposes to him. Henriquez loves the fair and innocent Lilla and gets repelled by Victoria's dark passion. His rude refusal rouses her vengeful spirit and she again masks her real intention under the camouflage of the spurned heroine: “Covering her face with her hands, she sunk into a chair, and audibly sobbed!” (196). With the help of Zofloya, Victoria chains Lilla in a cave while she acts the "angel-in-the-house" to a grief-stricken and bewildered Henriquez: “She, with well-assumed melancholy softness, but secret exultation, busied herself in silence, in little offices about his chamber” (217). Drugged by the magic potion given him by the artful Victoria, Henriquez mistakes her for Lilla, as Victoria puts on the girl’s veil; intoxicated, overjoyed and incensed, he becomes a prey to her lust: "On this day, high beat her heart – her bosom’s fierce triumph flashed from her eyes, as she gazed on the devoted youth…” (220).

As the delusion ends in the morning, Henriquez’s “phrenzied gaze,” his act of impaling himself on his sword, Victoria’s “black fringed eyelids” and “raven tresses hanging unconfined,” turn her to a Medusa figure, deadly and castrating for the male victim. It is a situation of fantasized seduction and death, in which the man is used sexually, and suffers punishment at the hands of a woman, made to signify a disordering sexuality. The unreasonable love of evil is shown by Dacre to constitute the ongoing struggle for power epitomized in the exultant gaze of
Victoria who can proclaim that “there is certainly a pleasure … in the infliction of prolonged torment…” (206).

Trying to maintain and control the two men in her life according to her own wish, Catherine Earnshaw tries to play the lady with Linton and be her true, unrestricted self with Heathcliff; but this duplicity makes it necessary for her to keep the two men apart:

..... when Heathcliff expressed contempt of Linton in his presence, she could not half coincide, as she did in his absence; and when Linton evinced disgust and antipathy to Heathcliff, she dared not treat his sentiments with indifference, as if depreciation of her playmate were of scarcely any consequence to her. (WH 69)

According to the housekeeper Nelly Dean, ambition had led Catherine “to adopt a double character without exactly intending to deceive any one” (68). But in Catherine’s duplicity, one recognizes the strategy of the gothic heroine all too clearly: the masquerade of "passive – aggression", the appearance of compliance while one actively and subtly subverts.

Even after marriage with Linton, as Heathcliff returns to compete for her love on equal footing with her husband, Catherine is not particularly interested in the new, wealthy Heathcliff, though she fixes her gaze on him, “as if she feared he would vanish were she to remove it” (92). Catherine is more interested in the earlier Heathcliff, her old playmate who gave her a scope for an attitude of amorality and antisocial deviance. As she looks into the eyes of a mature Heathcliff, she seeks his earlier version. Seeing herself as one with the lower classes is a sort of game with Catherine, a posing for effect while she retreats safely into the world of privilege whenever she wants. On the night of Heathcliff’s return, Catherine forces Edgar to receive him by setting up two tables, one for the siblings Edgar and Isabella as the ‘gentry’, and one for the pseudo – siblings Catherine and Heathcliff as the ‘lower orders’. As an adult woman, Catherine
continues playing a dual role. She becomes the wife of the propertied and socially respectable Linton as she thinks she has full control on him; it makes her sarcastically comment to Nelly: "...I have such faith in Linton’s love that I believe I might kill him, and he wouldn’t wish to retaliate" (94). On the other hand, she wants to play the role of social outcast with Heathcliff as she thinks “…he’s more myself than I am” (80). As the fatal woman in the life of two men, Catherine enjoys her importance and revels in the power of her gaze on them.

Like Catherine, Ginevra Fanshawe in Villette is far from wanting to serve men or grant them control over her feelings. Bent on grabbing power, she is clear-sighted enough to set her goal in life: that is, marrying “rather elderly gentlemen… with cash” (V 68). Ever practical, she opts for the only kind of control her resource provides her – the transient power of beauty. By presenting her physical assets in deliberately calculated ways to emphasize (in Laura Mulvey’s words) her "to – be – looked –at – ness", Ginevra links her enacted objectification of self with the visual objectification inherent in such artistic self-representations. In decorating her publicly presented image with such fetishistic props as her ‘curls’, ‘sash’, ‘dress’, ‘artificial flowers’ and ‘jewellery’, she constructs her ultra-feminized body as a coveted object of male gaze. Such is her perception as she looks at the reflections of Lucy and herself in the mirror. Her appreciation of her self-image carries with it both the plain, judgmental precision of Lucy and the extravagant fascinations of her enamoured suitors, Dr. John and Alfred de Hamal; thus Lucy describes Ginevra's celebration of self-love in front of the mirror:

She turned me and herself round; she viewed us both on all sides; she smiled, she waved her curls, she retouched her sash, she spread her dress,... (186)

Acting a romance heroine, Ginevra fancies Dr. John as ‘Isidore’, her dashing young lover and enjoys her controlling influence upon him. She is “well amused” by Graham, and it pleases
her to feel that she “can wind him round [her] little finger.” She rejoices while watching Graham “sulking and dying in the distance” because of her flirtation with de Hamal and declares bluntly that “of course he will break his heart. I should be shocked and disappointed if he didn’t” (110).

Masquerading as a delicate heroine of sensibility to impress Graham and rouse his chivalrous instincts, Ginevra gets bored of him quite soon; as she explains to Lucy, in her eyes:

.....the man is too romantic and devoted, and he expects something more of me than I find it convenient to be. He thinks I am perfect: furnished with all sorts of sterling qualities and solid virtues, such as I never had, nor intend to have. (116)

Tired of conforming to a role she does not fit in, Ginevra prefers the exotic, sugary charm of the aristocrat de Hamal, who admires her as she is. She brings out to Lucy the contrast, in her eyes, between the two suitors:

'Him you call the man’, said she, ‘is bourgeois, sandy – haired, and answers to the name of John! - ...Colonel de Hamal is a gentleman of excellent connections, perfect manners, sweet appearance, with pale interesting face, and hair and eyes like an Italian. Then too he is the most delightful company possible – a man quite in my way; not sensible and serious like the other, but one with whom I can talk on equal terms - … (191--92)

Ginevra’s goal of higher social status and equality in relationship makes her prefer the superficial aristocrat over the bourgeois doctor. However, for quite a long time, she enjoys playing the diva, exercising her erotic power over the two male hearts as she exclaims: “I do so like to watch them turn red and pale, and scowl and dart fiery glances at each other, and languishing ones at me. There is me – happy ME;”’ (187); Lucy Snowe’s adopted role of an ice–maiden serves both to conceal her conflicting desires and mask her rebellion. She cultivates the mask of invisibility to protect herself from pain. As a nursery – governess in the pensionnat,
Lucy is caught staring at Dr. John, whom she recognizes as the son of her godmother, though he fails to recognize her. She not only notices that “he was not without a certain nervous sensitiveness which made him ill at ease under a direct, inquiring gaze” (126); she is also surprised at his reproving tone, when he catches her staring at him. However, by her refusal to give him a just explanation of her gaze and clear herself, Lucy exerts a negative control over the situation. Her masquerade of silence gains her a moral edge, as she ‘rightly’ knows him as the son of her godmother, while she is certain that he will never 'rightly' know her. She also gets a perverse satisfaction from being thought audacious and bold. Her amusement is partly in the ironic disparity between what she actually is and what Dr. John thinks her to be: an audacious, immodest woman; but she also gets amused in her momentary ability (as thought by Dr. John) to play the role of such a woman. Lucy gives herself an advantage with her strategy of silent compliance: while she observes Graham Bretton from her shadowy position, he stands in the light. Thus, Nancy S. Rabinowitz observes: “As cops in a’ 30s film conduct their interrogations with a spotlight on the suspect, so Lucy Snowe puts herself in a position of power by remaining in the dark.”

Lucy’s supposedly “ambitious wishes” as well as her erotic desires forcefully assert themselves on the one occasion when she is empowered by society to adopt the role of actor on the public stage. One of the most notable aspects of the school play is its deliberate confusion of sex roles and gender identification. The role that Lucy is given to play is that of a “butterfly, talker, and traitor” (V 172). In short, a dramatic version of the eye-candy fop, Alfred de Hamal, Ginevra's lover. Playing such a narcissistic tease, Lucy is to woo Ginevra in the play. Grabbing this subversive opportunity, Lucy mixes and matches her feminine dress with masculine accessories such as vest, collar, cravat and palétot, and gives an androgynous turn to her
costume. As she woos Ginevra, her initial reluctance in performance gives way to a heady and reckless enjoyment. Lucy recalls in her narrative: “What I felt that night, and what I did, I no more expected to feel and do, than to be lifted in a trance to the seventh heaven” (181). Cast as a man, Lucy brilliantly enacts the initiative, the competitiveness, the courtship, the wit and the power that in real life are denied her. Her acknowledged source of inspiration is the presence of Graham in the audience, the brother / beloved / rival who animates her to act “as if wishful and resolute to win and conquer” (181) and in the process to “rival” and “eclipse” him. Unlike her usual self, for once she gazes from the other side of the mirror and acts upon that gaze as Ginevra does, making easy games of both Graham and de Hamal.

On the threshold of marriage, her fiancé’s exasperating behaviour makes Charlotte Brontë comment on men in general, in following terms:

Man is indeed an amazing piece of mechanism when you see, so to speak, the full weakness of what he calls his strength. There is not a female child above the age of eight but might rebuke him for spoilt petulance of his willful nonsense.

[ Letter to Ellen Nussey, 27 May 1854 ]

As a novelist too, she sometimes casts such an amused gaze on man, like in her portrayal of M. Paul among the girls of the pensionnat: "...surrounded only by women and children there was nothing to cross and thwart him; he had his own way, and a pleasant way it was" (V 508).

Throughout *Villette*, there are plenty of situations which allow Lucy a deeper gaze within Paul’s fierce exterior; by her silent comprehension and compliance, she controls him as a matron controls the whims and wanton tantrums of a difficult child. As she perceives, “The scarce – suppressed impetus of a most irritable nature” such as Paul Emanuel’s can only be soothed by the “balm” of “Silence and attention” (171). It requires “a thorough comprehension of his
nature” (266), which Lucy acquires after several trials. Paul’s childish jealousy regarding Graham’s letters titillates Lucy’s sense of humour, and she willfully maintains a façade of cold indifference, “not yet much shaken” by his storming of the whole class (316). Paul’s excessive emotional outbursts make her relax into a perverse “snugness of composure” and his mercurial disposition makes her “placid and harmonious” (439). Deciphering his nature thoroughly, Lucy gains confidence enough to be sure of her covert power over this eccentric professor; as she confides to the reader:

Indeed, at the worst, it was only his nerves that were irritable, not his temper that was radically bad; soothe, comprehend, comfort him, and he was a lamb; he would not harm a fly. Only to the very stupid, perverse, or unsympathising, was he in the slightest degree dangerous. (508)

Through her intense gaze into male psyche, the gothic heroine comes to grab and wield power covertly. Another, more subversive and paradoxical way to power also lies within her reach-- the power of persuasion and endurance. In women’s gothic novels, female protagonists, quite often, make the most of this power. Jean Baker Miller speaks of the soft power of persuasive female gaze covertly influencing male psyche. According to her, women “look as if they will entrap men in ‘emotions’, weakness, sexuality, vulnerability, helplessness, the need for care, and other unsolved areas” (Miller 120). This mirrors the equivocal nature of the gothic heroine’s passive gaze of endurance. The best of heroines ultimately has no physical power against a powerful male opponent. But she does have power of a different kind. One of her important defense strategies is to make her adversary perceive so vividly the spiritual barrier between him and her that he will be abashed into maintaining a physical distance as well. The heroine’s physical passivity is not a surrender to her situation, but a mode of moral – spiritual resistance and self – assertion. Though submissive in form, it is in content equivocal, embodying
both the impulse to submit and to dominate, whereby the ladies assert, not only the values of a passive and enduring gaze, but its power as well.

Such is the manner in which Emmeline resists the passionate Delamere who forcefully abducts her for a clandestine marriage. Emmeline has insight enough to know that “The heart of Delamere was accessible only by the avenues of affection and kindness; compulsion and threats only made him more resolutely persist in any favourite project” (E 205). She resists Delamere’s rash impetuosity by playing virtue in distress, thereby appealing to his chivalric sentiment:

She attempted to reach her cloak, but could not; her strength forsook her; her head became more giddy; she staggered, and would have fallen, had not Delamere caught her in his arms, and supported her to the chair she had left. ‘Hurry not yourself thus, my Emmeline,’ cried he; ‘in mercy to me try to compose yourself, and spare me the sight of all this terror, for which believe me you have no reason.’ (177)

By playing the tragic victim and persecuting her tormentor with her enduring gaze of moral superiority, Emmeline wins her stake and overpowers Delamere’s vehement passion:

He came to her; and she gently reproached him for all the inconvenience and uneasiness he had brought upon her. Her soft complaints and the distress pictured on her speaking face, he felt with a degree of anguish and self – reproach…(178)

Emmeline’s passive resistance gains her moral ascendancy over Delamere who is persuaded to bring her back with honour, thus creating an audaciously new possibility for the gothic heroine. Emily’s trial in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is one of endurance; refusing to sign the document and hand over her estates to Montoni, she defies his authority with her upright gaze:
‘You may find, perhaps, Signor, said Emily, with mild dignity, ‘that the strength of my mind is equal to the justice of my cause; and that I can endure with fortitude, when it is in resistance of oppression.’ (MU 381)

Emily emerges from this encounter, glowing with “sacred pride”, resolved to suffer her oppression “like a heroine” and revelling in her moral victory over Montoni:

…his power did not appear so terrible to her imagination, as it was wont to do… For the first time, she felt the full extent of her own superiority to Montoni, and despised the authority, which, till now, she had only feared. (381-82)

In fact, it is Emily’s ethic of care and moral worth that makes even the villainous Montoni quail and avert his gaze from her innocent eyes, as she pleads for her dying aunt:

For a considerable time he was proof against all she said, and all she looked; but at length the divinity of pity, beaming in Emily’s eyes, seemed to touch his heart. He turned away, ashamed of his better feelings, half sullen and half relenting; but finally consented, that his wife should be removed to her own apartment and that Emily should attend her. (366)

This is quite a disconcerting moment for the all–powerful male authority and another such situation once again, gives Montoni a trying time in meeting Emily’s gaze. This is the situation where he tries to persuade her to resign her estates under the false promise of protection and release. Emily’s innocent and piteous gaze holds the power to strike at Montoni’s masculine dignity and he cannot meet her eyes:

As she looked piteously at Montoni, he turned away, and at the same time desired she would withdraw to her apartment; but, unable to leave the room, she sat down in a chair near the door, and sighed heavily. She had neither words nor tears. ‘Why will you indulge this childish grief?’ said he. ‘Endeavour to strengthen your mind; you have no real evil to lament;’ (436)
IV

Women gothic novelists construct heroines who deliberately masquerade as weak and fragile for an obsessive and controlling male gaze. If the submissive female gaze thus combats male authority with subterfuge, the defiant gaze of women openly challenges such authority with a subversive power.

In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Emily earns her right to be a heroine by gradually adopting a determined masculine gaze. She is praised by Montoni for being different from other women, as he tells her: “...you possess an understanding superior to that of your sex; and that you have none of those contemptible foibles that frequently mark the female character...” (380). Later, Count de Villefort, Emily’s substitute father – figure also praises her ability to resist emotion when he tries to convince her to marry the suave Frenchman Du Pont rather than the spoilt Valancourt; his worldly-wise perception detects only weakness in feminine tears as he advises Emily: “They are weak tears, for they are useless ones,... I would have you superior to such weakness” (565). Tears are a form of language that powerful men ignore or abhor, and eventually Emily stops speaking with them. There is something daunting about Emily’s authoritative gaze when she puts forward a dignified argument to Valancourt’s guilty appeal of forgiveness for his dissipations in Paris:

‘I sincerely forgive you’, replied Emily. ‘You best know whether I shall continue to love you, for you know whether you deserve my esteem... It is unnecessary to say’, added she, observing his dejection, ‘how much pain it would give me to believe otherwise.’(504)
Emily’s castigating gaze reverses gender roles; she plays the offended lover to a fallen and sullied Valancourt who is at the receiving end.

It is with such a cool and collected gaze that the orphan Emmeline resists her uncle’s high-handed arrogance in arranging an ill-suited match for her. When an emissary from Lord Montreville informs her that she must marry the obnoxious, elderly businessman Mr. Rochely, or be left quite penniless, she refuses to be thus intimidated. “Anger and disdain, which she found fast riding in her bosom, restrained her tears: but her eyes flashed indignantly on the unfeeling politician who thus so indelicately addressed her.” Rejecting the proposal,

....with a firmness of voice and manner which resentment, as well as a noble pride, supplied; she arose, curtseyed composedly to Sir Richard, and went out of the room; leaving the unsuccessful ambassador astonished at that strength of mind, and dignity of manner, which he did not expect in so young a woman, and somewhat mortified, that his masculine eloquence, on which he was accustomed to pride himself, and which he thought generally unanswerable, had so entirely fallen short of the effect he expected. (136)

In the climactic confessional scene between Mathilda and her father where he confesses his incestuous love for her, anger and a sense of shame and betrayal drive the daughter to curse her father with a waning of his masculine virility and sexual energy: in short, a symbolic castration; Mathilda curses her father with such furious words:

Be thy limbs worn and thy heart chilled, and all youth be dead within thee! Let thy hairs be as snow; thy walk trembling and thy voice have lost its mellow tones! Let the liquid lustre of thine eyes be quenched… (M 30)

According to Freud, “Such hostility, hidden in the unconscious behind tender love, exists in almost all cases of intensive emotional allegiance to a particular person, indeed it represents the classic case, the prototype of the ambivalence of human emotions” (Freud:1918, 80). Female
anger surfaces in Mathilda’s dream following her father’s confession of erotic love, a dream in which she pursues him to his death. One may recall that Mathilda first met her father (when he returns from distant lands) in a wood clothed in a flowing white garment; now the power dynamic between them has shifted and it is the father’s turn to be a sacrificial victim, dressed in white. The apprehension and resentment that the daughter feels at her powerlessness to win and keep the father’s affections has turned into the opposite emotion, resulting in death. In pursuit of her father through the thunderstorm, Mathilda sees an oak tree; standing erect against the bleak landscape, like a singular phallic presence, the tree epitomizes the fugitive father. Inspired by a fatal impulse, Mathilda tries her hand at prophecy: “… if the next flash of lightning rend not that oak my father will be alive” (M 38). The tree gets blasted, as though by her lightning gaze. Following her father too late to save him, Mathilda locates his dead body in a cottage near the sea. In his death, the father has become a phallic spectacle, “something stiff and straight ..... covered by a sheet”; (39). For Mary Shelley, the idea of incest between father and daughter is subtly and indirectly bound up with parricide; in Mathilda, the heroine takes on the burden of guilt for drawing her father “into the abyss,” but the gesture is ambivalent. Just as the extraction of the father's confession of guilty passion is a display of the daughter's power, so the death of the father becomes a literal erasure of sources for the daughter, whereby the story becomes hers, she becoming the central character instead of the father. Neatly reversing the power equation, Mathilda’s narrative is constructed over the body of a dead father and a long-buried mother, while the mediating gaze is that of the alternately melancholy and hysterical daughter.

In Villette, M. Paul’s all – encroaching eye counters Lucy’s challenging gaze. Comparing him to Bonaparte in his “love of power,” Lucy decides to defy his demanding gaze, for she thinks: "....sometimes it was needful to resist; it was right to stand still, to look up into his eyes
and tell him that his requirements went beyond reason – that his absolutism verged on tyranny" (V 464).

So it is, when Lucy finds the eccentric professor insulting the English in general, “sullying the shield of Britannia, and dabbling the union-jack in mud”, she breaks her silence with a "sharp stroke on [her] desk" and with a cry: “Vive l'Angleterre, l'Histoire et les Heros! A bas la France, la Fiction et les Faquins” (452)! Lucy rebuffs Paul further in a strong parallel to the mirror scene with Dr. John; she works on a piece of sewing while M. Paul lectures at her, alternately fuming and sulking at her obstinate silence; thus Lucy records her moment of triumph in her narrative: “I sat and minded my work, and was quiet, and not at all unhappy” (438). Her “snugness of composure” coolly repels the “flint and tinder” of Paul’s glare. She withholds her gift for him, enjoys her power to anger and irritate him and is tickled by his idea that she is some rebel who must be kept in check: “so odd, in all this, was the mixture of the touching and the absurd” (441).

An interesting encounter reveals Lucy’s growing anxiety at Paul’s intrusive gaze. In a symbolic effort to prevent his further probe into her private world, Lucy accidentally breaks his lunettes, a symbolic blinding reminiscent of Rochester in Jane Eyre. M. Paul responds to the situation playfully, exclaiming “Ah, traitress! Traitress! You are resolved to have me quite blind and helpless in your hands!” (434) --- thus making a fatal Delilah of her.

Lucy’s rational clear-sightedness does not spare even Dr. John, her childhood hero. Her amused perception of his blindness regarding the true nature of Ginevra disturbs his easygoing Briton confidence: “The colour rose to his cheek; with half a smile he turned and took his hat” (160). Lucy’s sarcastic comparison between Graham and his rival Alfred de Hamal provokes his passion and she enjoys her power in drawing him out of his habitual composure and rallying
him on his illusions; the contrast between Lucy's deliberately playful banter and Graham's outbursts of fury makes prominent the power of Lucy's insight into this male psyche:

‘What a god–like person is that de Hamal! What a nose on his face–perfect!.... and then, such classic lips and chin–and his bearing–sublime.’
‘De Hamal is an unutterable puppy, besides being a very white–livered hero.’
‘You, Dr. John, and every man of a less refined mould than he, must feel for him a sort of admiring affection, such as Mars and the coarser deities may be supposed to have borne the young, graceful Apollo.’
‘An unprincipled, gambling, little jackanapes!’ said Dr. John curtly, whom, with one hand, I could lift up by the waistband any day, and lay low in the kennel, if I liked.’
‘The sweet seraph!’ said I. ‘What a cruel idea! Are you not a little severe, Dr. John?’ (195)

It is remarkable that earlier on that very night, Lucy just acted a flamboyant lover with relish in the school play. In the interaction with Dr. John, she again ventures out of her shell to perceive and point out the idiosyncrasies of the egotistic male psyche.

In Wuthering Heights, the child Catherine’s longing for a whip represents a powerless young daughter’s yearning for power. Never docile, her joy is in a tongue “always going–singing, laughing, and plaguing everybody who would not do the same” (WH 49). Even as a small child, she is bold enough to challenge the authority of her father, the master of the house; as the housekeeper Nelly Dean ruminates upon the defiant spirit of Catherine against patriarchal control: "His peevish reproofs wakened in her a naughty delight to provoke him: she was never so happy as when we were all scolding her at once, and she defying us with her bold, saucy look, and her ready words;" (49).

In one evocative situation in the text, Catherine acts as a link between her father and Heathcliff, the present and the future emblems of male authority in the house. According to
Nelly Dean's description of the scene: "Miss Cathy had been sick, and that made her still; she leant against her father’s knee, and Heathcliff was lying on the floor with his head in her lap" (50).

At this tender moment, her father asks, “‘Why canst thou not always be a good lass, Cathy?’” Her response is unexpected: “… she turned her face up to his, and laughed, and answered, ‘why cannot you always be a good man, father?’” As it is, there is always the suggestion that Heathcliff is actually Earnshaw’s illegitimate child, and certainly Catherine’s query to her father suggests some unconscious insight on the daughter’s part, that the father has not been the hallowed figure that he exhibits himself to be. Playing the docile daughter, yet questioning the father’s integrity, Catherine sings him to ‘sleep’, and quite significantly, Earnshaw dies that night, in sleep. In between love and hate for the father, the young Catherine replaces his patriarchal authority with Heathcliff, the phallic substitute, who does not condemn or control, but only responds to her biddings. This places Catherine in the same authoritative relation to Heathcliff as Mr. Earnshaw is to her. After marriage, the authority of Edgar Linton as master of the house provokes the same challenging urge in Catherine. As Edgar calls on his servants to throw Heathcliff out of his house, Catherine quietly throws the keys into the hottest part of the fireplace and looks at her husband with calm contempt.

The visitor Lockwood’s first encounter with Catherine Linton emphasizes her defiance of the male gaze. Lockwood admires her beauty, but expresses ambivalence about her eyes: “had they been agreeable in expression, they would have been irresistible” (25). The situation reminds one of Lockwood’s earlier experience at the seaside, where he got enamoured of a beautiful young woman, a “real goddess”, but as soon as she "looked a return", he "shrank icily" into himself and "at every glance retired colder and farther" (21), quite unable to face the
situation, look into her eyes and profess his feelings to her; Catherine is doubly a ‘looker’ in the sense that she is both an attractive woman and someone who looks back. Spectator as well as spectacle, she disturbs Lockwood’s pleasure in gazing, as he himself has to acknowledge:

She never opened her mouth. I stared – she stared also: at any rate, she kept her eyes on me in a cool, regardless manner, exceedingly embarrassing and disagreeable. (24)

Like the returned look of Lockwood’s seaside muse, Catherine’s cool gaze unsettles his self – command and deflates his male ego.

Catherine’s impudently assertive look makes her a monstrous woman to almost every male character in the text. Her defiant gaze is her only available weapon for self-defense. Shortly after challenging Lockwood’s smug composure with her “regardless look,” Catherine gets rid of Joseph, the pharisaical servant, by threatening him with a Medusa gaze: "Go, I’m looking at you!" (29). Even Heathcliff finds the power of her gaze unsettling and lashes out in fury at her: “‘What fiend possesses you to stare back at me, continually, with those infernal eyes? Down with them! And don’t remind me of your existence again’” (264).

Through Catherine, the text inscribes the dynamics involved in the gaze and articulates the psychological fact that when a woman looks back, she asserts her ‘existence’ as a subject. The novel even confronts these dynamics directly, having Catherine explicitly deny to Heathcliff that he had anything to fear from her gaze, as she desperately tries to convince him of her inherent goodness: “‘I’ll not take my eyes from your face till you look back at me! No, don’t turn away! Do look! You’ll see nothing to provoke you’” (231).

It is only in his death – bed when he meets the gaze of the spirit of the dead Catherine that Heathcliff looks Medusa in the eye, to experience, not horror, but the ecstasy of spiritual communion. As his open eyes continue to stare, his gaze confronts the spirit of Catherine
Earnshaw, whose eyes he has solicited throughout life. Even in death, his “life – like gaze of exultation” (277) represents an intense satisfaction, as he responds to the "relentless" gaze of the Other (the spirit of Catherine), an extension of himself. Through Heathcliff, *Wuthering Heights* seems to suggest that the woman’s gaze as an object of male perception is simultaneously feared and desired; as offering the possibility of lost wholeness, such a gaze is an object of desire – yet it is feared, as it also emphasizes the fact that the male subject suffers from lack (of wholeness), that wholeness has indeed been lost.

V

The perception of lost wholeness brings in the concept of a mutual gaze; a utopian concept of male – female relationship and power equation where there is no question of domination or suppression on either side, its formation is prevented in reality by the dominating and hierarchical gaze – apparatus in society. But in their texts, women writers of the gothic replace the hierarchical gaze with an interconnecting, mutual gaze based on reciprocation and equality. Defining the power of the heroines in women’s fiction as ‘ability’ rather than ‘control’, Judith Lowder Newton suggests that “both a preoccupation with power and subtle power strategies” are evident in these women (Newton 1981).

According to Nancy Chodorow, female identity formation takes place in a context of ongoing relationship. Girls experience themselves as like their mothers, thus focusing the experience of attachment or bonding with the process of identity formation. In contrast, boys, in defining themselves as masculine, separate their mothers from themselves, thus curtailing “their primary love and sense of empathic tie.” Consequently, male development entails a “more emphatic individuation and a more defensive firming of experienced ego boundaries.” 12 The
result of these different identity formations is a different perception of morality in men and
women; while morality as the activity of care centers moral development in women around the
understanding of responsibility and relationships, morality as fairness or justice ties moral
development in men to the understanding of rights and rules.

Sensitivity to the needs of others and the assumption of responsibility for taking care lead
women to attend to voices other than their own and to include in their judgment other points of
view. According to Carol Gilligan, “Women not only define themselves in a context of human
relationship but also judge themselves in terms of their ability to care.” (Gilligan 16-17) If
violence and aggression are tied, as women perceive, to the fracture of human connection, the
activities of care make the social world habitable, by avoiding isolation and preventing
aggression. From this perspective, Gilligan observes:

...the prevalence of violence in men’s fantasies, denoting a
world where danger is everywhere seen, signifies a problem
in making connection, causing relationships to erupt and
turning separation into a dangerous isolation. (43)

The fact of interconnection, thus informs the central, recurring recognition that just as
violence leads only to destruction, the activity of care recreates and nurtures both self and others.
Power lies not in domination, but in interconnection, where the system of hierarchy gets
transformed into a pattern of web, giving rise to an ethics of justice and care; this ensures a
vision that self and other will be treated as of equal worth. Indeed, such a vision seems to
emerge from Evelyn F. Keller’s outline of ideal, adult maturity: "Ultimately, however, both
sense of self and of other become sufficiently secure to permit momentary relaxation of the
boundary between – without, that is, threatening the loss of either."13
Women’s gothic focuses on this utopian vision of a mutual gaze, devoid of subject–object power relationship. It goes to the credit of the gothic heroine that she successfully combats the ruthless patriarchal gaze with her own strategy of ability and care, moulding the rough edges of fierce masculine power into a smooth, harmonious compatibility. Men, in women’s gothic, are subtly manipulated, till they are caught unaware, weakened by their own vulnerabilities and emotional pitfalls; as a natural consequence, the scale of power shifts towards the seemingly powerless.

Thus, Emmeline deals with a passionate Delamere by her insinuating softness. Tears, the sensibility heroine’s most effective weapon, comes to her aid in convincing this headstrong suitor to desist from tormenting her:

> In the present state of her spirits, she could not hear Delamere’s vehement and passionate exclamations without tears; and when he saw how much she was hurt, he commanded himself; spoke more calmly; and by a rapid transition from rage to tenderness, he wept also, and bathed her hands with his tears. (E 141)

A similar demonstration of care and feminine vulnerability saves the situation for Emmeline, as she pacifies a passionate Fitz–Edward and prevents violence between Adelina’s brother Godolphin and Fitz-Edward, her impulsive lover. Emmeline’s dramatic attempt is quite effective as she exclaims:

> ‘Hear me, Fitz–Edward! One moment hear me! Do not go to meet Captain Godolphin. I conjure, I implore you do not!’ She found it impossible to proceed. Her eyes were still eagerly fixed on his face; she still held his hand; while he, supposing her extreme emotion arose from the compassionate tenderness of her nature, found the steadiness of his despair softened by the soothing voice of pity, and throwing himself
on his knees, he laid his head on one of the chairs, and wept like a woman. (246)

Weeping "like a woman" is, in fact, considered a quality in the so-called heroes of women's gothic. Mostly playing second fiddle to the heroine, these men weep often and weep profusely, under the invisible influence of the heroine’s ability. Toning down the roughness of masculinity, this feminine outburst brings them at par with the ladies. It creates a bond of equality between the sexes.

The manner in which Emmeline convinces Godolphin in agreeing to an alliance between Fitz – Edward and Adelina, emphasizes the conflicting masculine and feminine view of justice. Godolphin's hesitation at the proposal is typical of his conventionally authoritative socio-cultural orientation: “‘There are objections in my mind, insuperable objections, to this alliance. These, however, I must talk over with the Colonel himself.’” Again, it is the feminine concept of justice as care that inspires Emmeline to such eloquent softness that Godolphin has to give in; thus, she argues:

‘Not hostily, I hope. Surely you have too much regard for the unhappy Adelina, to give way now to any resentment you may have conceived against him. Or if that does not influence you, think of what I must suffer.’ She knew not what she had said; hardly what she intended to say.

‘Enchanting softness!’ exclaimed Godolphin in a transport –‘Is then the safety of Godolphin so dear to that angelic bosom?’ (444-45)

Needless to mention that the gothic heroine in such situations, knows exactly what she says and intends to say, as her intention is to "enchant" the man and win her way. Godolphin becomes a hero when he eschews masculine codes of conduct and feels his sister’s disgrace so
intensely that he sheds tears over her sexual downfall, and thereby proves that he is as caring
and considerate in his perceptions, as the women around him.

In a similar manner, Emily’s appealing gaze prevents Valancourt from challenging the fierce Montoni:

…her affecting entreaties drew from him a promise, that, however Montoni might persist in his design of disuniting them, he would not seek to redress his wrongs by violence. ‘For my sake,’ said Emily, ‘let the consideration of what I should suffer deter you from such a mode of revenge!’ ‘For your sake, Emily,’ replied Valancourt, his eyes filling with tears of tenderness and grief, while he gazed upon her. ‘Yes – yes -- I shall subdue myself. (MU 146)

In the eyes of Lucy Snowe, M. Paul is a despot. However, gradually she also gets to see his caring and nurturing side. Her gaze responds to this, not with resistance, but with love and adoration. Paul’s heart is, Lucy observes, benevolent and charitable:

......in its care was a place, tender beyond a man’s tenderness; a place that humbled him to little children, that bound him to girls and women; to whom, rebel as he would, he could not disown his affinity, nor quite deny that, on the whole, he was better with them than with his own sex. (V 448)

Finding Lucy asleep at her desk, Paul covers her with a warm shawl and explains that she needs “watching over”. As he rescues Lucy from the hawk eyes of Mme. Beck, his concern for her is almost maternal, according to Lucy's reminiscences of the incident:

......he looked into my face, his luminous smile went out, his lips expressed something almost like the wordless language of a mother who finds a child greatly and unexpectedly changed, broken with illness, or worn – out by want. (637)
In Lucy’s eyes, Paul gets associated with plenitude and nurturance as she watches him, watering plants (his favourite pastime): "…now he looked to the orange – trees, the geraniums, the gorgeous cactuses, and revived them all with the refreshment their drought needed” (546).

On the spring outing, Lucy recalls, she observed Paul “crossing himself as devoutly as a woman” (508); androgynous by nature, Paul is the romance hero humanized, offering a promise of mutual relationship and equality. In loving him as a priest, mentor, lover and father – figure, Lucy embraces and familiarizes all these social relationships. As teacher – proprietress of the school gifted by Paul, Lucy imbibes within herself Paul’s androgynous role of care and nurturance that sustains her independent identity after his death. Through her retrospective gaze on Paul, Lucy continues to develop an understanding of how divine justice is always entwined with love and care.

Catherine Earnshaw’s self-absorbing perception of life destroys herself and the two families she relates to. Her daughter tries to rebuild families and relationships with her caring and nurturing spirit. The way she ministers to the childish demands of Linton Heathcliff, proves this side of her nature; as Nelly Dean recalls:

…she commenced stroking his curls, and kissing his cheek, and offering him tea in her saucer, like a baby. This pleased him, for he was not much better: he dried his eyes, and lightened into a faint smile. (WH 174)

After her forced marriage to Linton Heathcliff, Catherine dares to encounter in an open conflict with Heathcliff, as both of them have different missions: he, that of revenge and hatred, she, that of love and mutual compatibility. As Heathcliff boasts of his success in poisoning his son against her, Catherine challenges him with her power of love and care:

‘I know he has a bad nature,’ said Catherine: ‘he’s your son. But I’m glad I’ve a better, to forgive it; and I know he loves
me, and for that reason I love him. Mr. Heathcliff, you have nobody to love you; and, however miserable you make us, we shall still have the revenge of thinking that your cruelty arises from your greater misery. You are miserable, are you not? Lonely, like the devil, and envious like him? Nobody loves you – nobody will cry for you when you die! I wouldn’t be you!’ (240)

Her keen, analytic gaze into Heathcliff’s darkness focuses on the conflicting perceptions of life: self – absorbed isolation versus mutual interconnection. No wonder that Heathcliff promptly dismisses her from his vicinity, denouncing her as ‘witch’.

The courtship of Catherine and Hareton at the end involves the domestication of the potent male figure. The novel revises domestic relations to suggest mutuality, not unequal power dynamics in the family; it does so by means of the gaze.

Heathcliff has carefully cultivated Hareton’s degradation by cutting him off from the specular relations (based on the gaze and eye-contact) in which subjectivity is constituted. Before sending him off to entertain Catherine, Heathcliff commands Hareton:

…behave like a gentleman, mind! Don’t use any bad words; and don’t stare when the young lady is not looking at you, and be ready to hide your face when she is;… (187-88)

Such advice reduces almost to absurdity the dynamics of the gaze the text explores, as Heathcliff teaches Hareton to fear and avoid the female gaze and to associate it with imposed muteness (which again reminds us of Lockwood’s reactions to female gaze).

Eventually Catherine seeks to civilize Hareton by getting him to speak to her and return her gaze. ‘I can’t tell what to do to make you talk to me,’ she complains. Ultimately, she gets through his perverse defense with a kiss. To Nelly’s silent reproach at her unabashed boldness, Catherine argues: “‘Well! What should I have done, Ellen? He wouldn’t shake hands, and he
wouldn’t look:’ ” (261). Nelly does not describe how Hareton finally solves the ‘puzzle’ of “where to turn his eyes,” but later descriptions of him and Catherine as “sworn allies” implies that Catherine has succeeded in making him look at her. Nelly’s narrative about the family’s behaviour at breakfast suggests an intended hint of reciprocal gaze between the new lovers:

He dared not speak to her there: he dared hardly look: and yet she went on teasing till he was twice on the point of being provoked to laugh. I frowned, and then she glanced toward the master: whose mind was occupied on other subjects than his company, as his countenance evinced; and she grew serious for an instant, scrutinizing him with deep gravity. Afterwards she turned, and recommenced her nonsense; at last, Hareton uttered a smothered laugh. (264)

Some earlier exchange of gaze seems implicit in the familiar closeness between the lovers, as also in Hareton’s "dar[ ing ] hardly look" at Catherine in front of Heathcliff, who continues to attribute “infernal” powers to her gaze. Hareton, in contrast, experiences not the destructive powers Heathcliff, Joseph and Lockwood fear from the counter – gaze of a woman -- he experiences only joy. The inarticulate curses with which he formerly approximated human speech give way here to laughter. Alone among the male characters in the text, Hareton is able to laugh back in response to a woman. His positive response to Catherine’s flirtatious advances is a sign of a reciprocal gaze that neither appropriates nor annihilates.

Brontë imagines a total destruction of the hierarchical positioning of male and female that the gendered gaze entails. Instead, she portrays a different structuring of the gaze that is registered in a relation of sameness, in the resemblance between Catherine’s and Hareton’s eyes. Nelly shares this observation with Lockwood: “perhaps you have never remarked that their eyes are precisely similar, and they are those of Catherine Earnshaw” (267). The emphasis
actually focuses on Hareton’s gaze, which is strictly neither male nor female, thereby escaping the differential relations that express themselves in the hierarchical subject – object terms.

The subversive power strategy employed by women writers of the gothic aims to establish a fantasy regime of women based on the ethic of care, outwitting an oppressive male regime of rigid laws and strict conventions. The novels focus on the caring and daring gaze of the gothic heroine, subtly manipulating the patriarchal hierarchy to establish a gender relationship based on equality. By positioning herself as the dutiful, complying daughter, she usurps patriarchal power, reforming it in a manner acceptable to her.

Taking in her stride a benevolent father – figure [ such as Lord Westhaven in Emmeline, Marquis de Méfert in The Castle of Wolfenbach, or Count de Villefort in The Mysteries of Udolpho ], the gothic heroine overpowers the brute libidinal male energy epitomized by the gothic villain; she moulds a feminized man for herself in the form of the so-called hero, who would be comfortable to handle and not rob her of independent selfhood. Thus, the hero in women’s gothic ( such as Valancourt, Godolphin, or Hareton ) stands ultimately as a shadow of a man, who bears no resemblance to the dominating patriarch, while the heroine ( like Emily, Matilda, Emmeline, or Catherine ) emerges as less than a shadow, a woman who will struggle against ever suffering the fate of her mother.

As Naomi Wolf observes, “If we are to free ourselves from the dead weight that has once again been made out of femaleness, it is not ballots or lobbyists or placards that women will need first; it is a new way to see” ( Wolf 1992 ). The surviving heroines in women’s gothic have the visionary power to fantasize on a new mode of existence as well as the gut power to work upon it and give an actual shape to their vision. The home created by Emily and Valancourt at the conclusion of The Mysteries of Udolpho is not a claustrophobic, patriarchal home. Valancourt
appears to be living at La Vallée as a subdued version of his earlier frolicking self, an aftermath of his disastrous ‘errors’ in Paris. Emmeline marries Godolphin only after becoming an heiress, and her husband is not a raving, power – grabbing aristocrat, but a suave naval officer – one of the rising bourgeoisie. The penniless Lucy Snowe, inspired by her Christian lover, opens up to a reciprocation of his caring gaze and gets a whole educational establishment as reward from her benevolent, androgynous ‘Great Heart’. M. Paul conveniently dies, leaving on Lucy his mantle of care; as teacher – mother – proprietress of a houseful of girls, Lucy builds up her own matriarchal home, not controlled by surveillance of power, but by the loving vision of care and creative joy. Reworking on the Pygmalion myth, Catherine Linton sets about civilizing Hareton when she lives at the Heights. She gives him books, teaches him to read and know the power of words. Their joint cultivation of the flower – garden and Hareton’s primrose – strewn porridge are emblematic of the transformation of the Heights into a domain of feminine values, a domestic idyll of peace and warmth. The name carved on the lintel of their new home is ‘Hareton Earnshaw’, but it is Catherine Linton who teaches him to read it. It is the heroines in women's gothic who hold the power in their new households. Having exorcised the ravaging patriarch out of existence, the gothic heroine lives in her newly created home with her adequately chastened husband, a quasi – sibling figure, appropriately safe and subdued.

In one of her articles on the gaze, E. Ann Kaplan writes on ‘mutual gazing’ in the mother – child relationship, which, in fact, is the first manifestation of the gaze in human relationship. 14 In her successful usurpation of power through subversion, the heroine in women’s gothic energizes such enactments of mutual gazing whereby the ‘self’ and the ‘other' merge together in a holistic existence. No longer trapped in stifling domestic enclosures, the gothic heroine offers a different message through her civilizing gaze: that education and mutual perception control the
way we see our world and its possibilities. The subversive power of female gaze, a power of care and nurturance that destabilizes an oppressive social power – dynamics is emphasized throughout women’s gothic. The same vision that shimmers through the lines of Adrienne Rich:

Vision begins to happen in such a life
as if a woman quietly walked away
from the argument and jargon in a room
and sitting down in the kitchen, began turning in her lap
bits of yarn, calico and velvet scraps,
pulling the tenets of a life together
with no more will to mastery,
only care for the many – lived, unending
forms in which she finds herself. 15
Notes


