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The Character in the Veil: Imagery of the Surface in the Gothic Novel

DURING THE last twenty years the revival of critical interest in the Gothic novel has made room for a lot of intelligent writing about depth and the depths. Markedly and more or less consciously, critics have recognized and valued the Gothic most readily when they have been able to perceive and describe it as exploring our “sharply personal sense of the war *within*,”¹ as “acknowledg[ing] the non-rational . . . ultimately and most persistently in the *depths* of the human being,” as “*plunging into feeling*” to find “a new *dimension*.”² Such spatial metaphors of interiority occur in the criticism for three reasons. First, they simply echo the novels’ own structural and thematic preoccupation with depth and interiority. Second, they trace a particular psychological model of the self, one with an inside and an outside and with certain material (“the irrational”) on the inside that could or should pass to the outside. And third, they both justify and conceal a premature methodological leap from images of containers and containment in the novels to something rather different in the criticism: an eagerness to write about content. Those critics who have been the most intent on grasping the essence of the Gothic novel whole have also been the most impatient with its surfaces—“claptrap,” “*decor*,” “stage-set”—and the quickest to find “true depths.”³ But their plunge to the thematics of depth and then to a psychology of depth has left unexplored the most characteristic and daring areas of Gothic convention, those that point the reader’s attention back to surfaces.

The more traditional image of “self” as depth, to which some Gothic conventions seem to answer readily, stems in part from a map of psychic topography derived from a reading of Freud.⁴ In this map the self, a vesicle of life substance, is separated from the surrounding reality by a thin membrane that, while formed from the life sub-

stance, has for protective reasons differentiated itself in several respects. To guard its contents against dissolution as a result of inner drives, it has developed mechanisms of defense, signally repression, by which the inner drives, signally sexuality, are denied expression and returned to the interior “unconscious.” Trauma, or the rupture from without of the protective membrane, threatens dissolution through an uncontrolled influx of excitation; and its content too is often notoriously sexual.

In congruence with this map of the self, critics of the Gothic, and not only those who describe themselves as psychoanalytic, find it easy to group together on the one hand the surface, reason, and repression and on the other the depths, the irrational, and the sexual. Over the last thirty years, however, some psychoanalytic writing has suggested that this map of the “self” conceals (or represses), as much as illustrates, Freud’s most crucial formulations. Similarly, applied to the novel, this particular grouping of thematic and psychological topics has defused—by splitting—a second potent range of conventions. The thoroughly Gothic convention, for example, that pairs an elaboration of “the surface” (on a thematic level) with sexual content has often seemed to critics invisible or archaically empty (like “trappings”); they have found sexuality interpretable, or worthy of being deepened by critical language, only when it is already yoked to a thematic evocation of depth.⁵

In this essay, I examine three of the most influential eighteenth-century Gothic novels—Ann Radcliffe’s *Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian* and M. G. Lewis’ *The Monk*—to show that an analysis of the thematic attention to surfaces changes the traditional view of the Gothic contribution to characterization and figuration in fiction. Beginning with a description of the sexual function of veils in these novels, I point out

that the attributes of the veil, and of the surface generally, are contagious metonymically, by touch, and that a related thematic strain depicts veils, like flesh, as suffused or marked with blood. In the second section, I discuss two kinds of marking—the marking of flesh and the marking with blood of veils and other surfaces—as referential: both kinds, that is, have important though incomplete similarities to written language, and the use of the term “character,” like the Gothic conception of human character itself, is anchored in this image of the contagious, quasi-linguistic inscription of surfaces. In the Gothic view, therefore, individual identity, including sexual identity, is social and relational rather than original or private; it is established only *ex post facto*, by recognition. In the third section, I discuss the repetitiveness and fixity inherent in the Gothic presentation of character: incompletely linguistic markings of “character” maintain a draining but irreducible tension with a fiction of physical, personal presence. These traits, although they have often made Gothic characters seem devitalized or two-dimensional, nevertheless represent a powerfully consistent working out of a dialectic inherent in fictional writing. Other important fictional elements, in particular the use of color, landscape, music, and some characteristic turns of plot, exhibit the same fixity and repetition in more visibly influential ways. I conclude by considering, in the light of possible objections, some consequences of my argument: it shows why the recognition of fictional material as “conventional” affects the perception of content as well as of form; it undermines the traditional typology of Gothic characters; and it makes recognizable and meaningful some of the newly described Gothic conventions as they recur in later, more accessible, and apparently realistic fictions.

I

The Gothic convention of ascribing sexual content to surfaces has come closest to attracting critical notice in some studies on the imagery of veils. Even these studies, though, fruitful as they have been, still discuss the veil only as a cloak for something deeper and thus more primal. Elizabeth Broadwell's essay “The Veil

Image in Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian*,” for instance, finds that the veil

assumes a variety of forms: it appears frequently as a literal cloth or garment—a cloak, a cowl, a veil. Then again, it appears in the form of words such as “reveal,” “obscure,” “shroud,” and “conceal.” One form of the veil image is that of a “social veil”—that is, the adoption of manners or of a “social self.” Also, the image appears in a religious context: to “take the veil” is to become a nun. . . .⁶

Broadwell sees the veil as primarily a boundary and a disguise for something else; it is “the line between the conscious and unconscious minds” (p. 79); it is the perceptual envelope, the eye or “I” (p. 80), “manners,” and the “persona” (p. 79). Sympathy, sensibility, the sublime, and most especially sexual union in marriage are possible “only after the rending of all ‘veils’” (p. 86).

The veil itself, however, is also suffused with sexuality. This is true partly because of the other, apparently opposite set of meanings it hides: the veil that conceals and inhibits sexuality comes by the same gesture to represent it, both as a metonym of the thing covered and as a metaphor for the system of prohibitions by which sexual desire is enhanced and specified. Like virginity, the veil that symbolizes virginity in a girl or a nun has a strong erotic savor of its own, and characters in Gothic novels fall in love as much with women's veils as with women. *The Italian* begins (if we exclude the frame narrative) with this ambiguous excitement:⁷ in response to the sight of Ellena's veil, Vivaldi feels “a most painful curiosity”; he is “fascinated,” “excited,” “rapt,” and “embarrassed,” and thus the story is set in motion. *The Monk* opens similarly, with Antonia's appearance at church:

Her features were hidden by a thick veil; But struggling through the crowd had deranged it sufficiently to discover a neck which for symmetry and beauty might have vied with the Medicean Venus. It was of the most dazzling whiteness, and received additional charms from being shaded by the tresses of her long fair hair, which descended in ringlets to her waist. . . . Her bosom was carefully veiled. Her dress was white; it was fastened by a blue sash, and just permitted to peep out from under it a little foot. . . .⁸

The “Youths” who “started involuntarily from their seats,” inspired by this apparition “with the

most lively curiosity," and who make a fuss of forcing shy Antonia to "uncover" and "expose" herself are responding to the mix of the Virgin's colors and the Venus' neck, of whiteness and shade, of the veiling and the veiled. A more openly sexual version of this form of courtship is practiced in *The Monk*, where Ambrosio, the hitherto incorruptible monk of the title, is seduced by a younger monk who "reveals" that "he" is a woman. Matilda's whole appeal to Ambrosio is couched in the eloquence of the monastic habit and the parts of the body that peek through it (pp. 42, 65, 78).

These examples might suggest that the sexual charge of the veil, though evident, remains firmly subordinated to the sexual charge of the veiled, of the more authentically sexual contents. Note, though, how much the veil is *like* the veiled, the flesh that is prized for its "dazzling whiteness" (the phrase occurs formulaically). The flesh, moreover, seems valueless without the veil. In *The Monk* at any rate the hero's main, recurrent motive for further action is postcoital depression: Ambrosio transgresses over and over, in thought and deed, against virginity and modesty, and after each transgression his heart becomes "despondent," "the abode of satiety and disgust" (p. 223). "Matilda gluts me with enjoyment even to loathing, forces me to her arms. . . . Disgusting! did she know the inexpressible charm of Modesty . . . she never would have thrown it off" (p. 243). (The metaphor equates Modesty with the veil.) Robert Kiely's fine discussion of this rhythm in the novel associates the postcoital depression with Lewis' nausea over the limitations of his medium. "Like the artist superior to his art, Ambrosio is . . . the male superior to his gender." And later, "Art, as conceived by Lewis, is the lie which makes human longing . . . appear capable of fulfillment."⁹ To the degree that the latter assertion is true, the image of the veil would represent art, but it would also represent sexuality itself—sexuality as error, as the driving, transitory illusion that a specific object can adequately answer to desire.

Among the qualities that make *The Monk* such a formidably prurient book is its discovery that the attributes of veil and of flesh are transferable and interchangeable. One consequence is that a lover can have the charms of both com-

bined. Ambrosio intrudes on Antonia's sleep, when "an air of enchanting innocence and candour pervaded her whole form; and there was a sort of modesty in her very nakedness, which added fresh stings to the desires of the lustful Monk" (p. 300). (It is not only "modesty" here that replaces the absent veil. The word "candour" is also important in the Gothic, and because its meaning was at that time in flux, it has one sense—"dazzling whiteness," yet again—that seems to cling to its other, abstract, derived senses, including "openness.") Antonia's nakedness is as good—as arousing—as a veil, too, when Ambrosio spies on her in a magic mirror:

Though unconscious of being observed, an in-bred sense of modesty induced her to veil her charms; and She stood hesitating upon the brink [of her chilly bath], in the attitude of the Venus de Medicis. At this moment a tame Linnet flew towards her, nestled its head between her breasts, and nibbled them in wanton play. The smiling Antonia strove in vain to shake off the Bird, and at length raised her hands to drive it from its delightful harbour. Ambrosio could bear no more: His desires were worked up to phrenzy. (p. 271)

In a novel where veil and flesh are so much alike, one need not be dressed to perform a striptease.

Of course, however, there is a demonic side to this lip-smacking slippage from veil to flesh. When the flesh assumes the veil's "dazzling whiteness," the veil in turn can, like flesh, become suffused with blood. In these instances the whiteness is sepulchral, the blood engorgement a badge of violence. At the center of *The Monk's* story within a story, for instance, there is an apparition called the Bleeding Nun, "a Female of more than human stature, clothed in the habit of some religious order. Her face was veiled; On her arm hung a chaplet of beads; Her dress was in several places stained with the blood which trickled from a wound upon her bosom" (p. 138). She is a basilisk figure in the lives of young lovers, bringing demonic possession, cheated desire, and immobilization where they expect freedom and sexual union; where Raymond thinks to find his love, he finds instead "an animated Corse. Her countenance was long and haggard; Her cheeks and lips were bloodless; The paleness of death was spread over her features" (p. 160). In fact, the suffused veil very

often hides Nothing, or death, or, in particular, some cheat that means absence and substitution. Kiely describes this pattern in *The Monk* as “the reversal of the medieval tale of the ‘loathly lady’” (p. 112); in other Gothic novels, however, the shift is not always from an expected beautiful woman to an unveiled figure of death but, more structurally, from *something* expected with a fascinated demand to something else that, simply because it is a substitute, voids and exposes the fascination. Raymond, expecting to see his beloved behind the veil, discovers an animated corpse. When Emily, in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, after long speculation draws aside a black silk veil in the picture gallery, she “instantly let it fall—perceiving that what it had concealed was no picture, and, before she could leave the chamber, she dropped senseless on the floor.”¹⁰ Four hundred pages later we learn what met her eyes then: “a human figure of ghastly paleness, stretched at its length, and dressed in the habiliments of the grave”; it is, moreover, “partly decayed and disfigured by worms” (p. 662). But even the modest chain of inferences that Emily weaves from this evidence—that someone is dead and who the someone might be and how the person died—proves deluded, since the figure in the pall behind the veil is *really* made of wax, an old “monkish” memento mori, and in no way related to the rest of the story. The veil is the place of any voided expectation. The narrative of the veiled “picture” is doubled by another episode, when Emily, following “written traces [of blood] on the stairs of the turret” (p. 324), is fearfully searching Udolpho for her aunt. In a “remote end” of what looks like a torture chamber, she perceives a long, dark curtain:

It seemed to conceal a recess of the chamber; she wished, yet dreaded, to lift it, and to discover what it veiled: twice she was withheld by a recollection of the terrible spectacle her daring hand had formerly unveiled in an apartment of the castle, till, suddenly conjecturing, that it concealed the body of her murdered aunt, she seized it, in a fit of desperation, and drew it aside. Beyond, appeared a corpse, stretched on a kind of low couch, which was crimsoned with human blood, as was the floor beneath. The features, deformed by death, were ghastly and horrible, and more than one livid wound appeared in the face. Emily, bending over the body, gazed,

for a moment, with an eager, frenzied eye; but, in the next, the lamp dropped from her hand, and she fell senseless at the foot of the couch. (p. 348)

Predictably, the hastily and fearfully interpreted blood turns out to be that of a wounded soldier, and the “corpse” of the “aunt” is *another* wounded soldier (p. 365)—although the aunt herself, locked in another room behind other curtains, has also grown “pale,” “emaciated,” with a “skeleton hand” and a face “so changed by illness, that the resemblance of what it had been, could scarcely be traced in what it now appeared” (p. 364). (Emily in the midst of the latter discovery, “unable to speak, or to move from the spot, uttered no sound of terror.”)

It is striking in all these examples that the pallor, attenuation, insentience once proper to the veil, then shifted to the veiled figure, now prove widely contagious. Emily, on making her discoveries, drops “senseless,” blanches, pines away, or goes mute and inert. Later in the novel she is terrified at having a veil thrown over her—“wrapped round her, descending even to her feet”—by a thoughtless servant. “I thought,” the servant says, “how like you look to my dear [dead] mistress in that veil” (p. 534); the veil is a carrier of death. When Raymond in *The Monk* faces the real Bleeding Nun, he becomes immobilized, like her: “My nerves were bound up in impotence, and I remained in the same attitude inanimate as a Statue. . . . There was something petrifying in her regard. . . . She remained for a whole long hour without speaking or moving; nor was I able to do either” (p. 160). “My limbs were chained in second infancy” (p. 162). The successive attendants he hires to guard him are useless: “irresistible slumber” always overtakes them as the ghost approaches. Kiely points out that even Agnes, who has *failed* to substitute herself for the Bleeding Nun and thus escape, is turned by her family and the convent into something like this specter, “a creature . . . so emaciated, so pale” that the man who finally discovers her “doubted to think her Woman” (p. 369; Kiely, p. 112). And the discoverer, in turn, feels “a piercing chillness spread itself through his veins.” Thus the veil is the locus of the substitution of one person for another, in the service of an indis-

criminate metonymic contagion of its own attributes.

II

So far I have discussed the veil in its function of spreading, of extending by contiguity, a particular chain of attributes among the novel's characters. The bloody "veil," however, can also be directly referential: it can constitute itself, at least momentarily, as an order of things that is both distinct from and intentionally descriptive of some other order. This situation occurs in a rudimentary way in *The Monk*. When the wife of a bandit in the Black Forest wants to warn her guest that he will be murdered, she carefully makes up the bed and then hisses quietly, "Look at the Sheets"; the guest, once alone, finds them "crimsoned with blood!" (p. 107) and takes precautions for his life. Although the bloodstain from a previous murder was not originally a sign but, rather, an instance of the metonymic spread described above, it becomes a sign at the moment that it points to a discontinuity: not, in this incident, between an already constituted code of signifiers and their signifieds but between a distinct and comparable past (what happened to the last guest) and present/future (what will happen to this one). While I call this form of signifying rudimentary, it is admittedly less rudimentary, more meaningful, than the "written traces" of blood that Emily follows to find her aunt, where writing is simply equated with a spatial attenuation that captures a temporal flight. It is less rudimentary, too, than the traces of Antonia's blood on Ambrosio's habit that "sufficiently marked him out for [her] Assassin" to the holy office (*Monk*, p. 421). But a fuller unfolding of the same terms—blood, flesh, writing, ground—occurs at a funny moment in *The Monk*, where Antonia's vulgar (and red-headed) aunt writes to a friend of a man she thinks admires her:

"But let not a word drop, which may raise a suspicion of my having written this letter. Should you see the Condé d'Ossorio, tell him . . . I blush while I declare it . . . Tell him that his presence will be but too acceptable to the sympathetic

Leonella.[""]

The latter sentences were written in red ink—

to express the blushes of her cheek, while She committed an outrage upon her virgin modesty.

(p. 202; ellipses in the original)

Red ink spread over paper signifies, at a comfortable distance, red blood suffusing white cheek, and this image, in turn, signifies a fantasied encroachment on a fantasy of virgin modesty. The analogy blood:flesh::writing:ground is here distinct, uncollapsible, denotatively stable, and, by the same token, obviously a fiction. No one would imagine that the red ink *was* blood; no one would even imagine that Leonella could blush.

Not every use of a four-part homology, however, is as crisply stable as Leonella's. In fact, it would be possible to define a thematic convention as the collapse or degradation of a four-part homology.¹¹ There are two ways of collapsing the homology blood:flesh::writing:ground, and each points to a distinct family of Gothic convention. One way is to say that as blood is to the flesh, *so blood is also to the ground* (page, veil, vellum) of writing. This version—the theme of writing in blood—has a special potency in the Gothic novel as elsewhere: it is the token of magic. In *The Italian*, for instance, the doorway to the inner apartment of the Inquisition bears "an inscription in Hebrew characters, traced in blood-colour" (p. 200); and *The Monk* culminates in Ambrosio's signing away his soul in his own blood. When the Wandering Jew prepares to exorcise the Bleeding Nun, he sprinkles the floor with a "liquor" that seems to be blood, "and then dipping in it one end of the Crucifix, He describe[s] a circle in the middle of the room" (p. 171). The authenticity of the blood is an issue in eliciting truth from the ghost: the Wandering Jew demands, "'Knowest Thou this blood? Knowest Thou in whose veins it flowed? Beatrice! Beatrice! In his name I charge thee to answer me!'" (p. 172). (This outcry is like the exclamation in *The Italian*—"here is some print of truth!"—about the bloodstain on a dagger [p. 323].) The inscription of figures on the ground, the emptying of a liquor from a phial, and the marking of the earth with blood are also part of Matilda's later ritual for summoning the devil (pp. 275–76), and a similar chain of rituals is performed by a gypsy with magical powers (pp. 34–39).

The other, corresponding permutation of the

homology is more thoroughly influential: the one in which *writing is to flesh* as writing is to its ground. Writing on flesh occurs explicitly at different levels of literalness. The Wandering Jew in *The Monk*, for instance, literally has "a burning Cross impressed upon his brow" (p. 172), but even he is sometimes described formulaically as well, with no evident joke intended: "He was a Man of majestic presence: His countenance was strongly marked" (p. 168). Here is a sampling of more or less formulaic usages from *The Monk*:

[of a figure in a dream] . . . on his forehead was written in legible characters—"Pride! Lust! Inhumanity!" (p. 28)

He fancied that every eye could read the trans-actions of the night upon his countenance. (p. 226)

With every day his Image grew less feebly impressed upon her bosom. (p. 260)

He approached her with confusion painted on his countenance. (p. 387)

. . . branded with shame. . . . (p. 392)

In *The Italian*, "character" is often a pivotal word in expressing the theme of writing on flesh. It not only has two separate denotations (on the one hand, personality and personal qualities; on the other, a graphic symbol) but represents a way of linking them. While in the following examples from *The Italian* the word sometimes tends more toward one meaning than the other, it usually seems to make an intermediate, ambiguous, or double designation:

. . . the character of Vivaldi lay before him as a map. (p. 52)

The silence and deep repose of the landscape, served to impress this character more awfully on the heart. . . . (p. 65)

A character of peculiar sadness was on her brow. (p. 91)

Their visages, with few exceptions, seemed stamped with the characters of demons. (p. 197)

. . . the inexplicable character of his countenance . . . (p. 275)¹²

Such usages grow wild in these two novels, and comparable ones are present, though less ubiquitous, in *Udolpho* and *Melmoth*.

The properties of figured flesh and the figured surface are contagious in the same way as those of the veil. The brand of the Wandering Jew, for instance, transmits enough of its deadening character to the black velvet bandage that conceals it for the bandage in turn to "spread over his features an additional gloom" (*Monk*, p. 168). Perceiving or retracing one of these inscribed characters is often verbally equated with having it etched on oneself.¹³ When Vivaldi in *The Italian* tries to compare two monks, he notes that "the same gloomy severity seemed to characterize both, and nearly the same terrible portrait was drawn on his fancy." (Or is this likeness just another example, at one more remove, of the veil's contagion? He has second thoughts: "Yet this again might be only an artificial effect, a character which the cowl alone gave to the head" [p. 49].) Similarly, in a landscape, distant sounds at the same time both "characterize solitude, and impress it's [sic] awful power more deeply on the heart" (*Italian*, p. 255).

Although these Gothic conventions about writing give primacy to surfaces, they by no means exclude depth but admit it in certain slippages. Writing on flesh or other surfaces, for example, can occur by marking *on* the surface with a liquid, by staining *through* the surface, or, finally, by impressing *in* the surface, as with acid or a stylus. (This last method forms the etymological basis for "character.") The depth of the inscription, however, does not show that the graphic character is private to, original with, or intrinsic in the bearer. Even when it spells out a true name for the bearer, such as "villain," its depth merely shows the mutilation caused by the attrition of experience. Again, the "character," whatever it is, may be written on countenance, brow, fancy, mind, or heart—in, one presumes, roughly descending order of visibility and publicness—but its veracity is not at all proportional to how private it is or how deep it lies; to the contrary, the very image of writing or engraving seems to insist that the ground be seen strictly as surface, whatever its real dimensional

status. It is complicated to make a model of the relation between a mind that can be inscribed and a countenance that can be inscribed, although the relation must clearly be a version of the one I have already detailed—one that is both metaphorical and metonymic—between the veil and the flesh. At any rate, the centrality or inwardness of mind does not privilege it as long as it is viewed as part of the surface, any more than the flesh is privileged over the veil as a carrier of sexuality.¹⁴

Writing in blood, writing in flesh—even when the formulas are figurative, they represent a special access of the authoritative, inalienable, and immediate; the writing of blood and flesh never lies. What that writing gains in immediacy, though, it loses in denotative range, since writing that cannot lie is only barely writing. The marks traced out in earth, flesh, paper, architecture, and landscape are often not part of any language but, rather, circles, blots, a cross, a person's image, furrows, and folds. Whether stamps of authenticity or brands of shame, and however rich in symbolism, they act as pointers and labels to their material ground and not as elements in a syntactic chain that could mean something *else*. Even the real words that get spelled out—an unintelligible inscription in Hebrew, "villain," "assassin," "Pride! Lust! Inhumanity!"—though more eloquent than one would expect of walls or foreheads, nevertheless lack something in discursiveness. (They are less discursive than, say, the "character" that comes with a new servant.) To the degree that such writing is writing at all, it is like an illustrated lexicon of nouns. Yet it is this imperfect writing, as we shall see, that anchors the Gothic conception of fictional character and lends it its most riveting and influential traits.

What I have been grouping together here is indeed an influential family of Gothic conventions, congruent with one another in important respects and resistant to any psychological reading based on the primacy of depth and content. The self expressed or explored by these conventions is all surface, but its perimeter is neither fixed nor obvious: the veil? the countenance? the heart? This self is at least potentially social, since its "character" seems to be impressed on it from outside and to be displayed facing outward. And the contagion of characters does

more than shape the self that already exists; it presides over the establishment of the self. An extreme example is Matilda in *The Monk*. After she "reveals" to Ambrosio that she is really a woman who has entered the monastery to be near him, she explains how she predisposed him to love her by posing for a painting of the Madonna and arranging to have it sold to him, so that his religious and artistic admiration of the icon created in her image, and the sensual dreams he could not help having about it, would foster in him an erotic proclivity that would be readily transferable back to her. At the end of the novel, though, when Ambrosio's damnation is completed, Lucifer reveals that Matilda's story is the opposite of the truth. The picture came first: "I observed your blind idolatry of the Madona's [sic] picture. I had a subordinate but crafty spirit assume a similar form, and you eagerly yielded to the blandishments of Matilda" (p. 440). The critics who have liked the novel most have generally found this turn "inconsistent with all that has gone before, a blunder."¹⁵ But, even aside from the homosexual frisson of showing that the man who reveals that he is really a woman is *really* something else—more glamorous, more sinister, more potent, and even blanker—this development is ingeniously of a piece with the broader Gothic notion of personal identity.

Always for women, and very often for men, life begins with a blank. The mother, if known, has disappeared temporarily, and an aunt may substitute. The women's names suggest the blank, the white, the innocent, and the pristine: Blanche (who lives in Chateau-le-Blanc), Virginia, Agnes, Ellena Rosalba, Emily St. Aubert, even Signora Bianchi. (In addition, the initial letter A can, I think, be a cipher that signifies a blank origin where the name does not do so denotatively: e.g., Antonia and Ambrosio, who turn out to be siblings.) It is only after experience has inscribed some of these blanks with character that the figures' true identity is "discovered," and then it is made known by a retracing of recognized traits from other faces, signally from portraits, as with Matilda. In *The Italian*, the question of Ellena's identity hangs on the miniature that hangs from her neck. As Schedoni is about to stab her in her sleep, he draws aside the veil from her bosom and sud-

denly freezes: the miniature has tumbled out from its concealment, and he recognizes himself in it. When he wakes her, she says it is of her dead father, and Schedoni claims her as his daughter in a sudden, painful revulsion of feeling. Unconvinced, she is alarmed when he sits on the bed beside her and hugs her, but "she appealed to the portrait, and endeavoured, by tracing some resemblance between it and Schedoni, to decide her doubts. The countenance of each was as different in character as in years." Still, "the same character of haughty pride was visible in both; and Ellena did trace a resemblance in the bold outline of the features, but not sufficient to convince her, without farther evidence, that each belonged to the same person . . ." (pp. 237–38). Similarly, in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* Emily is placed in the context of her family by her resemblance to a miniature (actually to two identical miniatures).

While the "identity" a pendant represents is only the character's social identity, that turns out to be an intimate and inclusive category: one's true name, one's closest ties, and one's radical erotic choices—how one responds to a stranger's hug in the middle of the night—all hang on it. The only attributes it seems to leave out are, finally, the initial sexual differentiation and the education that has preceded the discovery. (But the consequences of sexual difference are themselves the product of careful education; and that education, needless to say, is the imprint of an even more widely public "identity.")¹⁶ The belated establishment of identity, coming after the accumulation of the various inscriptions of character, occurs only with the retracing or recognition of pairs of marked countenances that are ocularly (never just metaphorically or imaginatively) confronted and compared with each other. The chains of visual likeness needed to support a single identification may be long and threatened. To prove that *one person* did all Schedoni's dreadful deeds requires many witnesses and several chapters of exchanges like this:

" . . . That the penitent was the Count di Bruno I have proof; . . . but that father Schedoni was the penitent, I repeat it, I dare not affirm."

"But that dare I!" said another voice. . . .

(*Italian*, p. 342)

Personal identity—in the senses we are discussing here—is at no moment inherent in one but is applicable—is applied—only from outside, *après-coup*, and by a process of visual assimilation or "seeing as."

When there is no other way to establish identity, this method is slippery itself—most often sideways within a generation, between siblings. It establishes identity through similarity, but not every similarity is an identity. The miniature that Ellena wears does represent Schedoni but does *not* represent Ellena's dead father, who was Schedoni's brother, whom Schedoni had killed, and whose wife—Ellena's mother—had then married Schedoni and borne him a child (now dead). Result: the miniature, the only "print of truth," induces Ellena to take Schedoni for his own brother and Schedoni to take Ellena for her own sister. Again, Emily's resemblance to the twin miniatures in *Udolpho* leads her and others to imagine she is the daughter of the pictured woman, who turns out to have been her aunt, her father's sister. In both novels the provenance of the (inherited) miniatures is an issue. A particular "identity" in these two instances is a pendant, a detachable, misplaceable fetish that is transmitted through the family by an erratic path, coming into the possession of some and eluding others.¹⁷ Nor can the pendant represent the identity of one person alone. The crucial thing that Ellena and Schedoni both have to learn, the thing that will stamp their sexual and class ambitions, is their identity in relation to each other; and the same acts of retracing carried out on a single portrait identify, or provisionally identify and permanently associate, the two of them. Similarly, it is only in the bond of visual assimilation with her aunt that Emily begins to make sure who either she or her aunt is.

III

Thomas De Quincey writes that in the worst throes of opium "the human face tyrannized over my dreams." The human face seems also to tyrannize over the Gothic novel, and its insistence, as I will show, is most closely related to what readers see as the flatness, the devitalization of character in these novels. Faces tyrannize here neither by beauty nor by ugliness, nor even

by an oppressive numerical excess, but by their very freight of meaning. The faces are not memorable in themselves: no funny noses, disturbed complexions, expressive chins, or idiosyncrasies of any sort (one redhead is the only exception), but only a succession of designations among a small group of bipolar oppositions. Face highly colored?—yes or no. Flesh marked by furrows?—yes or no. Eyes fiery? (Fiery eyes go with furrowed flesh, for they are reservoirs of the fury born of mutilation.) Features in motion?—yes or no. Like the characters impressed on them, the faces themselves seem to be halfway toward becoming a language, a code, a limited system of differentials that could cast a broad net of reference and interrelation.¹⁸ Since faces in these novels are said to record history and every social relation, such a language could have a great deal to say. “Halfway toward” becoming a language is exactly the locus of tyranny, however.¹⁹ The system of differentiations is, to begin with, too small to make more than a crude and tedious code. And then, like the “characters” that could only form an illustrated lexicon of nouns, the entire code of physiognomy has a small vocabulary that is firmly tethered—as an illustrative text, a fixed pendant—to a physical presence. Although in novels the actual physical presence of a character’s face and body is absent, still the physiognomic code is continually impoverished by the insistent *fiction* of physical presence—the fiction that a real physical face is somehow imposing its special coherence on the features verbally described. The relation between the code’s diacritical characters and their physical ground is thus not at all the necessary one—necessary for writing—between dominating focus on the one side and renunciatory inattention on the other. To the contrary, the human face and body always insist on being recognized as such. But at the same time the fascination with the code in Gothic novels is so full and imperious that it weakens the verbal supports for the fiction of presence—though without denying the fiction, which is almost inalienable. (Thus one describes the characters as “two-dimensional” but anthropomorphizes them nonetheless.)

It is in the insistence of this constitutive struggle, and the attenuated versions involving the veil and the habit rather than the countenance

itself, that the Gothic novel makes its most radical contribution to the development of character in fiction. In a (novelistic) world of faces where the diacritical code is poor but where all nonlinguistic, or nonsignifying, discriminations are elided in its favor (the two conditions of being halfway toward a language), two things will happen. First, there will be unbounded confusions of identity along the few diacritical axes: any furrowed man will be confusable with any other furrowed man (Schedoni with Zampari with Zeluca, for example), and so forth. Second, when the time comes to settle these confusions, the normal tools for doing so—nonce discriminations, the differentiations that happen not to be coded, “This one has blue eyes and that one, I remember, had brown eyes,” “He always did suck on his teeth like that”—will be unavailable. The noncode level of discriminations having been vitiated by the fascination of the code, the only reliable basis for comparison will be one of those complete, literal, ocular juxtapositions. And that will be reliable only to the degree that the two faces approach being line-for-line identical. (I.e., there is such a thing as a decided “Yes! They are exactly the same” but no possible criterion for a decided “No.”) There seem to be no noncoded differences between persons that could not also occur in any one person over time.

The preceding account provides, at any rate, a way of tracing the bond between, on the one hand, those commanding, inalienable, but static and limited hieroglyphics and, on the other, the imperative in these novels that seems to make the hieroglyphic faces multiply and confront one another, and multiply *by* confrontation, so tyrannically and uncontrollably. Faces or fictional “characters” less dominated by their hieroglyphic function—as in other, more familiar novelistic traditions—might not only look more idiosyncratic and “human” but might also more freely assume and illustrate the play of different symbolic parts rather than the proliferation of the same one. Ruskin, writing about drawing, describes a threatening imaginary “society in which every soul would be as the syllable of a stammerer instead of the word of a speaker, in which every man would walk as in a frightful dream, seeing spectres of himself, in everlasting multiplication, gliding helplessly around him in a

speechless darkness.”²⁰ Against this Gothic-sounding state, where, again, an imperfect or nonsyntactic language points straight toward “everlasting multiplication,” Ruskin sets the ideal of “perpetual difference, play, and change in groups of form.” Ruskin’s scale of valuation, or Jacques Lacan’s congruent one (see n. 18), is foreign to the Gothic novel, but the images are the same—not only the images singly considered but also the terms of their conjunction.

That the Gothic novel—or the Gothic convention—does not value “perpetual difference, play, and change” highly as an antidote to the fixities of repetition is evident, not in the absence of figures of play and change, but in their firm subordination to the figures of fixity. In the Gothic, and specifically in Radcliffe, the best thematic representation of “difference, play, and change,” as opposed to what inheres and endures, occurs in a typically pictorial image: color as opposed to outline. Color is, to begin with, often a lie, a disguise spread over an underlying “design.” (“Thus to give injustice the *colouring* of mercy, and to acts most absolutely tyrannical the *softening tints* of generosity, excited her honest indignation. She was not, however, shocked by the discovery of the designs formed against her” [*Italian*, pp. 83–84; italics mine].) Passages in *The Italian* suggest that the color-stained darkness of the church, where “the colours of the glass throw, instead of light, a shade,” is meant to accommodate the blushes of the sinful and thus bring more money into the church (pp. 3, 80). Even where color does not temporize, it emblemizes the temporal because it fades from designs:

... taking the light from her woman to examine the tapestry, [Blanche] perceived, that it represented scenes from the wars of Troy, though the almost colourless worsted now mocked the glowing actions they once had painted. She laughed at the ludicrous absurdity she observed, till, recollecting, that the hands, which had wove it, were, like the poet, whose thoughts of fire they had attempted to express, long since mouldered into dust, a train of melancholy ideas passed over her mind, and she almost wept.

(*Udolpho*, p. 474)

If color represents immediacy, that immediacy is an ignorant and indeed a projected one:

the joy

Of young ideas, painted on the mind
In the warm glowing colours fancy spreads
On objects not yet known, when all is new. . . .¹²

The later state, with the colors faded, is both more truthful and more serene. Ellena cannot confide in her mother, she finds, because “over the scenes of her past distress Time had not yet drawn his shadowing veil; the colours were all too fresh and garish for the meek dejection of her eye” (*Italian*, p. 372). In those insistent, lovely, influential Radcliffe landscapes, which all seem to tell the same story but which interrupt the narrative as eagerly as if they all braided together into a suspenseful subplot, the deliquescence and withdrawal of color in favor of outline are the main action. Twilight is the favorite hour, and “dubious light” or “dubious tint” the favorite condition, not because of the growing indistinctness of the view—indeed the main lineaments dominate—but because of the fascination of that moment when the different colors of a scene (*as opposed to* the shape) first become one, then disappear. The shift from the play of different colors to the brooding on the presence or absence of color (of color absolutely considered, but usually only one color, and that one always purple or red) in a perceived scene or tapestry or face or veil represents the magnetism of the bipolar, exercised at the cost of sapping any system that has three irreducible primaries. (The presence or absence of color in these landscapes is exactly analogous to the presence or absence of music, which very frequently succeeds the withdrawing colors of twilight “win[ning] on silence” and then “roll[ing] away in murmurs, which attention pursued to the last faint note that melted into air” [*Italian*, p. 65].) Of course, the obvious traditional referent of color symbolism is sexual desire—“His affection assumed stronger and warmer colours” (*Monk*, p. 419)—but especially in the erotic field, where the imagery of blood engorgement is so ready, “warmer colours” usually means the monochrome red; in *its* ebbs and flows the bipolar use of color, the brooding on presence or absence, assumes its most affecting form.²² And yet even here, even with the fiercest motive of desire, color stands for the temporally fugitive. The last word is almost always with the linear residue, with structure drained of color. Sexually

passionate characters come to the end of their histories not imbued or suffused or deep-dyed with passion but, often dismayingly, emptied of affective passion, retaining only those etiolating graphic traces in which, as we have seen, the notion of "true character" so often inheres.²³

This transumption of color by line is, not surprisingly, at home in eighteenth-century metaphysics. Kant, for instance, writes that

in painting, sculpture, and in all the formative arts . . . the *delineation* is the essential thing; and here it is not what gratifies in sensation but what pleases by means of its form that is fundamental for taste. The colors which light up the sketch belong to the charm; they may indeed enliven [*belebt machen*] the object for sensation, but they cannot make it worthy of contemplation and beautiful.²⁴

It is relevant for our purposes that the first edition of *Critique of Judgment* had "*beliebt* [pleasing, from *lieben* 'love'] *machen*" instead of *belebt machen*. Freud in his pivotal writings around the uncanny also uses the opposition color/outline to group together the reality and pleasure principles (*belebt* and *beliebt*) in opposing them to some ultimate of structure, the death instinct and the repetition compulsion.²⁵ In the Gothic, if desire animates characters, it is repetition and death itself that most stamp them as (with) characters and fix them in those identifying ocular confrontations where, as face reflects character from face, pallor and immobility are epidemic. The only passion that lasts until death is revenge, the passion most nearly stripped of affective coloration, the one that comes closest to embodying the unadulterated compulsion to repeat. Schedoni and Nicola, in *The Italian*, are both literally poisoned by the venom of revenge; it is striking in this climactic paragraph (as in the entire chapter) how pure a form our conventions assume in the proximity of death. I quote for that reason at some length:

Schedoni's struggles now began to abate, and in a short time he lay motionless. When he unclosed his eyes, death was in them. He was yet nearly insensible; but presently a faint gleam of recollection shot from them, and gradually lighting them up, the character of his soul appeared there; the expression was indeed feeble, but it was true. . . . At length, he uttered a sound, but he had not yet sufficient command of his muscles, to modulate that sound into a word, till by repeated efforts the name of

Nicola became intelligible. At the call, the monk [Nicola] raised his head from the shoulder of the person on whom he had reclined, and turning round, Schedoni, as was evident from the sudden change of expression in his countenance, discovered him; his eyes, as they settled on Nicola seemed to recollect all their wonted fire, and the malignant triumph, lately so prevalent in his physiognomy, again appeared as in the next moment, he pointed to him. His glance seemed suddenly impowered with the destructive fascination attributed to that of the basilisk, for while it now met Nicola's, that monk seemed as if transfixed to the spot, and unable to withdraw his eyes from the glare of Schedoni's; in their expression he read the dreadful sentence of his fate, the triumph of revenge and cunning. Struck with this terrible conviction a pallid hue overspread his face; at the same time an involuntary motion convulsed his features, cold trembling seized upon his frame, and, uttering a deep groan, he fell back, and was caught in the arms of the people near him. At the instant of his fall, Schedoni uttered a sound so strange and horrible, so convulsed, yet so loud, so exulting, yet so unlike any human voice, that every person in the chamber, except those who were assisting Nicola, struck with irresistible terror, endeavoured to make their way out of it. This, however, was impracticable. . . . (p. 402)

To the ocular contagion of death and its attributes, the graphic legibility of the face, the draining and horrifying struggle to make intelligible a single word, and that word the proper name of someone present—to these an extensive catalog of conventions could only add that the poison, whose origin was perhaps secreted in Schedoni's heart, was smuggled into the dungeon in the "vest" of his habit, folded "within a broad hem of his garment" (pp. 403–04); but how it got from there to Nicola, Schedoni dies without explaining, nor is the mystery ever explained.

IV

If one contends that not only the traditional brief against the Gothic novel but also the most comprehending brief in favor of its psychological sophistication and artistic purposefulness must lie in the complication, fascination, and contagion of the two-dimensional conventions, some interesting corollaries and conclusions appear—partly in the light of possible objections.

One such objection is the tendentiousness of examining thematic conventions, especially for

figures of dialectic and change. The problem here is with "thematic" (do not *things* in novels—once they are focused on—always stand for fixity rather than play?) but even more, and more interestingly, with "conventions." For the process of recognizing a convention is structurally identical with what goes on in the conventions we have recognized—those tests of identity, for instance, in which one face is confronted with another and the presence or absence of a few diacritical coded features is allowed at least momentarily to eclipse any idiosyncrasy, so that the comparison is found reliable, as I noted above, "only to the degree that the two . . . approach being line-for-line identical. (I.e., there is such a thing as a decided 'Yes! They are exactly the same' but no possible criterion for a decided 'No.')" Thus, the identification of conventions is almost the least dialectical of critical activities, the most assimilative, the one in which the slippage of things into their opposites is most necessarily imperceptible. Those traits are visible in the structure of the present essay: the smooth, echoic dovetailing of thematic matter, the wearying, sometimes unmapped shifts of content.²⁶

All this is to say that an examination of conventions in a genre is limited in what it can find, limited almost to reflections of its own project: imaginative mastery of arrested, drained, repeated, and denotatively unstable and ambitious material.

At the same time, I mean to say something more positive. For to say that one genre is more conventional than others—and Gothic is the conventional genre par excellence—is now also to say something not only formally but also substantively descriptive about that genre's ambitions and preoccupations.

A second objection to the present examination might simply be that it has left out something that *is* properly conventional: a typology of Gothic characters along such axes as generation, sex, and class. That sort of classification is conventional not only in the novels but also (indeed chiefly) in the criticism, and I have left it out here chiefly for fear of including it too early. If the conventions I have discussed show any one thing, it is how many important attributes circulate in these novels between characters and their world, between characters and objects, and

simply between characters; that voluminous circulation has very much to do with the sometimes unfamiliar, though by no means naive, view of personal identity. Generation, sex, and class indeed preside over that circulation, but often in unexpected terms. The servant class has not, for instance, the distinctively active sexual role it has in some other genres; but the indignities servants often suffer as characters are balanced by the potency of their sway over the discourse. In rhetorical terms, they represent the pole of metonymy, of spread, which is dominant in all Gothic characters but deformed or paralyzed in the "higher" characters by an additional insistence on metaphor and proper naming (in Lacan's words, "hieroglyphics of hysteria," "blazons of impotence" [p. 44]). This function of servants not only leads to their notorious garrulity and hence to the particular form in which information flows through (is obstructed in) these volumes (i.e., the form by which the stories prolong themselves); it also facilitates the few occasions on which emotion as such—as distinct from its graphic blazons, blush or pallor or immobility—is allowed to spread by contagion. Here servants turn out to play a sexual role. Vivaldi's servant Paolo illustrates it both tonally and thematically at the end of *The Italian*:

Paolo bowed, and stammered, and writhed and blushed, and was unable to reply; till, at length, giving a sudden and lofty spring from the ground, the emotion which had nearly stifled him burst forth in words, and "*O! giorno felice! O! giorno felice!*" flew from his lips with the force of an electric shock. They communicated his enthusiasm to the whole company, the words passed like lightning from one individual to another, till Vivaldi and Ellena withdrew amidst a choral shout, and all the woods and strands of Naples re-echoed with—"*O! giorno felice! O! giorno felice!*"

And Paolo goes on to say:

" . . . here we are all abroad once more! All at liberty! And may run, if we will, straight forward, from one end of the earth to the other, and back again without being stopped! May fly in the sea, or swim in the sky, or tumble over head and heels into the moon!" (p. 414)

A truly dynamic or economic reading of these novels would discern the rules of circulation of conventional "material." It would, I think, have

to discuss sexual desire and, more generally, the will or motivation of individual characters—the illusion of individuality, in fact, and the wracking, dominant struggle between that illusion and the fascination of the hieroglyphic—first as a disorder of rhythm, a disease of expectation, of the sort we have discerned in Ambrosio in his approaches to veils and the veiled, and only then in terms of a typology of characters.

A third objection might be that the thematic features I find in the Gothic novel, even if they are there, do not represent the part of the genre that proved usable or resonant for later writers and hence have not become part of any major tradition. Really, though, it is only critics, not novelists, who have ignored these conventions. Robert Heilman's influential essay on Charlotte Brontë's treatment of the Gothic, for instance, suggests that, while Brontë may have looked to the "simple," "primitive Gothic" for raw passion, no one would look to it for anything so sophisticated as the use of a wedding veil to symbolize *marriage*. "That is another thing," he writes, "far less elementary as art" (pp. 120–21). But it is not only in the complication of veils, in the impenetrable and compelling fetishes of the Gothic, in the bipolar color sense that moves from blood color to no color that later novelists found important matter, although they did find it there. They turned to the Gothic for the most important thematic and structural elements of the creation of fictive character. I should like to end by quoting some sentences from Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* in which the thematic strands I have been discussing from the Gothic do become salient in all their Gothic complexity. The passage represents, at the same time, an exemplary moment in Brontë's psychological exploration of her heroine. The sentences are not obviously Gothic in "trappings" or "mummery," but trappings and mummery are part of their subject. Brontë creates a character

—Vashti, an actress—as Lucy Snowe watches her on stage. Vashti is herself at work creating a character, so that the rigor and wastage of individuation, redoubled in her, spread out as well to capture Lucy, the suddenly fixed viewer.

What I saw was the shadow of a royal Vashti: a queen, fair as the day once, turned pale now like twilight, and wasted like wax in flame. . . .

I found upon her something neither of woman nor of man: in each of her eyes sat a devil. . . . They wrote HELL on her straight, haughty brow. They tuned her voice to the note of torment. They writhed her face to a demoniac mask. Hate and Murder and Madness incarnate she stood.

It was a marvellous sight: a mighty revelation.

It was a spectacle low, horrible, immoral.

. . . she stood locked in struggle, rigid in resistance. She stood, not dressed, but draped in pale antique folds, long and regular like sculpture. A background and entourage and flooring of deepest crimson threw her out, white like alabaster—like silver: rather, be it said, like Death.

The issue of what constitutes the character—what internecine superposition of a length of words, the image of a body, a name, and, on the countenance, an authenticating graphic stamp—had never before the Gothic been confronted so energetically in those terms.

Scarcely a substance herself, she grapples to conflict with abstractions.²⁷

It was from the Gothic novel that this drama of substance and abstraction made its way into more easily intelligible, modern-sounding fictional forms.

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Notes

¹ Masao Miyoshi, *The Divided Self* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1969), p. xiv; my italics.

² Robert B. Heilman, "Charlotte Brontë's 'New' Gothic," *From Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad: Essays Collected in Memory of James T. Hillhouse*, ed. Rob-

ert C. Rathburn and Martin Steinmann, Jr. (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1958), pp. 131, 121; my italics.

³ The first quotation is from Lowry Nelson, "Night Thoughts on the Gothic Novel," *Yale Review*, 52

(1963), 251; the next two from Heilman, p. 121; and the last from Nelson, p. 238.

⁴ In the first chapter of my book *The Coherence of Gothic Convention*, Gothic Studies (New York: Arno, 1980), I offer a critique of this way of interpreting images of depth and interiority in the Gothic. Briefly, "the units of this model are often not coterminous with the fictional 'selves' in the novels, nor does the model necessarily demarcate areas that are qualitatively, affectively, or atmospherically different from each other" (p. 12). For the influence of Freud see, e.g., *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*, Vol. xxiii of *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. Ernest Jones (London: Hogarth, 1953-73), pp. 198-99. I take it, however, that a map of psychic topography very like this one is (now) not the hypothesis of a specialized few but a tenet of "common sense": the language about depth quoted in the first paragraph of this essay was written by, and is instantly intelligible to, nonspecialists.

⁵ "Thematic" as used in this essay means verbally explicit, at the level of denotation or etymological connotation. It contrasts with "formal" and "structural."

⁶ Broadwell, *South Atlantic Bulletin*, 40 (1975), 77.

⁷ "It was in the church of San Lorenzo at Naples, in the year 1758, that Vincentio di Vivaldi first saw Ellena Rosalba. The sweetness and fine expression of her voice attracted his attention to her figure, which had a distinguished air of delicacy and grace; but her face was concealed in her veil." Ann Radcliffe, *The Italian, or the Confessional of the Black Penitents*, ed. and introd. Frederick Garber (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971), p. 5.

⁸ Matthew Gregory Lewis, *The Monk*, ed. and introd. Howard Anderson (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), p. 9. In discussing this novel I use Lewis' capitalization.

⁹ Kiely, *The Romantic Novel in England* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1972), pp. 108, 110.

¹⁰ Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, ed. and introd. Bonamy Dobrée (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970), p. 249.

¹¹ The four-part homological structure A:B::C:D is useful in apparently making possible a discussion of invariant relations that begins with specific attributes of particular things (A, B) but goes beyond the particular or thematic to play over things that have far different attributes. To give an example, if I look for elements to link thematically with a river in a poem, I am likely to look mainly for "water imagery"—for example, wet things. But if what I first perceive is an *opposition between* wet and dry, I can bring into relation other *oppositions* (A:B::C:D), including ones not based on humidity—fair and dark, for instance. Indeed, an infinite chain of these is possible.

Thematic conventions—such as "water imagery"—do not offer or invite this floating free of meaning from attributes to relations; instead, they dwell on the attribute, may even seem fixed on it. As they apply the same attribute to different things, their relational structure could be written A:B::A:C. I am suggesting that, while A:B::A:C may be a simpler homology than A:B::C:D (in the sense that it is more repetitious,

more tethered to the particular, less relational, less open to the orderly free play of the Symbolic), it is not anterior to, or more elementary than, A:B::C:D; rather it assumes the latter structure, which it depends on for meaning.

For a further discussion of convention and its relation to both repetition and fixity, see Sec. 4 and n. 26.

¹² Further: "His cowl, too, as it threw a shade over the livid paleness of his face, encreased its severe character . . ." (p. 35). ". . . the air of proud yet graceful dignity, with which she characterized herself . . ." (pp. 117-18). ". . . the mountains . . . character themselves sublimely upon the still glowing horizon" (p. 161). "Vivaldi could not look upon [them], without reading in them the fate of some fellow creature . . . ; and, as they passed with soundless steps, he shrunk from observation, as if their very looks possessed some supernatural power, and could have struck death" (p. 197). ". . . a man, who had 'villain' engraved in every line of his face . . ." (p. 211). ". . . she thought 'assassin' was written in each line of [his face] . . ." (p. 250). ". . . a grateful heart . . . is the indelible register of every act that is dismissed from the memory of the benefactor . . ." (p. 254). ". . . the monk held a lamp, which gleamed over every deep furrow of his features, yet left their shadowy markings to hint the passions and the history of an extraordinary life" (p. 319). ". . . the same wild and indescribable character still distinguished his air . . ." (p. 356). ". . . the intermediate part of his countenance, receiving the full glare of the torch, displayed all its speaking and terrific lines" (p. 396).

¹³ The double surface of the memory trace in psychoanalytic thought is closely analogous to this particular contagion. See Freud's "A Note upon the 'Mystic Writing-Pad,'" *Complete Psychological Works*, xix, 227-32, and, among many recent writings on the subject, Nicolas Abraham's especially relevant "The Shell and the Kernel," trans. Nicholas Rand, *Diacritics*, 9, No. 1 (1979), 16-28, esp. p. 24.

¹⁴ How casual the slippage between surface and depth can be—that is, how readily a third dimension can be assimilated to the notion of "surface"—appears in the odd solution to a persistent mystery in *Udolpho*. How have invisible strangers infiltrated Chateau-le-Blanc? How do they manage to be just where the family are not and to carry off the servants? Where do they keep themselves? A thorough, absolute search of the chateau reveals nothing. Finally a returned servant reveals that he was snatched away through a door concealed behind an arras.

"This door surprises me," said Emily, "because I understood, that the Count had caused the arras to be lifted, and the walls examined, suspecting, that they might have concealed a passage through which you had departed."

"It does not appear so extraordinary to me, madam," replied Ludovico, "that this door should escape notice, because it was formed in a narrow compartment, which appeared to be part of the outward wall, and, if the Count had not passed over it, he might have thought

it was useless to search for a door where it seemed as if no passage could communicate with one; but the truth was, that the passage was formed within the wall itself." (p. 632)

Indeed, the chateau turns out to be riddled with passages, all masquerading indetectably as walls.

¹⁵ John Berryman, *Introd., The Monk*, by Matthew Gregory Lewis, ed. Louis F. Peck (New York: Grove, 1959), p. 16.

¹⁶ For instance, Antonia, like Ambrosio, at the beginning of *The Monk*, "knows not in what consists the difference of Man and Woman" (p. 17; comedy about this, in which her aunt, in preaching ignorance, almost spills the beans, follows on p. 18); and her mother cannot warn her to resist Ambrosio's liberties (Antonia has no idea what a liberty *is*) "lest in removing the bandage of ignorance, the veil of innocence should be rent away" (p. 264). As we have seen, this careful differentiation between bandage and veil proves factitious.

¹⁷ The pendant shares some traits with the Lacanian "phallus" (distinct from the penis): it circulates among men and women, it leads to definition within a larger symbolic system, its relation to the body is confusingly both metonymic and metaphoric. But see n. 18 for a problem this identification suggests.

¹⁸ This "halfway toward" locus shares some traits with Lacan's realm of the Imaginary, which originates in a "mirror stage" and allows bipolar oppositions to be described psychologically in terms of a fixation at the stage of ocular confrontation. See, for instance, in English, Jacques Lacan, *The Language of the Self*, ed. and trans. Anthony Wilden (New York: Dell, 1968), specifically Wilden's essay (pp. 159–77). But the identification of the pendant, the mirror image, with the phallus, and hence with the entry into the Symbolic system, creates a problem for the Lacanian terms, which define the Symbolic by differentiating it from the Imaginary. We have in the Gothic both a form of language that is arrested at the mirror stage and a mirror object that circulates like language in the realm of the Symbolic. Nor is the Gothic unique in displaying these anomalies.

¹⁹ Lacan, to the contrary, apparently sees the inauguration of language, or the Symbolic function, as guaranteeing freedom rather than imposing fixation. Thus, the identification here of the hieroglyphic imposition with fixation itself is, in terms of the polemical background of this essay, a confirmation of the firm links Derrida and others have drawn between, precisely, writing and the uncanny.

²⁰ "Sketching from Nature," *The Elements of Drawing*, in *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1904), xv, 117.

²¹ Hannah More, "David and Goliath," *Sacred Dramas* (Philadelphia: Edward Earle, 1818), p. 45. Quoted in *Udolpho*, p. 464.

²² Joshua Wilner, to whose reflections I am indebted in this section, suggested to me in a conversation that

the tripolarity of color tends to be sublated to the bipolarity presence/absence because the latter is complicit with a wish to see the self and specifically the will as unitary and integral. See below and esp. n. 24 for some related imagery in Kant.

²³ Examples: Laurentini in *Udolpho*, esp. p. 646, and Ambrosio repeatedly in *The Monk*, esp. pp. 304, 387. Even the final satisfactions of sympathetic—i.e., moderate—characters tend to be closer to anesthesia than to consummation. The fate of *The Monk's* four successful young lovers, for instance, is announced in these numb lines: "The exquisite sorrows with which they had been afflicted, made them think lightly of every succeeding woe. They had felt the sharpest darts in misfortune's quiver; Those which remained appeared blunt in comparison. Having weathered Fate's heaviest Storms, they looked calmly upon its terrors: or if ever they felt Affliction's casual gales, they seemed to them gentle as Zephyrs, which breathe over summer-seas" (p. 420).

²⁴ Immanuel Kant, "Critique of Aesthetic Judgment: Analytic of the Beautiful," *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J. H. Bernard (New York: Hafner, 1968), Sec. 14, p. 61. The transumption is, however, an imperfect resolution of the play between form and color, to the extent that color can be viewed as a subversive and possibly a malignant or an imperialistic part of the whole: "So far are [charms] from adding to beauty that they must be admitted by indulgence as aliens." It is the incorporative body that warily "admits aliens" that must, as in Wilner's formulation, insist on mobilizing them, even if factitiously, against a single, distinctively formal enemy.

²⁵ Neil Hertz gives an account of this grouping and its implications in "Freud and the Sandman," in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Poststructuralist Criticism*, ed. Josue Harari (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1979), pp. 299–302. The main Freud passages he brings together are from *Civilization and Its Discontents*, *Complete Psychological Works* (hereafter *CPW*), xxi, 120; *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, *CPW*, xviii, 60; and "The Uncanny," *CPW*, xvii, 238. Jean Laplanche's *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976), contains a further careful, challenging assessment of the opposition in Freud's later theory between the death drive and the other drives, concluding that "the death drive does not possess its own energy. Its energy is libido. Or, better put, the death drive is the very soul, the constitutive principle, of libidinal circulation" (p. 124).

²⁶ Here is a small example of how the structure of "looking for conventions" determines the content of what will be found. When one reads *The Italian* with close attention to faces, one keeps encountering the word "fixed": "There was something in his physiognomy extremely singular, and that can not easily be defined. It bore the traces of many passions, which seemed to have fixed the features they no longer animated" (p. 35). ". . . his features were fixed in an expression at once severe and crafty" (p. 48). ". . . habitual discontent had fixed the furrows of their

cheeks" (p. 62). "... he yielded, though reluctantly, to the awe which, at intervals, returned upon him with the force of a magical spell, binding up all his faculties to sternness, and fixing them in expectation" (p. 71). "... a dreadful foreboding of their own destiny fixed them ..." (p. 76). "... a fixedness in her look ..." (p. 86). "... [Olivia's eyes] were often fixed upon her face ..." (p. 91). "He ... had contributed, by his artful instigations, to fix the baleful resolution of the Marchesa ..." (p. 223). "The person who discovered Schedoni, would not have recollected him, had not his remarkable eyes first fixed his attention, and then revived remembrance" (p. 226). "... his look and fixed attitude terrified her ..." (p. 247). "... the gleam of spirit and of character that had returned to his eyes, was departed, and left them haggard and fixed ..." (p. 404; other instances include pp. 75, 87, 91, two on 104, 105, two on 236, and 237).

Everything makes it easy to perceive this particular repeated semantic choice as conventional—as fixed, like a game of chance, if not fixated, like a neurotic. It wears its name blazoned on it; its subject is usually, like its structure as convention, repeated reinscription; the meaning "ocular domination" itself comes by repetition to dominate other meanings of "fix"; and from the (inevitably retroactive) identification of fixity as

convention, certain inferences, including those in this essay, can be "read" (written) back into Ann Radcliffe's novel. What is left out? First, in many of its occurrences, "fixed" appears as part of an antithetical pair, but its opposite number varies according to context: "animated," "recovered," "revived," "convulsed," etc. (pp. 35, 76, 226, 247). These different words, though they have a strong bond of meaning, do not come to look conventional, and neither does their relation to that conventional "fixed," because the relations differ: sometimes the other term leads to fixation, sometimes it succeeds it, sometimes it struggles against it. Second, even that word "fix" has different content in different places—the "fixed"-ness that follows death (p. 404) is the opposite of "a fixedness in her look, too energetic for common suffering" (p. 86)—and it is from the *difference* of the meanings this word dominates (fixes) that we know it is a convention. Third, "to fix" is a transitive verb, but focusing on it as something *repeated* tends to suppress its function as something *circulated*. The basilisk properties of eye, like so many other properties, move from character to character (see, e.g., p. 236), but the dynamics and economics of the exchange are not properly conventional.

²⁷ Brontë, *Villette* (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1911), II, 9–10.