Don't Look Behind You! The Mirroring of Mental Illness In the Gothic Between Character and Environment

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Introduction

To quote Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik, both writing in reference to the role of gender in the gothic genre, “women constantly flirt with madness.” This is not to say that all women in the gothic genre are truly mad, or that they purposefully “flirt” with the concept of madness as a way to gain attention, or stand out, or in any way use “madness” as a means to an end. Instead, as all women in the gothic genre are subjected to, the “madness” of a woman is the madness of the environment around her, fully compounded upon herself until she has no choice but to express her hysteria, only to be punished for her manipulated actions. Horner and Zlosnik continue with this line of thought, stating that many readers, myself included, tend to “gradually [realize] that the passionate female characters who fail to tame their wild nature end up locked in turrets, convents, or prisons”.

Even before the concept of hysteria can be studied, one must look at the gothic genre as a whole, of which there is a seemingly infinite amount of research and knowledge that has been expounded upon since the genre’s inception over two centuries ago. Indeed, the gothic exists in its own right as a genre of terror and the macabre, in which the swooning of women, the haunting of castles, and the occurrence of the supernatural leaves the reader entranced. Critiques of the genre tend to focus on the amount of time spent on environmental description or the impossibility of ghosts, haunts, and apparitions, to the point that such topics are still heavily debated today. However, pioneers of the genre, including Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe, and Matthew Lewis, all worked to create an exclusive space in which their darkest imaginings and worst fears could come to light. Such a genre, while evolving over time, still exists today, both in the novel context and outside of it in mediums such as television, film, and music.

Despite the evolution of the gothic genre, and the continuous improvement upon early critiques, one concept that has remained is that of our troubled heroine, who must fight against the torment of her own mind in order to survive the harsh environments she is forced to face due to circumstances that are outside of her control. In looking at the concept of "gothic hysteria", one can see that mental illness, while not largely studied at the time, is a central theme in the partially imagined worlds that gothic authors create. Such symptoms of an antiquated "hysteria", while still seen in today's works, were at the forefront of the gothic genre at its inception, and can now be equated to the symptoms that one may face when dealing with mental illness. The list of such mental illnesses, according to symptoms in the DSM V, can include but are not limited to schizophrenia, borderline personality disorder (BPD), and bipolar disorder. While not being able to scientifically diagnose a character or person without the proper training and accreditations, a reader may still look at the gothic heroine in the light of recognizing potential symptoms, and equating them to the general category of "mental illness" that exists today. In addition, such symptoms exist in direct relation to the setting, more specifically the environment, of the novel, to the point that the hysteria the traditional female heroine faces cannot exist without the environment she is forced into.

When looking at this relationship between symptoms of hysteria and environment, one of the most profound examples, with multiple situations and examples spanning across hundreds of pages, is Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, one of the first gothic novels to be written by a female author, and one of the longest gothic novels of its time. As was common with gothic novels of the time, *Udolpho* takes place outside of its modern publication date, and is set in the late 1500s (which, given the more extreme stigma around hysteria in this time period, only cements Emily's character as one that will go through the struggles of the illness). The novel

revolves around the character of Emily St. Aubert, a young woman who, after losing her mother, must endure the loss of her father while simultaneously traveling the European countryside. Along the way she makes friends and allies, and even a potential love match, while also facing the dangers of a life of travel and the mysterious personalities of Count Montoni, her aunt's unlikely and imperious husband. The namesake of the novel comes from the castle of Udolpho, owned by Count Montoni and home to terrors, horrors, and the worst of Emily's imaginings. It is here that the reader truly sees the gothic at work in the form of Emily's supposed symptoms of hysteria (which, incidentally, cannot be diagnosed in the novel due to the seclusion of the castle, only adding to the hysteria that Emily faces). And, given her interactions with the gothic environment that Udolpho holds, the reader is able to make a direct connection between the two.

It is not only in the life of Emily St. Aubert that readers of the gothic genre can see the interaction between hysteria and environment. Rather, as the gothic genre has evolved, the relationship between the two has been maintained, to the point that a gothic female heroine is unlikely to exist without the archetypal association of mental illness. As will be discussed, countless authors, from Shelley to Poe to Morrison, have faced the challenge of writing within the gothic genre, and each has surfaced with a troubled female character and an extremely descriptive environment in tow. It is remiss to say that such things are not important to the gothic genre when, in fact, they are fundamental, to the point that they still exist today. Radcliffe's extensive impact on the gothic genre has ensured that these ideas will continue to persist, both in and outside of the genre, with many novelists, producers, directors, and editors using the archetype of the gothic heroine in other literary and visual works.

Chapter One: The Hysteria of Women and the Mirroring of Their Environment

Gothic Hysteria

Since its inception with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto,* the gothic genre has long included descriptions of female hysteria and madness in its pages. Largely attributed to a woman's lack of backbone, women were considered the fairer sex in the eighteenth, and were thought to be unable to hold the strength and character that men of the time had. As such, for a woman to have hysteria at the time was to dismiss her integrity and wit, and instead subject her to the physical ailments of the disease. To have hysterics at the time was to be subject to fainting spells, dizziness, hallucinations, wailing and screaming, crying, along with countless other symptoms that at the time were associated with the disease while also being associated with women as a whole. With a lack of wit comes a lack of respect from society and an assumption that madness is an inevitable trait of the female mind, to the point that "women constantly flirt with madness" (Horner and Zlosnik). Female hysteria is a common trope across all literature in the eighteenth century, though it exists in excess in the gothic genre. Walpole's *Otranto* sees this in the archetypal gothic heroine of Isabella, whose "thoughts crowded her mind" to the point that "she was ready to sink under her apprehensions" (Walpole, 27). Aside from Isabella, other female characters like Matilda and Hippolita experience bouts of fainting, crying and extreme jealousy (Walpole). Emily St. Aubert of Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* seems disproportionately prone to fainting spells and delusions (which will be discussed at length), and Charlotte Perkins Gilman sees *The Yellow Wallpaper's* narrator confined to an isolated space due to the hysterics she experiences. These continued presences of hysteric women were compounded with novelists of the time reading each other's works and following the same patterns. Horner and Zlosnik note that "[Charlotte] Bronte's madwoman in the attic, as a confirmed medical patient regularly surveyed by medical professionals" also had a large impact

on the presence of hysteria in gothic novels (Horner and Zlosnik, 34). In more modern narratives, female characters like Toni Morrison's Sethe from the acclaimed southern gothic *Beloved* and Silvia Moreno Garcia's Noemi from the modern *Mexican Gothic* share similar experiences.

The existence of hysterics in female gothic literature cannot exist without its counterpart in the real world of the 18th century and its continued influence into modern times. At the time that sensationalist novelists like Radcliffe were writing, the subject of hysteria as it pertains to women was extremely pertinent in the medical communities. Most commonly, the reason women checked into mental asylums or psychiatric wards (with many doing so against their will) was hysteria. Robert Miles points out the true horrors of life in a psychiatric ward in his in-depth analysis, "Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis." At the time, it was common for doctors to "literally label" their female patients "through dermography", a process in which linear welts appear on human skin as a result of external pressure. In the 18th century, the process of dermography was used to "inscribe a message on the skin of the hysteric" in order to quickly assess and categorize them (Miles, 42). Although the practice is no longer used, with the physical abuse it possesses overshadowing the overall well being of the patient, its legacy left a large impact on the medical community, producing a continuing stereotype that those in hysterics should be physically isolated from their communities.

The disease of hysteria can be traced back to Ancient Egypt. At the time, as Cecilia Tasca and her colleagues explain in "Women and Hysteria in the History of Mental Health", physicians believed it to be a mental disorder that resulted from "spontaneous uterus movement within the female body" (Tasca et. al, 1). This thought continued into the modern age, with many physicians further dehumanizing women by claiming hysteria can also be tied to demonization or

possession of the female body (Tasca et. al). It is not until the work of Joseph Raulin in 1748 that the disease was theorized to be caused by an external force. In his publications, Raulin explains that hysteria may be caused by the "foul air of big cities and unruly social life" that exists in such places (Tasca et. al, 5). In theorizing that hysteria may be caused by an external force, Raulin implies that both men and women can be infected (though, he notes, with women being much more lazy than men, they are more at risk for contracting the disease). For the nearly four thousand years that span Ancient Egypt to Raulin's theorizing, hysteria was believed to be a disease solely impacting women, resulting in a biased outlook on women as a whole.

With the discussion of mental disorders in modern times comes the need to introduce the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. First published in 1952, the manual (abbreviated to the DSM) is constituted of, according to the American Psychiatric Organization, "a glossary of description of the diagnostic categories" of mental disorders (psychiatry.org). Included in these descriptions were symptoms of disorders, the diagnostic criteria required to confirm the presence of a disorder, timelines regarding the presentation of symptoms, along with treatment options and relative percentages regarding diagnostic rate. The DSM has since been revised and republished five times, with the most recent edition (DSM V) being released in 2013 (psychiatry.org). Importantly, hysteria as a disease does not exist in the DSM V; rather, it was removed in the third edition of the DSM that was released in 1980, with many symptoms of hysteria being associated with dissociative and personality disorders instead (Tasca et. al). This is to say that, despite hysteria not being a highly defended disease in modern times, the symptoms associated with the disease still exist, and can be traced to other disorders in place of hysteria.

For gothic heroines in the 18th century, hysteria was a near guaranteed struggle they faced. All too commonly, as David Punter notes in *Gothic Pathologies: The Text, the Body, and the Law*, "Gothic heroes share a tendency to think that, if there is distortion in the world, it is they themselves who are producing and controlling it" (Punter, 7). This is not to say that gothic heroes in the writings of Walpole, Radcliffe and others had a physical control on the environment around them; rather, their perception of their environment was heavily influenced by the supposed hysteria they experienced through the duration of their respective novels. Punter goes on to state that, despite the heroine's best intentions, the reader largely views their world through a "violently distorting prism" (7). The prism in question has two references in regards to the main character, with hysterics being one of them. The label of "hysteric" as it applied to women left them largely untrusted, with fits, delusions, and hallucinations greatly impacting their ability to decipher reality in an accurate and honest manner. Secondly, their gender has an impact, with their status as women in a male dominated and controlled world leading to a biased and untrusted narration of the novel.

Settings of Madness

Another archetypal characteristic of the gothic novel comes in the form of the setting. While settings can vary in geographical placement, climate, building materials, and more, most if not all settings in gothic novels possess the same atmosphere. That is to say, while physical descriptions of settings can vary, the ambiance and atmosphere the character cast finds themselves in will remain largely the same. Most traditionally, a gothic novel involves a detailed description of some sort of castle. As Norman N. Holland and Leona F. Sherman explain in their "Gothic Possibilities," gothic settings all share qualities of "midnight revelry, violence, battles,

confusing noises, and disturbances" (218). These characteristics lay on top of the already similar atmospheres these settings have, with the castle representing "a physical space that will accept many different projections of unconscious material" (Holland and Sherman, 219). Key to the concept is the inclusion of complete isolation in gothic settings. The benchmark of *Otranto* sees Manfred, Isabella, Matilda, and others navigating a castle that is created in the concept of illusion; it is routine for characters to find themselves lost in secret passages and hidden vaults, with little idea as to how they arrived there or how they may escape. The castle of Udolpho holds many of the same twists and turns that the characters find themselves wary of.

The concept of isolation pervades the gothic genre well into the modern era. Emily Bronte succeeds in isolating the reader and characters by placing *Wuthering Heights* in an isolated estate, surrounded by nature that, when coupled with the storms that routinely plague the British countryside, are extremely successful in trapping the characters. Bronte's sister is also successful in *Jane Eyre* with a similar idea– Jane finds herself shuffled from manor to manor, each with its own sense of sinisterness. Morrison plays with the idea of physical isolation as it pertains to grief and loss, with Sethe convinced she is to be haunted by her child's ghost in a house that has stood for decades (with its own history of horrors). To be isolated in the physical world is to be isolated in one's mind, with little to expand on in the ways of companionship or freedom. Gothic literature is constantly evolving, yet the concept of isolation remains, even outside of novels. Director Guillermo del Toro recognized this in his production of *Crimson Peak*, in which Edith is whisked away to a dilapidated and haunted estate that, try as she may, she cannot escape from. *The Haunting of Hill House* and *The Haunting of Bly Manor* both follow the same pattern.

Alongside isolation comes a similarity in the architecture of the setting, to the point that gothic writing is directly associated with the "gothic architecture" that came to summation in the twelfth century. Common among all gothic novels is the castle or manor in which the story takes place. It is also common for novelists of the time to describe these castles and manors in extreme detail– they paint the image so vividly in the reader's mind that the reader has no choice but to fully imagine the setting in its entirety. Gothic architecture as a whole can largely be characterized by the lofty ceilings, spires, and turrets found in the castle. Walpole originated this in his *Castle of Otranto,* in which the "locked gates," "hollowed" and "intricate" passages, and "labyrinth of darkness" the characters find themselves in leads to a general sense of unease (Walpole). It is within the darkness these characters exist, coupled with the isolation that comes from the secluded environment, that leads to such a distressful atmosphere. Radcliffe achieves the same concept with *Udolpho*, in which turrets, hidden passages, and mysterious paintings combine to create Emily's personal imprisonment.

Along with the isolation and physical description of the setting, the gothic genre leans heavily on the environment as a whole. While the concept of environment is similar to that of setting, these two ideas vastly contrast in the parameters they include on an emotional level. A setting exists on a much more superficial level; when speaking of a setting of a novel, most look to the solely physical aspects of the book. In the gothic genre, the "setting" looks at the castle itself. Characters are able to interact with the setting on a surface level in that they must exist in the setting in order for the novel to be created.

The "environment" of a novel works at a much deeper level. As defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, environment is "the physical surroundings or conditions in which a person or other organism lives, develops… the external conditions in general affecting the life, existence,

or properties of an organism or object" (OED). Environment looks at the ways in which setting interacts with the emotions, thoughts, and well-being of the characters. An environment encapsulates all of these things, to the point that it has its own life and consciousness. It is the environment that works within the gothic genre that, when paired with a character who suffers from hysteria, creates an entirely new and uneasy emotion.

The Diagnosis of Woman and Environment

Key to the gothic genre is the direct relationship between character and environment. The atmospheric environment that novelists such as Radcliffe are able to create work in direct relation with the character in terms of impacting their mental state. Radcliffe couples the environment with the struggles that the gothic heroine faces in her own mind, which produces the "hysteria" that is so commonly seen in the genre. This is not to say that heroines of the gothic genre were necessarily "diagnosed" with hysteria. Given the isolation of the setting, in which physicians are in short supply, to be properly diagnosed was near impossible. A proper diagnosis would also remove the heroine from the environment, as she would, as discussed before, likely have been committed against her will and placed in a psychiatric ward. In reference to the OED again, "diagnosis" can be defined as "determination of the nature of a diseased condition; identification of a disease by careful investigation of its symptoms and history" (OED). A diagnosis looks at all aspects of a disease and its origin, including the environment in which it grows. This is key in the gothic genre, as "in the second half of the nineteenth century, the figure of the madwoman in the attic became intertwined with discourse on medical science" (Horner and Zlosnik, 36). As gothic novelists continued to write, it became apparent that, according to physicians and scientists, "the mind [was] at the heart of emotions… emotions were redefined by

physiologists 'as a product of sensory perception and material processes'" (Horner and Zlosnik, 36). In essence, the diagnosis of a mental illness (in women's case, this was most likely hysteria) had been theorized to be a direct result of the environment around the person, so much so that to be in a space prone to terror and unease is equal to a diagnosis. And, given the atmosphere of an environment that has the ability to come to life under the direction of the novelist creating it, these environments have the same ability to be "diagnosed."

Indeed, the "symptoms" required for a diagnosis can be seen in the shared similarities of the environment. Disturbing castles, unexplained noises and apparitions, even the legends of past events that have taken place within the castle walls, all contribute to this idea. When looking at *Otranto*, several events take place outside of the jurisdiction of Isabella, Matilda, or Hippolyta. Chief among these is the giant knight's helmet which appears in the manor, alongside the secret passages that exist in and out of the castle, the suspected ghosts that are seen by several characters, and the atmosphere of the castle itself, which is filled with gusting winds, mysterious slammings of doors, and more (Walpole). None of these events or characteristics of the castle are within the control of any of the female characters- rather, these events, originally thought to be "the product of a nervous young maiden's inflamed imagination or alarmed fancy," exist in a separate realm (Horner and Zlosnik). The environment exists separately as an entity to the point that, given the definition of "diagnosis," it is very possible for the reader to "diagnose" the environment with the same hysteria that the heroine faces.

The castle or manor central to the gothic novel has a life of its own, whose characteristics are then recognized and further emphasized by the main character. This is a practice that is not only restricted to the gothic novel; many other books, series, television shows, and films follow the same pattern. J. K. Rowling sees her fantasy world of *Harry Potter*, specifically Hogwarts

castle, come to life outside of the characters' viewpoints, with stairwells moving of their own accord, ghosts existing to torment the students, and secret chambers coming to life; del Toro again creates a lifelike manor in *Crimson Peak*, where apparitions, mysterious noises, and unexplained events take place without character involvement. Within the gothic genre, the lifelike qualities of the environment are also the symptoms of the environment; ghosts and mysterious noises are like hallucinations and delusions, raging and "wailing" winds can be transcribed into crying, and the secret passages and chambers of a castle can signify the uncertainty a person feels when trapped in their own mind. It is important to note that all of these aspects of the environment are able to exist without character involvemen– it is not as if, in order for *Otranto's* helmet to have fallen or for the stairs of Hogwarts to move, a person noticing these actions is required. They are able to exist outside of character and reader perception, to the point that it is common for characters to become fearful of tales of events that have taken place in the castle long before they ever stepped foot in it.

While the castle itself acts as a center for the sublime and supernatural (along with the psychological and macabre), the nature surrounding this isolated environment acts as a separate entity, in which there is a lack of any "symptoms" that could be construed into hysteria. Again, this is a common theme in all gothic novels, and has spread beyond the gothic world into other genres and media. Sticking to the examples past used, while Hogwarts does hold copious amounts of magic, Harry finds that once he leaves the castle grounds, he lives a relatively mundane life. Outside of *Otranto's* walls, there exists a chapel and a small town that does not interact with the castle itself, and as such does not go through the same experiences. Udolpho sees a similar situation, in which while the castle itself has a haunted air, yet the grounds and forest surrounding it have a much more natural air.

The characters of gothic novels follow the same pattern when specifically looking at female heroines and their interactions with the environment. Within the true "gothic" environments, the reader sees heroines succumb to the madness that surrounds them. Essentially, the "symptoms" that pervade the castle walls also pervade the characters within, to the point that a mirroring effect takes place. "Mirroring" involves a process of direct reflection; the environment that the novelist has created, which has instilled a sense of fear in both reader and character, becomes so lifelike and holds such grandeur in hysteria that female characters "mirror" these symptoms. Following this thread, the lack of "symptoms" seen in nature is also apparent when looking at character interactions. In Walpole's original gothic novel, those who travel through the secret passages to reach the town and chapel find themselves released from the spell of the castle. Prior to her arrival at Crimson Peak, Edith holds a relatively normal life, in which she does not experience any of the symptoms of hysteria (this is, until she meets Sir Thomas Sharpe, whose incestuous tendencies can be seen as a direct result of his family's manor, alongside his sister's mania). *Udolpho* follows the same pattern, with Emily feeling a sense of peace and tranquility in the woods outside of the castle, only to be shoved back into the madness of the castle, once again succumbing to the hysteria she experienced while residing there. Essentially, in environments where symptoms can lead to diagnosis, gothic heroines experience the same symptoms; in environments where these symptoms do not exist, heroines remain whole, with their minds untampered.

With Radcliffe being one of the most influential gothic novelists of her time, it is only necessary to say that her novels helped to revolutionize this thought pattern. Given that Emily is consistently prone to episodes of swooning, crying, and hallucinations, she easily fits into the archetype of a hysterical gothic heroine. With Radcliffe going into extreme detail regarding the

various settings of *Udolpho*, including the ambiance of each setting, she is able to create a gothic environment in which symptoms of hysteria thrive. In doing so, as discussed below, she subjects Emily to the torment of that hysteria, only to be relieved by the nature around her. This will be discussed at length by looking into several scenes in *Udolpho*, including contrasting scenes between the castle and the nature around it.

Chapter Two: The Intricacies of Environment in *Mysteries of Udolpho*

Setting Up Setting: Udolpho as a Whole

Chief among the evolutionists of the gothic novel is Ann Radcliffe, one of the first female writers of the genre known for her illustrious descriptions of setting and the extensive "explained supernatural" that so heavily pervades her writing. While the supernatural is common and expected in the gothic novel, evolving from *Otranto* and its massive knight's helmet to *Frankenstein* and the macabre creation that haunts Victor throughout the novel's course, the idea of an "explained supernatural" underlies this. Essentially, in Radcliffe's writing, any and all forms of the supernatural that may exist are "explained" through completely natural phenomena. The extended method of writing regarding extreme description and avoiding of the supernatural has been widely critiqued, with Samuel Taylor Coleridge claiming that Radcliffe "delights in concealing her plan with the most artificial contrivance" (Rogers, 17). A review from *Gentleman's Magazine* similarly states, "we object to the too great frequency of landscape-painting… the reader is held too long in suspense and the development brought on too hastily in the concluding volume" (Rogers, 21). However, when working with the mental illnesses that are present in the novel, "explained" supernatural helps to support the scientific background that, when looking at mirroring effects between character and environment, largely

pervades the novel. In fact, there is little in Radcliffe's *Udolpho* that can be proven or even theorized as truly supernatural; the perceived horror of a hidden supernatural figure concealed by a black veil that Emily faints at the sight of turns out to only be a wax figure of a head; mysterious disappearances in the Languedoc estate turn out to be the work of pirates and dug out passageways; eerie music that pervades the halls of Udolpho is proven to be the works of Valancourt and his melancholy heart. However, within each of these mundane explanations of the supernatural comes the interactions that they have with the environment which, in turn, affects Emily St. Aubert, the main character of the novel who suffers the most from a presumed hysteria.

Emily exists as an archetypal feminine heroine in a gothic novel– she is largely inexperienced in society, having been secluded to her and her father's estate for the majority of her life prior to his death. She finds a love interest in Valancourt, though the tumultuous path they take is detrimental to her mental health and her self esteem. And, last and arguably most importantly, she suffers the symptoms of hysteria, as is universal across all gothic heroines. Fainting, weeping, falling into hysterics, seeing hallucination and apparitions, and becoming overwhelmed with emotion are all present in Emily's character throughout the novel, as she is battered with countless traumatic experiences. At the time of *Udolpho's* inception, all of Emily's behavior was written off as the consequences of hysteria; and, if she had been fully integrated into society, away from the environments seen in the novel, she likely would have been institutionalized. In reality, while Emily did struggle throughout the novel with these concepts, her mental health is a direct result of the environments she is forced into, culminating at the castle of Udolpho. Without the influence of the castle and its environment, Emily would not have experienced the same magnitude of symptoms.

Before delving into the psychological devolution of Emily as a result of staying at Udolpho, one must understand the environment of Udolpho itself, built up and mythicized by rumors, theories, lies, and assumptions. Upon arrival at the castle, Emily is immediately affected by the "walls of dark grey stone [rendering] it a gloomy and sublime object" (Radcliffe, 227). She continues to describe the exterior of the castle with adjectives such as "silent," "solemn," and "melancholy" (Radcliffe). All of these descriptions are common for that of a gothic environment, with many castles and manors over the decades exuding the same melancholy and gloominess that Udolpho does. Precipices and towers are described as having "shattered outlines," "long grass and wild plants" have overcrowded the turrets, and "beyond these [gates of the castle], all was lost in the obscurity of evening" (Radcliffe, 227). Such descriptions of the exterior of the castle, taking pages to fully develop, transfer the reader into the true environment of Udolpho, in which the architecture of the castle coupled with the ambiance of melancholy and eerieness create, both in the reader and in Emily, "fearful emotions." For Emily, such exposure to a volatile environment caused "her imagination, ever awake to circumstance, [to suggest] even more terrors, than her reason could justify" (Radcliffe, 228). Already, without entering the castle itself, Emily is on edge, and fearful of what may lay inside the dark walls and sinister gates.

The interior of the castle, much to Emily's dismay, exists in a state of disrepair, with the villain Count Montoni doing little in terms of upkeep or repair. Emily hears this through several reports of housekeeper and repairmen, who claim "a part of the roof of the great hall has fallen in… so, that there was no keeping one's self warm" and "the wall of the rampart has tumbled down in three places; then, the stairs, that lead to the west gallery, have been a long time so bad, that it is dangerous to go up them" (Radcliffe, 230). The act of "tumbling" acts in direct contrast to the stairwell, and the overall dilapidation of the castle leaves the reader pondering the safety of

Emily's safety. Emily herself feels this lack of safety, and wonders at the level of comfort and security she may or may not feel while residing in the castle. The castle was decorated with "hastily lit" tripods dangling from ceilings, "lofty" entrances and foyers, and countless upper passages (Radcliffe, 232). While attempting to find her bedchamber, Emily finds herself "frightened by [the] intricacies and desolation" of the castle while "eloquently haranguing on ghosts and fairies", and needs to call for assistance (Radcliffe, 232). The oddness of the castle continues into her bedchamber, in which she discovers a "second door" which was not the one "through which she entered [the room]" (Radcliffe 235). Emily's uneasiness already existing from her view of the exterior only intensifies once she is safely within the castle's walls (though, as she will soon learn, the castle is not as safe as one may wish to believe).

<u>The Dive into Despair</u>

To begin the novel, Emily exists in a relatively simple world. Despite her father's early passing in the novel, she takes in the beauty of her surroundings with poise and admiration, stating upon her first morning at the castle of Udolpho, "it was delightful to watch the gleaming objects, that progressively disclosed themselves in the valley- the green turf- dark woods- little rocky recesses- a few peasants' huts- the foaming stream- a herd of cattle, and various images of pastoral beauty" (Radcliffe, 242). When looking at the nature beyond Udolpho, Emily feels at peace with herself and with her environment. She is able to focus on specific details that directly relate to nature, noting the stream and grass and woods surrounding the castle. Again, the nature surrounding Emily (when she is able to be present in it) is a peaceful place in which she is able to reflect and ponder, and acts as a direct contrast to the environment of the castle. In fact, directly after she observes the pastoral beauty of the outside world, she is forced back into the confines of Udolpho, in which a door inside her bedchamber, which she had blocked off the night before,

had supposedly been “fastened” and “bolted in the night” against her knowing (Radcliffe, 242). She becomes immediately paranoid, feeling “as if she had seen an apparition,” and she is “extremely uneasy at the thought of sleeping again in a chamber, thus liable to intrusion” (Radcliffe, 242). In this interiority of Emily and her thoughts, the reader sees the beginnings of a hysteria take root. Emily feels uneasy in her memory of the night before, thinking she may have locked the door but does not remember doing so. The chair in front of the door shifts overnight and the door becomes fastened, and while these supposedly “supernatural” experiences are explained later in the novel, it is in this moment that Emily, unsure of the trust she has in her own mind and unable to decipher reality from the clouded interpretation she has, begins to display symptoms of traditional hysteria.

Unfortunately for Emily, this is not the last interaction that she must fearfully endure regarding the doors of her bedchamber. Shortly after arriving, she finds herself in a predicament in which she is alone in her room and perceives there to be an intruder attempting to break in; Which, in the late 1500s, was extremely ungentlemanly, and could very well interfere with Emily’s purity and chastity. As Radcliffe writes, the scene unfolds with a distinct sense of terror:

> Emily had passed some melancholy hours with Madame Montoni, and was retiring to rest, when she was alarmed by a strange and loud knocking at her chamber door, and then a heavy weight fell against it, that almost burst it open… It occurred to her- for, at this moment, she could not reason on the probability of circumstances- that some one of the strangers, lately arrived at the castle, had discover her apartment, and was come with such intent, as their looks rendered too possible- to rob, perhaps to murder, her… She went to the gallery door, and then, fearing to open it, lest some person might be silently lurking for there

> without, she stopped, but with her eyes fixed in expectation upon the opposite door of the stair-case. As thus she stood, she heard a faint breathing near her, and became convinced, that some person was on the other side of the door, which was already locked. (Radcliffe, 299).

The paranoia originally caused by the bolted door and the moved chair pours over in this moment. With the assumed robber or murderer huddled behind the door, Emily finds herself slipping into what, at the time, would be considered true hysteria- she imagines breathing on the other side of the door, and allows her mind to hypothesize the worst case scenario for what may be waiting for her if she were to open it. Her delusion takes over fully, to the point that "she could not reason on the probability of circumstance," meaning she could not listen to reason over the fear of her delusions that her mind has created. Emily hears the slight possibility that someone may be breathing on the other side of the door, and is immediately "convinced" that there is a person waiting for her. To this point, despite the door being "locked", Emily is convinced that she will be robbed or murdered, and that she will not be able to call for help or to be saved. In part, the reader can see that her actions are a result of her environment. The ambiance of the castle lends itself to an uneasy heroine, in which the secret passages (which, the reader later learns, have a direct route into Emily's bedchamber) and unexplained phenomena cause Emily's anxiety to take over any reason that may exist.

Ultimately, as is common in Radcliffe's writing, the supposed breathing is explained by a collapsed Annette, her lady in waiting, that has fallen into the door. However, even this is caused by a supposed supernatural event, in which Annete claims that "she had seen an apparition… a tall figure gliding along (Oh! I cannot describe how!) into the room, that is always shut up, and nobody has the key to it but the Signor" (Radcliffe, 300-301). While Annette is also a woman,

and as such the plague of hysteria can extend to her, the correlation of two supposed inexplicable experiences in such a short time span point to Udolpho as a place which instills fear and panic. This fear and panic, as will be seen, builds and is tempered by the stressful situations and environment that the castle holds, resulting in the "symptoms" of mental illness that manifest in our heroine. These symptoms grow to the point that Annette claims she "cannot describe how" the supposed apparition came into existence, nor how it was able to move into a normally locked room which no one could enter before.

The environment of Udolpho truly strikes for the first time in the form of a veiled portrait that Emily discovers while walking through "obscure and desolate" rooms, "where no footsteps had passed probably for many years" (Radcliffe, 248). Emily finds herself drawn to the veiled picture, which had captured her attention the previous night, lending to the magnetism that the eerie atmosphere of the castle holds. While she appreciates the "grandeur" of the castle and its many passageways, the narrator is also certain to note the "emotion of melancholy awe" that pervades the environment, which evolves into " a faint degree of terror" which only grows as Emily walks closer to her destination (Radcliffe, 248). The environment itself instills these emotions in Emily; the predisposition of hysteria that she faces as a result of her environment only increase in this passage, as her level of terror rises with the reveal of the veiled portrait, to the point that she faints on the spot: "she paused again, and then, with a timid hand, lifted the veil; but 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" (Radcliffe, 248-249). Radcliffe leaves her reader in suspense, not explaining until much later in the novel that the veiled portrait is not supernatural in any means, but is rather a simple wax bust of a head left to decay in the long forgotten room. However, for Emily at the time, the horror of her surroundings is so

profound that her body has no choice but to shut down. For the argument of hysteria, her collapse only supports the idea that she is succumbing to illness (for, only a few pages before, Emily falls victim to the terror and possible hallucinations of the bolted bedchamber door and the shifted chair). However, as stated above, the veiled wax bust exists in the environment of Udolpho, and is not something that Emily imagines into existence. Its placement in an "obscure" room, which in and of itself, in the viewpoint of diagnosing the environment, can correlate to the imaginative delusions and made up fantasies that can exist in a hysteric's mind, only works to trap Emily in a dark and gloomy stupor. This, when equated with the shock of seeing the wax bust, leaves her incapacitated, with her fainting directly resulting from the castle's hidden objects of horror. The natural fear of the unknown that, even at the time which *Udolpho* takes place in, is a near universal fear, only exacerbates Emily's symptoms while interacting with the bust. This, followed directly by the stifling surprise of the revealed bust, becomes too much for the fragile female heroine of the gothic, and she succumbs to the most physically debilitating ailment of her hysteria.

Again, Radcliffe makes it very clear in her descriptions of other characters that the "symptoms" which Emily deals with are not isolated to solely her. Instead, the reader sees several other female characters, including Annette and Emily's aunt, Madame Montoni, go through similar experiences. The castle and its environment sets these women at a predisposition for developing said symptoms, due to the mirroring effect that has been mentioned before. It is of note that Madame Montoni, under the influence of Count Montoni, suffers greatly; this, coupled with her predisposition to hysteria as a result of residing in Udolpho, overcomes her, and she is banished to a tower by her husband (Radcliffe). Emily has little access to the tower, and must repeatedly petition Montoni to see her aunt, before ultimately permission only for her aunt to

pass away. Before her death, Madame Montoni's mental health has decreased to such a poor level that she "scarcely appeared to wish for life" (Radcliffe, 366). Her aunt's death leads Emily to a similar situation in which she seriously ponders suicide (though, her aunt's death only acts as a cataclysm for this school of thought; indeed, past experiences in the castle, including the aforementioned secret passageway in her bedchamber and the wax bust that caused her to faint also contribute to this, along with the environment of the castle itself).

Emily takes a hiatus from the castle, in which she seemingly recovers from the horrors of Udolpho (to be discussed in *Escaping the Cage*). However, the reader sees her immediately revert back to the person she was while residing at the castle. Upon arrival, the castle itself has sustained serious damage, with "broken heads of arrows" and "shattered remains of armour" scattered across the grounds (Radcliffe, 425). Upon arrival, "Emily feared to see some vestige of death," and exclaims, "Alas!... I am going again into my prison!" (Radcliffe, 426). Emily experiences a reversion to who she was while living in Udolpho. After experiencing the freedom of Maddelina and her cottage, Emily is desperate for an escape, and as such takes the first opportunity to leave the castle with Ludovico, Annette, and Du Pont. Amidst departure, Emily settles into a ponderous state, in which "[her mind sunk], after the various emotions it had suffered, into a kind of musing stillness, which the reposing beauty of the surrounding scene and the creeping murmur of the night-breeze among the foliage above contributed to prolong" (Radcliffe, 453). This displays one of the milder senses of ease that Emily feels while away from the castle, of which more can be seen in greater detail, even before this instance.

<u>Escaping the Cage</u>

Importantly, the mental health effects seen in Emily are not constant throughout the novel. She seems to struggle the most in the confines of true gothic environments, including

Udolpho and Languedoc. After the constant travel she endures during her father's illness and ultimate death, the stagnant nature of Udolpho proves to be a location in which, while Emily originally believes she will find sanctuary, she succumbs to the terrors that the castle holds. Much of the same can be seen once she arrives at the Count de Villefort's estate, which holds a similar ambiance and is described in largely the same way as Udolpho. The gothic constraints placed on Emily in each of these environments provide the predisposition needed for the hysterics that she is forced to endure. However, the reader is able to see a lack of such symptoms when Emily strays from the constraints of such gothic environments, to the point that, in nature that is not associated with gothic castles and manors, she seems to flourish and thrive. Any disturbance to a gothic environment gives similar effects. This is not to say that such disturbances are a true balm for the struggles she faces. Instead, they act as a disruption in the normal control that the castles have over Emily.

Notedly, the first few instances of the instillment of hysteria take place in only the first few days of Emily's existence at Udolpho– by the time she escapes the castle, and is notably worse of in her mental and physical health than she had been when she first arrived, she has lived there for months. However, the reader is able to see a reprieve from such mental abuse in several instances, the first of which happens while Emily still resides in the castle. Udolpho undergoes a siege during the novel, of which Emily sees the fortifications and preparations being made. She comments on this in an extensive interior monologue, in which she feels "the sudden joy of a prisoner, who unexpectedly finds himself at liberty" (Radcliffe, 400). Interestingly, she proclaims this despite the danger that she faces, with "soldiers and workmen, hurrying to and fro," and the general chaos that comes with preparing a castle for a siege (Radcliffe, 400). The supposed "freedom" Emily feels during the preparations points to the relative emotions she feels while

being kept in the castle. In this scenario, which many people of the time, specifically women, would see as being stressful and overwhelming, Emily feels a relative sense of freedom due to her forced occupation of the Udolpho and the horrors that she feels within the castle walls. To this, the hold that the environment of the castle has levels of control on Emily and her companions, which lessens the further she moves away or the more unstable the safety of Udolpho becomes. The reader sees the mirroring effect lessen with distance– Udolpho gives up the control it has over its inhabitants, whether willingly or forcefully, and as a result Emily sees her hysteria lessen, until she has nearly returned to the person she was before stepping foot inside the castle walls. Radcliffe displays this to the reader in a series of scenes, taking place over vast pages in the book (for, in between such scenes, Emily still experiences the terror that is Udolpho on a regular basis– these scenes are included as a moment of relief for her, until she is able to escape the castle all together). Such a scene as that with the battle preparations is one among many.

On the eve of the battle itself, Montoni sends Emily off of the castle's property and shelters her in a cottage in the woods. This is meant to act as a defense against the chaos that will come with the battle at Udolpho, and while this does work in that aspect, Emily also experiences a near immediate sense of relief and improvement in her mental health. If the reader follows the theory of a gothic environment being a direct correlation with a decrease in good mental health, then one could surmise that this sudden increase in happiness and tranquility is due to the lack of a gothic environment. Radcliffe goes in extreme detail when describing the cottage environment which holds little similarity to her equally extensive descriptions of Udolpho:

> When Emily, in the morning, opened her casement, she was surprised to observe the beauties, that surrounded it. The cottage was nearly embowered in the

> woods, which were chiefly of chesnut intermixed with some cypress, larch and sycamore. Beneath the dark and spreading branches, appeared, to the north, and to the east, the woody Apennines, rising in majestic amphitheater, not black with pines, as she had been accustomed to see them, but their loftiest summits crowned with antient forests of chestnut, oak, and oriental plain, now animated with the rich tints of autumn, and which swept downward to the valley uninterruptedly, except where some bold rocky promontory looked out from among the foliage, and caught the passing gleam. Vineyards stretched along the feet of the mountains, where the elegant villas of the Tuscan nobility frequently adorned the scene, and overlooked slopes clothed with groves of olive, mulberry, orange and lemon. The plain, to which these declined, was coloured with the riches of cultivation, whose mingled hues were mellowed into harmony by an Italian sun. Vines, their purple clusters blushing between the russet foliage, hung in luxuriant festoons from the branches of standard fig and cherry trees, while pastures of verdure, such as Emily had seldom seen in Italy, enriched the banks of a stream that, after descending from the mountains, wound along the landscape, which it reflected, to a bay of the sea. There, far in the west, the waters, fading into the sky, assumed a tint of the faintest purple, and the line of separation between them was, now and then, discernible only by the progress of a sail, brightened with the sunbeam, along the horizon (Radcliffe, 413).

Such grand descriptions, while seen early in the novel before Emily's arrival at Udolpho, are few and far between while Emily resides in the castle. The environment of the woods and cottage she resides in during the battle hold a distinctively different ambiance than

the woods and castle of Udolpho. Such descriptions as the "rich tints of autumn" and a "sunbeam" reflected on the horizon hold more value to Emily and her mental health than she and the reader are originally aware of. Furthermore, the events that take place at the cottage are in direct opposition to those of Udolpho, to the point that, upon Maddelina knocking on her door, she "[started] up in terror" over fear of an intruder being on the other side (Radcliffe, 417). However, the reader soon learns that these reactions change as her time at the cottage continues.

As Emily's stay at the cottage continues (with the battle at Udolpho under way, she remains here until it is deemed physically safe for her to return), she is able to settle more into a sense of safety. Her room in the cottage comes to bring her "feelings of security, which we naturally attach to home." and she is marked as "having been undisturbed by any new circumstance of disgust, or alarm" (Radcliffe, 418). Emily's interactions with those around her also aid in her overall improved well-being. Maddelina especially helps in this endeavor, and her efforts, combined with those of the other villagers, work to help Emily "[lose] the sense of her misfortunes in that of a benevolent pleasure" (Radcliffe, 421). Importantly, Emily spends her time at the cottage with little occurring in terms of physical or mental ailment; the reader is hard-pressed to see any of the symptoms of hysteria she experienced while living in Udolpho. Any tears that fall are those of happiness and relief, and while she does reflect on the terrors she has faced throughout the novel, any physical reactions that originally came from such experiences (including fainting, hallucination, delusions, and extreme bouts of wailing) are not seen, at least until her unfortunate return to the castle.

Radcliffe works throughout the novel of *Udolpho* to establish the gothic environment as a place of terror for the female heroine. Emily goes through a number of traumatic experiences, all the while spiraling further into the depths of hysteria and psychopathology as a direct result of the environment she exists in. Emily establishes herself as a survivor in this situation, and is able to move beyond her circumstances until she succeeds at leading a relatively normal life, given everything she has gone through. As has been stated before, the concept of hysteria as a result of the environment in gothic novels of the time of Radcliffe was common. Walpole, Dacre, and many others followed similar themes at the time, with more modern novelists taking these correlations and twisting them to fit the modern gothic genre while also expanding beyond the gothic to other genres, media, thematic experiences, character developments, and more.

Chapter Three: A Troubled Mind Beyond the Radcliffian Gothic

A Modern Gothic, An Antiquated Mind

Ann Radcliffe worked as a revolutionary in the gothic genre, establishing such patterns as a gothic heroine, the atmosphere of a disturbing and terrible castle or manor, and the supernatural haunting the characters of the novel, even if it can ultimately be explained by the mundane. She, along with her peers, created the genre of the gothic, which has expanded and evolved into the modern world. Many of the same traits seen in *Udolpho* can be traced through several other gothic novels until ultimately arriving in the modern novel, where gothic traits mix with those of the science fiction, fantastical, romantic, and comedic genres. Importantly, such themes extending beyond the traditional gothic novel prove that there is a constant and consistent overlap between genres of

fiction, of which, while there are certain rules to be followed, there may be exceptions to said rules. Boundaries may be crossed both within and outside of the gothic genre, and as David Punter points out, “we can find traces of this same [Gothic] struggle, and of the literary and attitudinal styles which were forged in it, in a whole range of writers,” ranging from the original behemoths of Radcliffe, Lewis, and Walpole, to the elegies and poems of Poe and the city-building of Dickens, to modern ghost stories, suburban legends, and countryside myths (“Towards a Theory”, 403). Separately, Punter notes that “the Gothic is indeed extra-legal; it is illicit, contraband, always at the mercy of comings and goings… It is always on the point of dissolving into something else" (*Gothic Pathologies*, 200). Gothic elements, with a specific focus on described architecture, can be seen spanning from the vintage romances to beginning fantasies to poetry across decades, in which emotions and thoughts are specifically tied to such architecture as is described in *Udolpho* and its peers (Punter). As such, it is only natural for the “comings and goings” previously mentioned to include the vast evolutions in not only the gothic genre, but those genres adjacent to such features.

With Radcliffe and Walpole creating the gothic genre, many of the same concepts are seen in each authors’ respective novels, and are further used by future novelists of the same genre. Chief among these is the gothic architecture and atmosphere that exists in *Udolpho* and similar novels. Among her peers, novelists such as Walpole and Lewis exhibit the same sincerity when describing the manors, mansions, and castles in which their stories reside, to the point that “castle” is explicitly used in the first widely recognized novel of the genre, Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto.* Radcliffe goes into extensive detail regarding the visualization of Udolpho, as has been described above.

Following in her footsteps come future visionaries of the gothic genre. Shelley focuses on the physical and emotional isolation that both Victor and the creature face when describing the wooded Italian countrysides and Arctic tundra in which *Frankenstein* takes place; Emily Bronte ensures that such diction as “wuthering” in reference to the moors and plains of *Wuthering Heights* is directly connected to the tumultuous emotions of Heathcliff and Catherine: In a more modern sense, J.K. Rowling sets her magical world of witchcraft and wizardry in a castle, haunted with ghosts, apparitions, moving staircases, hidden passageways, secluded dungeons and chambers, and speaking portraits Such descriptions of architecture go beyond the realm of the gothic, to the point that it is common for a pointed castle to exist in a fantasy or a swampy moor to exist in a dystopian novel. Following the same theme, one can say that the psychological aspect of the gothic novel has also expanded beyond its original confines. Modern interpretations of hysteria, while the term itself has been replaced with more politically correct diagnoses and descriptions, can still be found.

All of the listed examples above show the extent to which the gothic has pervaded modern genres of writing. However, one must specifically look at the same “mirroring” effect that *Udolpho* holds and its reflection throughout other novels and genres. One can argue that there are varying levels to the concentration of such an effect, and one would be correct. Much as there are varying levels of gothic architecture, environment, and conventions across different genres, with individual books varying even more, the same can be said of the mirroring effect that Radcliffe utilizes. However, any reader can see that there are clear examples spanning the centuries since *Udolpho’s* release in which the mirroring effect has a strong hold on the female heroine.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman fully utilizes her environment as a being in her short story *The Yellow Wallpaper*, which was published in 1892, nearly a century after *Udolpho*. The story follows a unnamed narrator through her spiral into a seemingly inevitable insanity, with the narrator all the while going into detail about the house and attic in which she resides (for, as the "woman in the attic" trope is also common in the gothic genre, Gilman takes it to the extreme). The narrator first describes the house as being "well back from the road," with "hedges and walls and gates that lock" (Gilman, 2). The narrator is locked away in the attic to supposedly live out her illness, and goes into great detail about the room, with "repellant, almost revolting" walls that are painted in "a smouldering unclean yellow, strangely faded by the slow-turning sunlight" (Gilman, 3). Her isolation in the attic, where her husband rarely visits, leaves the narrator with only her thoughts and the wallpaper as company, constantly haunted by the near freedom of the gardens that surround the house. Such descriptions of a "beautiful shaded lane" and "greenhouses" around the house leave the narrator yearning for the freedom that comes with an escape from the attic. The environment of the attic leaves the narrator at a predisposition to suffer from the "insanity" that she endures, to the point that the wallpaper is integral to her fate.

As her stay in the attic progresses, the narrator becomes paranoid of the "dim shapes" that occupy the wallpaper, which are slowly becoming more and more clear to her. She sees the shapes as "a woman stooping down and creeping about," and considers the wallpaper to be "a lack of sequence, a defiance of law… a constant irritant to a normal mind" (Gilman, 6-7). Much of the same paranoia can be seen in Emily St. Aubert, especially when considering her interactions with the mysterious music that haunted the

castle, the supposed ghost that traverses the hallways, and the terrifying image hidden under the veiled portrait (which we now know was only a wax bust). The isolation of each of their environments, and the humanlike qualities that each takes on, only results in each character suffering a mental break. For Emily, she was able to recover after her escape from Udolpho– for the narrator of *The Yellow Wallpaper*, her isolation and the environment's effect on her is too drastic, and she succumbs to the insanity that she faces.

Toni Morrison follows a similar trajectory in her critically acclaimed *Beloved*, published nearly two hundred years after *Udolpho* in 1987. In this twisted southern gothic novel, the main character of Sethe struggles with the decisions she has made in the past regarding her freedom and family while dealing with the macabre and grotesque environment of the house in which she lives with her daughter, Denver. From the beginning of the novel, the house in which these female characters live is described as "a person rather than a structure," which "wept, sighed, trembled, and fell into fits" (Morrison, 35). These symptoms that the house portrays can be directly correlated to the fits, tantrums, and delusions that a hysterical woman may experience. Emily St. Aubert displays many of these symptoms in *Udolpho*, and her environment is directly reflected in the house of *Beloved.* The "sighs" and "trembles" of the house can be connected to the "mysterious noises" and "wails" of Udolpho castle, and as such each creates a similar eerie ambiance.

Not only do the environments match each other in terms of their ambiance and personification, but the female main characters of Emily and Sethe also hold many similarities. Sethe faces many of the same struggles that Emily does in terms of familial relations; both women experience grief and loss, with Emily living through the deaths of

both of her parents and Sethe grappling with the loss of her children. Sethe's surroundings do little to ease this grief, and instead only work to exacerbate them, to the point that the near religious experience she faces at the end of the novel, where her Beloved (who she believes is the reincarnation of her child) disappears, can be viewed through the lens of a psychotic break.

These stories, along with countless others, plague the gothic and institutionalize the concept of mirroring between character and setting as a common denominator among most novels in the genre. Radcliffe pioneered such a feature in *Udolpho*, and while the gothic genre has largely evolved since its publication, many of the features that her novel has can still be seen today. The universal experience of a setting influencing the mental health of a character is seen across genres and media, with countless characters succumbing to their environment as Emily St. Aubert did centuries ago. The timeless themes that the gothic has instilled in itself since its inception can continuously be seen today, and are likely to be seen for centuries to come.

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