The Maternal Gaze in the Gothic

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by

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Abstract

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This transdisciplinary thesis excavates the critically-neglected Gothic convention of the maternal tyrant through the theoretical framework of the maternal gaze, recently conceptualised by Alina Luna in *Visual Perversity: A Re-articulation of the Maternal Instinct* (2004). As a counter-response to the critical heritage of feminist and film scholarship which privileges the presence of an objectifying and fetishising male gaze, Luna argues that the maternal gaze issued from the womb is the most powerful and fatal because it is concerned with nothing apart from devouring the child and reinstalling it in the mother's body, and punishing the paternal order which had taken it away. Examining how the Gothic articulates intra-uterine symbols and structures, I consider a spectrum of written and visual texts to argue that an omnipotent maternal gaze is pathologically narrativised by the genre.

The thesis is structured in three parts of two chapters each which plot the evolution of the maternal gaze in the Gothic. In Part One, ‘The Gothic Heritage’, I discuss maternal symbolism and structures in folkloric and Victorian Gothic texts to show how the infanticidal maternal gaze has existed in the genre since its inception, while Part Two, ‘Gothic Practices’, reveals how the maternal gaze in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries used the intersecting technological and religious practices of photography, Spiritualism and Marian iconography to Gothicise the domestic space of the maternal practitioner. Part Three comes home to ‘The Gothic Domestic’, which examines how narratives of child abuse, incest and trauma are perpetuated in the domestic space for the maternal gaze through modes of serialisation, and I conclude by showing how the internet has become the modern Gothic web in which the maternal gaze weaves hypertextual narratives through which mothers meditate on and reproduce the image of the abused and traumatised child.

This thesis provides new directions for genre criticism and gaze theory, and drawing on feminist, film and psychoanalytic scholarship I use the maternal gaze to write a place for the maternal tyrant in the Gothic, one which she has previously been denied by the critical and cultural blindness to the capabilities of maternal desire.
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My Mother

Medbh McGuckian

My mother’s smell is sweet or sour and moist
Like the soft red cover of the apple.
She sits among her boxes, lace and tins,
And notices the smallest of all breezes,
As if she were a tree upon the mountain
Growing away with no problem at all.

Her swan’s head quivers like a light-bulb:
Does she breed in perfect peace, a light sleep,
Or smothered like a clock whose alarm
Is unendurable, whose featureless
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Introduction

The Maternal Gaze in the Gothic

This thesis plots the presence of the maternal tyrant in the Gothic, a destructive and devouring figure who has remained invisible to the probing eye of scholarship. Contesting the supremacy of the male tyrant perceived and privileged by criticism of the genre, I map a trajectory of the malevolent mother through the maternal gaze, which has been theorised by Alina Luna in *Visual Perversity: A Re-articulation of the Maternal Instinct* (2004). As a counter-response to scholarship which privileges the presence of the phallic male gaze, Luna argues that the maternal gaze which is issued from the womb is the more devastating mode of scrutiny, as its one desire is to consume the child back into the womb and punish the paternal order which had taken it away. Applying Luna’s theory to my analysis of mothers in the Gothic will offer new directions for both genre criticism and gaze theory.

While much ground has been covered in the field of female Gothic by Ellen Moers, Juliann Fleenor, Claire Kahane, Barbara Creed and E.J. Clery (1976, 1983, 1985, 1993, 2000), and recently through Diana Wallace and Andrew Smith’s edited collection *The Female Gothic: New Directions* (2009), the critical heritage has largely understood the maternal presence in the Gothic as a spectral one which is liminal and passive in comparison to that of the genre’s male despots like Horace Walpole’s and Ann Radcliffe’s infamous paternal sexual tyrants, Manfred and Montoni. Unmediated female autonomy and activity in the female Gothic is perceived to be a rare thing, and writing in Wallace and Smith’s collection Lauren Fitzgerald laments ‘does Female Gothic have anything left to offer?’, before engaging in a meta-critique which positions the doyennes of female Gothic criticism as victim-
heroines embroiled in the (intellectual) property plot, with Gothic texts themselves relegated as mentions (17). In response, I excavate the maternal gaze in the Gothic to reinvigorate how the genre is perceived. I consider a spectrum of texts, from J.S. Le Fanu’s ‘Carmilla’ (1872), Bram Stoker’s *The Jewel of Seven Stars* (1903/1912) and ‘The Squaw’ (1893), through Henry James’ *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) and its filmic reincarnations *The Others* (dir. Alejandro Amenábar, 2002) and *The Orphanage* (dir. J.A. Bayona, 2007), nineteenth-century spirit photography and memorial portraiture and the photography of Julia Margaret Cameron, and Virginia Andrews’ Dollanganger incest saga (1979-87) in relation to Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations* (1860-61) and misery literature, to argue that a sadistic maternal gaze is pathologically narrativised by the Gothic through symbolic and linguistic structures of the womb, and that the genre itself is maternalised through the compulsive repetition of the uncanny intra-uterine *mise-en-scène* and the abuse of the child which is performed inside it. This unearthing of the maternal tyrant in the Gothic compels a seismic shift in critical perception, which has understood the genre as a definition and defence of patriarchy. I contend that the Gothic text provides a platform of uncanny interiors and fractured narratives which allows the maternal gaze to rupture the patriarchal paradigm and thrive beyond it.

Fred Botting argues that during its ascension in the eighteenth century the Gothic asserted masculine discourses of science, knowledge and empiricism. Not ‘the positive expression of hidden natural instincts and wishes’, but a way through which ‘the newly dominant order produced, policed and maintained its antitheses, opposites enabling the distinction and discrimination of its own values and anxieties’ (2001: 2-3), the genre is understood as a framework of paternal surveillance. This surveillance promoted the
perceived morality and decency of the patriarchal order by which the readership was
governed, while implicitly promoting heteronormative masculinity in the form of the
ultimate hero, like Walpole’s Theodore or Radcliffe’s Valancourt. However, this desire to
assert an honourable patriarchy assumes the archetypal tyrant of the Gothic to be male, in
order that the victim-maiden he pursues and persecutes may be bravely saved by the hero.
While this battle of masculinities takes place, the maternal tyrant slips through the grasp of
the Gothic’s surveillance, and I show that these eruptions of the repressed maternal within
the annals of the Gothic are not as easily policed as their male tyrant counterparts because
of the evasive, mutable and secretive modes through which they invade the genre.

I propose that the maternal gaze can consume children because it circumvents
previous tenets of gaze theory, which have been preoccupied with the interaction of the
male/female active/passive dichotomy of phallocentrism. While Luna’s theoretical apparatus
of the maternal gaze is inflected throughout my research, I also draw on a number of
psychoanalytic theories which are both informed by and challenge Freud and Lacan,
including the work of Helene Deutsch, Melanie Klein, Julia Kristeva, Barbara Creed,
Elisabeth Bronfen, and Bracha Ettinger, to present the maternal gaze as a tenable theoretical
alternative to the primacy of the phallus.

If Looks Could Kill: Maternal Gaze Theory

While the scrutiny of the maternal gaze has been detected by critics like Barbara Creed
(1993: 141-150) and Mary Russo (53), Luna’s recent study extrapolates the concept to offer the
first theoretical paradigm that makes sustained textual analysis possible. Considering
Euripides, Coleridge, Hitchcock and de Sade, she traces the maternal gaze through such a
range of texts as to imply an omnipotence which I show is felt acutely in the Gothic. Luna proposes that the maternal gaze is not simply a physical one of the eye, but also a psychic mode of vision which originates from the empty womb in search of its former inhabitant the child, to consume it back into the maternal fold and regain the narcissism of pregnancy:

Prior to [the] sudden separation, the mother has only known union with her child. Existence within the womb blocks the mother’s realisation of the child as an other. Its survival becomes completely conditional upon the well-being and desires of the mother, and it is here that maternal power is first established and exerted. The child develops and gestates within a constant state of subjugation during which the mother retains control over its life. (42)

Consequently, although the maternal gaze is characterised by desire, it is not simply a desire for the child but for the transformative effect it has upon the maternal body; it is a manipulative and exploitative gaze which will go to such extreme lengths as infanticide to reassert the primacy of the mother, ‘to re-possess the child even at the cost of [its] well-being’ (4). This echoes Kristeva’s contention that ‘the child can serve its mother as token of her own authentication; there is, however, hardly any reason for her to serve as go-between for it to become autonomous and authentic in its turn’ (1982: 13). The maternal gaze of the womb is an abject one which ‘kills in the name of life’ - the mother’s life – ‘a progressive despot’ borne by a ‘murderous [...] maternal body’ (ibid.: 15, 54).

Rejecting the Mulvean notion of the male gaze as being the most objectifying and consuming, Luna’s contention of a murderous maternal gaze represents a seismic shift in gaze theory, and reveals the fallibility of the psychoanalytic foundations upon which it is
established – the Freudian/Lacanian model that figures the maternal body as inherently lacking. Redressing the critical given that the gaze first and foremost articulates gender and sexual inequality, Luna argues that it is not the absence of the phallus that signifies maternal lack, as upheld by Lacan, but the vacated womb:

The mother looks upon the child in the same manner as Sartre looks upon the world: as always for her. The Sartrian idea of nothingness at the core of one’s being undergoes a strangely physical articulation in the figure of the mother-having-given-birth. The empty womb signifies the literal nothingness occasioned by the child’s evacuation, the same nothingness which the maternal feels compelled to deny. (4-5)

The maternal gaze allows the mother to retain a psychical connection with the child and fill the void of her hollow womb, as the child in the sight of the mother ‘creates the illusion that the nothingness at the core of her being produced not nothing but its opposite: thing’:

The connotation of object which accompanies ‘thing’, also known as child, allows the maternal to exert its will over the child with self-centredness and unyielding prejudice. In the end, it is not the male gaze that is the most damaging, but the maternal one. (5)

Consequently, while the maternal body in the Freudian/Lacanian Oedipal paradigm is figured as lacking because it does not possess the penis/phallus, Luna reconfigures and mobilises the mother towards owning a subject-position (although certainly an ambivalent
The maternal gaze seeks to re-internalise the child through the act of looking as this recreates the sense of ‘all-consuming narcissism demanded and validated by pregnancy’ (Luna: 4), and this echoes Renata Salecl and Slavoj Žižek’s understanding of the gaze as a residue of the maternal body, a Lacanian objet a, the ‘leftover of a prephallic jouissance [...] not yet “sublated in”, mediated by, the paternal metaphor’ (3). Thus the gaze originates in the maternal dyad shared before the child enters the mirror stage and develops a sense of subjectivity separate from the mother, a dyadic narcissistic space of enmeshment in which mother and child share an ego which demands the non-existence of the phallus: ‘Narcissism is predicated on the existence of the ego but not of an external object [...] one has to admit that such a narcissistic topology has no other underpinning in psychosomatic reality than the mother/child dyad’ (Kristeva 1982: 62).

Entry into the Symbolic order necessitates an acceptance of the Name-of-the-Father which moves the child further still away from the mother through emphasis on the ego, the creation of the ‘I’ subject position and the paternal debt which attends it (Elizabeth Grosz: 71). The womb’s gaze is problematic for the paternal contract then as it travels with the newly-initiated child into the Symbolic order, a shadow of the primary identification shared with the pre-Oedipal mother. Even during the mirror stage the child’s gaze is held by its mother’s (Daniel Stern: 26), as the reciprocity between their looks and the image of the child reflected back at it by the mother’s eye causes the child to (mis)recognise itself as a separate subjectivity. While ‘the child seeks to draw onto itself the gaze of the mother so as to find itself mirrored there [...] us[ing] its image reflection of an intact subject to support its fragile
narcissism’ as Bronfen explains (1996: 73), the maternal gaze retains its power because the image it offers up to the child to take with it into the Symbolic is merely a copy, which, in being formed, in being *taken*, fractures its subjectivity: ‘In the look of the mother, the child’s own gaze becomes absorbed, appropriated, and turned back upon the child, causing him to see himself as an object, as a thing. In turn this has a splitting or alienating effect upon the child for he occupies two spaces at once: that of subject (seeing) and object (being seen)’ (Luna: 18).

The child misrecognises itself as complete, and the specular mirror image, in this case that reflected by the maternal gaze, forms a split in the ego of the child which erroneously considers itself to be whole (Lacan: 1949). The image of the child the maternal gaze withholds becomes the deposit with which the mother will return to claim what she is due, and this visual mutilation of the child-object is galvanised in the Gothic through physical acts of fracturing; that of the body through (sexual) abuse, torture, murder, that of subjectivity, through incarceration and the separation of the child from the paternal order, and that of the textual body itself. Thus, the maternal gaze exists long before the voyeuristic and fetishising one of the male, and lures the child into a false sense of security in order to trap it:

The child is born into a masquerade whose theme has been the unquestionable devotions of its mother. In the process of having been given birth, the child becomes enmeshed in a perpetual state of indebtedness which long outlasts the hours of labour. The mother wears [the mask] that pretends she has no desire to collect on that debt, but the eyes betray her true
intention. With the removal of the mask, the nature of the maternal instinct will unfortunately be revealed. (Luna: 14)

The return of the repressed mother in the Gothic represents her vengeful attempt to collect the debt, the child, and spirit it away back to the womb. The maternal gaze carves out a place for maternal agency in the Freudian/Lacanian-governed paradigms of both psychoanalysis and gaze theory, which traditionally privilege the subject-making role of the Law/Name-of-the-Father over that of the mother.

In film, psychoanalytic and art theories the idea of the gaze has repeatedly been eroticised and aligned with masculinity, as Jean Clair affirmed that ‘vision is a phalloid organ able to unfold and erect itself out of its cavity and point towards the visible’. The ability to gaze is structured by an agency which implicitly occludes those who lack a penis and its symbolic phallus from participation, as for Clair ‘the gaze is the erection of the eye’ ([La Pointe à l’œil cited in Abigail Solomon-Godeau: 229]). Consequently, late twentieth-century feminist film theory, informed by the Lacanian paradigm which inscribed femininity as intrinsically lacking, sought to renegotiate the sexual politics of the gendered gaze which denied female desire. While Laura Mulvey’s seminal theorising of the male gaze ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ (1975) provided a springboard from which to consider visual agendas, its complicity with the victim-status of woman as ‘linchpin to the system’ (14) is reductive and divisive, privileging female passivity to the point that it ‘ignores alternative models of spectatorship and gazing [...] does not conceptualise any positive version of the female gaze [.... and] represses female desire’ (Norman Denzin: 43), and Luna similarly approaches Mulvey’s theories with a ‘degree of caution’ (12).
In response to Mulvey, feminist film theorists including Mary Doane, Teresa de Laurentis, Stephen Heath and Brigid Cherry (1982, 1984, 1992, 1999) have written a place for the female spectator, although these alternative theories base their arguments within the same cinematic constraints as Mulvey; the iconicity of the woman-as-spectacle remains committed to celluloid, and so even if the gaze of the viewer is reciprocated or challenged there is always the barrier of the screen, the fourth wall, to nullify it. Mulvey’s ‘Afterthoughts’ on her formulation of the male gaze proposes a female spectator absent from her previous analysis, but one whose vision must negotiate the ‘masculinisation’ of spectatorship which inevitably implies for the female viewer an ‘inability to achieve stable sexual identity’ (30). Thus, the gendered agency of spectatorship has proved a stumbling block for many theories which call for a paradigm shift yet find difficulty in proposing one which operates beyond the binaries of active/male/spectator and passive/female/spectacle.

While film theory has tried to identify a model of the female gaze, Luna’s is the first to focus on mothers and, furthermore, to offer an uncompromised, unmediated and aggressive maternal gaze. She negotiates the cinematic apparatus which troubled previous theorists, demonstrating through her analysis of Hitchcock’s Psycho (1960) that the maternal gaze forms a ‘concentric spectacle’ around the film, which refers to both the textual panoptic surveillance of Mother Bates and its witnessing by the audience, who are ‘render[ed] visible’, and therefore vulnerable through their own spectatorship (74). Contending that with viewing the murderous maternal gaze attends ‘the realisation that [it] is indeed every mother’s honest instinct’, Luna considers the film-as-text beyond the cinematic apparatus which she exposes as fallible, as the maternal gaze can erupt and exist
beyond it through a reunion with the child-objects that constitute the audience (94). As I show, this has severe implications for the Gothic consumer.

**Nothing to See Here: The (In)visibility of the Maternal Tyrant in the Gothic**

Although Female Gothic scholarship like Donna Heiland’s *Gothic and Gender* (2004) highlights the subversions and transgressions performed by the genre’s heroines against the paternal sexual aggressor, this ultimately reinforces the gendered codes propagated by patriarchy of female/passive/victim and male/active/perpetrator. The possibility of the maternal tyrant mobilised through her gaze and its origin the womb, not a new presence but a prehistoric one which has existed undetected in the canon for centuries, compels a radical revisioning of how scholarship understands the Gothic’s structures and conventions.

Heiland contends that ‘Gothic novels are all about patriarchies, about how they function, what threatens them, what keeps them going’, that ‘patriarchy is not only the subject of Gothic novels, but is itself a Gothic structure’ (11), yet this overview completely neglects the presence of the maternal tyrant which I trace throughout the genre. Furthermore, whereas the male aggressors of the genre are only capable of ending their victim’s lives, the Gothic mother’s womb grants life to its child-object which is simultaneously inflected with the shadow of its own death in the form of the maternal gaze, and this is reflected in the frequency of child mortality and maternal infanticide in the genre. While victim-heroines, particularly Radcliffe’s, eventually escape the clutches of their male tyrants (not without enjoying the sexual suspense of their incarceration as Coral Howells shows (1989: 152)), it is rare for the Gothic text that contains the murderous maternal gaze to not bear witness to the destruction of the child it seeks, and in each of the
texts I discuss there is always at least one death which the maternal gaze has caused. Even prey who does manage to evade the jaws of the hungry gazing womb, like Laura in ‘Carmilla’, is left so affected by their communion with the mother that a psychic infanticide is achieved, as the child cannot perceive of itself without reference to the absent mother, thus annihilating their (illusory) subjectivity in the paternal contract.

So, by eschewing the Mulvean notion that the female sexual body is always the desired object, the maternal gaze in the Gothic circumvents and undermines this scenario which consolidates the female-victim-object and male-tyrant-subject positions. In commandeering and creating womb spaces within the paternal household that deny the father access such as the attic, cellar, bedroom and schoolroom, the maternal gaze forces the patriarch to abdicate his position at the apex of the gaze hierarchy within the Gothic domestic.

The Ocular Devouring Womb of the Gothic

Many critics including Creed (1993) discuss maternal monstrosity in the Gothic, identifying the vagina dentata as the archetypal symbol of the Gothic maternal body, the toothed wound as mouth of the womb that is simultaneously castrated and castrating, and expresses at the most explicit level Freud’s contention that ‘no male human being is spared the fright of castration at the sight of the female genital’ (1927: 154; see also Solimar Otero). The threat posed by the vagina dentata to the paternal rule as structured through the primacy of the phallus has made it a Gothic convention, and the image can be found in many of the earlier texts I discuss, especially ‘Carmilla’, Dracula and ‘The Squaw’. While its status as convention of the monstrous maternal in the Gothic remains undisputed, I show that there is a place
within the canon of conventions for a brand of maternal monstrosity previously unidentified, that which originates from the gaze of the womb and is consolidated through vagina symbolism that incorporates not only the jaw, mouth, lips and teeth but also the eye.

Although the eye has been invested with phallic significance in much Lacanian-influenced gaze theory, Garfield Tourney and Dean Plazak note it has ‘also been interpreted as a female symbol, the pupil representing the vagina, the lids the labia, and the lashes the pubic hair’ (489), and this is reflected in the medical term for the fascial sheath of the eyeball, the *vagina oculi*. Physiologically, the eye shares more similarities with the vagina than it does the penis, as both are openings in the body which ‘take in’ and consume their surroundings. Luna’s understanding of the maternal gaze is not limited to conventional anatomical origins, and for her it begins in the womb and continues beyond it through the conduit of the vagina:

The monopoly of an all-seeing capacity can be a haunting one, particularly for the offspring, because knowledge and surveillance become synonymous with the maternal. Having been delivered from the body, one finds that there is no escape from its place of conception. The gestation period during which one develops in the womb is a maternally internalised scopic field that may mislead one to believe that this is a temporary state of gazing/surveillances, the end of which is signified by the birth of the infant. This, however, is not the case. Once expelled from the maternal body, a heightened sense of being watched is triggered by conduct that would meet with maternal disapproval. The actions of the offspring are then prone to the influences of the mother
by the pre-existing condition of having been object of the womb’s constant gazing, the centre of attention. (5)

The maternal gaze is the child’s shadow, its twin, and the child-object can never escape the gaze of the mother because of their shared womb origins. Whereas retinal objects are mere copies ‘taken’ by an external gaze, the child-object which is linked inextricably to the mother through the prehistoric womb experience is not reproduced by the maternal gaze but is stalked by it, a constant reminder of its indebtedness to the mother and the attendant inability to ever achieve subjectivity, what Luna terms the ‘impossibility of wholeness’ (70). Consequently, the maternal gaze can be issued from a number of places as the pupil, the vagina(dentata) as the mouth of the womb and architectural and narrative womb-spaces conspire to re-consume the child. Revealing the presence of the tyrannical maternal gaze in the Gothic, I show that relocating the origin of the gaze from the physiological to the psychic and the structural creates an unprecedented intimacy which allows the mother to capture not a retinal copy of the child but the child itself.

**Watch your Language: The Stifling Semiotic Womb**

In the texts I discuss the maternal gaze in the Gothic and its consumption of the child back into the mother’s fold through abuse, torture, incest, incarceration and murder within metonymic womb spaces perform the very thing that Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis seeks to prevent, the emasculation of paternal rule and the disintegration of the child-subject’s psyche. The bond between mother and child is created and galvanised before the Law-of-the-Father can intercede through the child’s acceptance of language as the primary
The maternal distorts language, violating patriarchal linguistic and narrative laws to assert the primacy of her gaze, and as Luna explains, the adage ‘children should be seen and not heard’ favours the agency of the eye and ‘relegates children to the realm of visual exposure’:

The mother’s look evokes a time prior to language when the child’s needs were communicated without words. That look conveys a superiority, a moment in which the child is reminded of its own inefficacy as a human being in the face of one who remembers his inarticulate primitivism and that in itself is enough to render the child mute. (17)

The gaze aborts Symbolic language, splitting of the child’s subjectivity so the maternal can retain her control over it. This echoes Kristeva’s semiotic chora, the place and time before the acquisition of paternal language which recalls the mother’s womb: ‘If the Symbolic established the limits and unity of a signifying practice, the semiotic registers in that practice the effect of that which cannot be pinned down as sign, whether signifier or signified’ (1976: 68).

In the texts I discuss, especially The Turn of the Screw and its adaptations, the child existing in the semiotic womb-space does so without the structuring of drives and must answer to the maternal body, that which dominates the semiotic and which the child considers part of itself. Subsequently, the semiotic space or text is that which Elizabeth Grosz describes as recreating the ‘rhythmic, energetic, dispersed series of forces which strive to proliferate pleasures, sounds, colours or movements experienced in the child’s body’, and
with the emphasis on the sensual it becomes ‘the repressed condition of the symbolically regulated, grammatical, and syntactically governed language’ (152), the articulations of the maternal body which the Symbolic curtails and which erupts as pre-Oedipal objet a of the gaze and the voice of the womb. The gazing womb is a violent space beyond paternal rule, and the child it nurtures is similarly ambivalent, tainted by the originary all-consuming dyadic bond. The maternal gaze becomes a psychic umbilical cord to which the child is always tethered; the child can never cut the cord and death, either the child’s or the mother’s, does not sever the link as the mother will find a route through which to retain her hold.

As Luna contends, the violent death of the child is the most intense demonstration of maternal instinct: ‘In the honesty of the maternal gaze, the literalising impetus takes over and the desire to possess is recapitulated in the act of physically fragmenting [...] the child’. ‘A dismembered child is better than a live one for [its] pieces can then be gathered in the loving arms of [the] mother’, and I show that this is why the Gothic maternal gaze – both that of its characters and its consumers - is so obsessed with the image of the dead, dying, ill and abused child (26). The omnipotence of the maternal gaze in the Gothic testifies to the mother’s tyrannical desire to be reunited with the child at any cost, and the genre’s urge to repeat the trope of infanticide enacted by the mother-figure compels ‘the revelation that maternal instinct is naturally lethal to the child’ (27).

**The Maternal Tyrant as Gothic Convention**

Challenging Heiland’s view that the Gothic narrativises patriarchy, this thesis reads the genre as governed by the maternal gaze, a Gothic convention which has eluded detection.
The critical failure to detect the maternal gaze is due to three factors: the privileging of the male gaze in psychoanalytic, feminist, film and literary theory, the emphasis on the male tyrant archetype in the Gothic and an endemic cultural blindness to the capabilities of maternal desire.

Eve Sedgwick seminally identified the coherence of Gothic conventions, including ‘the trembling sensibility of the heroine’ and the ‘tyrannical older man with the piercing glance’ (1980: 8, my emphasis), and these gendered signifiers of passive female victim and active male aggressor are so embedded in the collective consciousness of the Gothic it seems profane to consider they may be misguided. Yet, the texts I analyse demonstrate the enduring presence of the gaze of the maternal tyrant. As Howells discusses, the thrill and suspense of the Gothic for both readers and characters is based on a flirtation with sex and violence which is neither fully consummated nor actually extant (1979: 11, 13), as the victim-heroine exaggerates the threat of the paternal tyrant through her hysterical wishful thinking. In Radcliffe’s Gothic romance The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794), Montoni becomes Emily’s rape fantasy despite limited contact throughout the novel, a spectacle she pursues through her eidetic scopophilic gaze as ‘she saw herself in a castle, inhabited by vice and violence, seated beyond the reach of law and justice, in the power of a man’ (435). Consequently, objectification by the male gaze through the ‘piercing glance’ of the male tyrant is a stock female Gothic fantasy, a desire rather than the reality, while the scopic regimes which shape the genre are frequently implemented by the mother(figure), who does this through the manipulation of Gothic conventions, of which she herself is a neglected example.

The maternal gaze re-visions the domestic sphere accorded to women into a Gothic interior which symbolises the mutable, secret, abject womb which issues the gaze, and
Introduction – The Maternal Gaze in the Gothic

provides an arena in which behaviours ruinous to patriarchal rule occur without the judgmental/voyeuristic spectatorship of the paternal/male gaze. In the texts I discuss the maternal gaze thrives in the domestic, a space owned by the father but delegated to the mother and so considered a haven from the dangers of outside, by incarcerating the child-object in womb-spaces - the cellar, the bedroom, the nursery, the attic - which lurk within the paternal domain. These spaces metonymically recall the uncanny inception of our origins hidden from paternal surveillance, and Freud specifically aligns the domestic space with the mother’s genitals and what they conceal. This idea that something happens beyond paternal sight correlates with the castration anxiety engendered by looking upon the vagina as the entrance to the womb, ‘the entrance to man’s old “home”, the place where everyone once lived (Freud 1919b: 151). The uncanny space of the home represents the pre-phallus time and place where the maternal gaze was all-consuming, and for the subject to enter the home is to re-enter this scopic field and relinquish autonomy, to become the object.

Encountering the Maternal Gaze

This thesis examines how visual tyrannies within the Gothic are perceived and excavates an existing but ignored convention of the maternal tyrant by mapping a trajectory of her gaze throughout the genre. It challenges critical discourse which has gendered the gaze as male, and applies a new gaze theory to literary and visual texts to consider the politics of spectatorship in both the content of the texts and the extratextual act of reading or viewing, of consuming.

The thesis is divided into three parts, each comprising two chapters, which track the maternal gaze throughout the Gothic. Part One ‘The Gothic Heritage’ contains Chapters
One and Two which both consider male-authored Victorian and early twentieth-century Gothic novels to establish a history of the maternal gaze in canonical texts of the genre. In these chapters I identify how Victorian anxieties about the maternal body erupt into the text and escape through ruptured narrative structures. Discussing the work of J.S. Le Fanu and Bram Stoker, Chapter One focuses on the influence of folkloric and socio-medical gynaecological discourses of the Gothic revival of the late nineteenth century, to contend that it is at this point chronologically the genre becomes preoccupied with a malignant maternal gaze that is galvanised through interrelationships of theme, symbol and space. The womb as site/sight of the conception of the gaze is replicated in spaces from which external paternal interference is prohibited, such as Laura’s bedroom in Le Fanu’s ‘Carmilla’ and Tera’s tomb in Stoker’s The Jewel of Seven Stars; if this prohibition is violated, as in the invasion/rape of Tera’s tomb, the maternal seeks her revenge through the elimination of that which is most precious to the father, the child. Various symbols of the maternal gaze will be explored, including the birthmark as a totemic symbol of the womb’s ownership, the bite of the vampire, the result of the vagina dentata’s desire to reclaim the child from the Symbolic order, and also the cat, the hand and the breast. Anticipating discussions in my next chapter which engage with Henry James’ The Turn of the Screw and its filmic perpetuations, I also consider the maternal gaze’s invasion and usurpation of classical narrative structures as a mode of recapturing the child, and its movement between texts to create a maternal intertextuality.

Chapter Two demonstrates how The Turn of the Screw and its adaptations the contemporary Spanish ghost films The Others and The Orphanage are engaged in an intertextual dialogue about Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy (MSBP) which is troubled by
the discordance of the culturally-perceived nurturing role of the maternal. The disturbance of paternal order in these texts originates from the sight of the ostensibly self-sacrificing mother(figure), whose ambiguous spectral visions deny external masculine participation and lead to the death of the child(ren) and their reintegration into the womb. The *mise-en-scène* of these texts is the isolated and apparently haunted house, which affirms the omnipotence of the maternal gaze through the ghost, symbolic of female sexual disturbance, and the uncanny intra-uterine space. Developing the concept of the womb’s surveillance, I contend that the dominance of the maternal gaze in these texts is energised by the dissolution of realist narrative authority and Symbolic language. Commandeering both domestic and textual patriarchal domains, the maternal gaze dissolves the cohesion of the master narrative, and the hermeneutical possibilities of James’ text leak through into its adaptations, creating ambiguous spaces in which the maternal can thrive as James’ governess reappears under different guises in the films, wreaking havoc with her infanticidal gaze under the masquerade of the caring mother. Considering how maternal visual agency is articulated in both written and filmic texts by the notion of spectrality, this chapter takes a transdisciplinary approach which will be developed in the second part of the thesis, which considers the maternal gaze in nineteenth-century spirit photography, memorial portraiture and the work of Julia Margaret Cameron.

Part Two, ‘The Maternal Gaze’s Gothic Practices’, follows on from the spectral strategies of the maternal discussed in Chapter Two to focus on the intersections of nineteenth-century photography and Spiritualist and Catholic religious practices as a medium for the maternal gaze. Discussing the popularity of Spiritualism in the late-nineteenth century, Chapter Three considers representations of the dead child in spirit
photography, and I begin by arguing that ectoplasmic spirit photography has been over-determined by feminist readings which fashion it as a liberating metaphor of birth. I contend that ectoplasmic material mediumship is fetishised as a spectacle for the photographic male gaze which exposes the vulnerable body of the medium, and I counter that the Spiritualist writings of Florence Marryat and the psychic spirit photography of Ada Deane and Georgiana Houghton, in which the female medium/photographer imprints and captures the image of the child-spirit onto the plate, become parthenogenetic processes of birth where the maternal body is not exposed to the male gaze. I argue that psychic spirit photography was the perfect medium for the maternal to extend her prison of vision as it re-creates multiple versions of the dead-child-as-object to be captured and meditated on as the deceased child is suspended by the lens of the maternal gaze; it cannot pass over but remains perpetually on the precipice between life and death and so is denied subjectivity in either realm. This chapter explores how alternative modes of seeing which defy patriarchal structures of empiricism, rationality and logic have been commandeered by the maternal practitioner.

Arguing that nineteenth-century photography was transformed into an arena for matriarchal visualities through the depiction of child mortality, this chapter galvanises the transdisciplinary nature of my thesis by drawing together visual and textual notions of the gaze to contend that psychic spirit photography and writing perpetuate the maternal gaze through the implied-yet-deferred death of the child object. Considering Luna’s contention that fragmenting the child’s subjectivity enables the maternal to foster her own, I contend that meditating on the image of the dead child becomes one of the most effective ways for the maternal gaze to operate.
This is discussed further in Chapter Four in relation to Victorian memorial portraiture and Julia Margaret Cameron’s Marian photography, where I continue to examine how the maternal gaze imprints and captures the child onto the photographic plate. I show how Cameron’s work echoes and inverts the aesthetics of Victorian memorial portraiture to Gothicise photography and the domestic space in which it is practised, by manipulating the body of the living child into a performance of death. Challenging feminist critiques of Cameron’s work which celebrate the maternal sensuality of her pieces in juxtaposition to Lewis Carroll’s uncomfortable photographs of Alice Liddell, I argue that Cameron’s photography is a manifestation of a destructive maternal gaze, and that her photographic infanticide is doubly subversive as a motif which runs through her Marian photography, where her maid Mary Hiller was made to pose as her divine namesake the Virgin Mary while holding the dead child Jesus, played by Cameron’s living grandson.

I demonstrate how Cameron’s work continues the tradition of Medieval Marian iconography of maternal holy kinships and trinities in which Mary and her mother Anne are privileged over the Holy Father, whose presence is marginalised or completely absent. Arguing that Cameron fulfills Anne’s pedagogic role to Hillier’s Mary, I show how she instructs Mary-as-Mary in the infanticidal maternal gaze to create compositions which connote maternal violence, rather than the expected piety, devotion and sorrow traditionally associated with Virgin Mary iconography. Arguing that the abuse implied through Cameron’s compositions is compounded by her visceral methods of production, in which she impregnated herself into the photograph by scratching into the plate and leaving fingerprints and hairs in the emulsion, I show that, veiled by the image of holy maternal benevolence, her photography’s violation and fetishisation of the child’s ‘dead’ body has
remained undetected. This Gothicisation of technology anticipates the final part of my thesis which discusses how the incest narratives of Virginia Andrews’ novels are hypertextually reproduced and circulated by and for the maternal gaze through the unpolic ed space of the internet.

Part Three, ‘The Maternal Gaze and the Gothic Domestic’, returns to the novel to show how the maternal gaze continues to Gothicise the domestic space with narratives of the abused child. Chapter Five concentrates on the neglected incestuous Gothic of Virginia Andrews’ Dollanganger Saga, novels which self-reflexively invoke canonical texts to emphasise an antecedent maternal gaze which authorises the extreme portrayals of incest and child abuse in the novels. Rather than hinting coyly at incest through metaphoric devices and mistaken identities as earlier Gothic texts like The Castle of Otranto (1764), The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794) and The Monk (1796) did, Andrews’ matrilineage of incest is explicitly and sympathetically plotted throughout the saga, and I show how she validates her writing through intertextual references to Great Expectations (1860-61), which contains coded sibling incest between Pip and Estella. Beginning by reading Great Expectations as an incest text in which Pip and Estella are caught in a web of desire for each other that can never be consummated, I show how Miss Havisham’s sadistic manipulation of the children for her voyeuristic pleasure exposes incest as a Gothic convention which is instigated by a maternal tyrant.

Having excavated the precedent of maternally-induced incest in the Gothic, I show how in Flowers in the Attic the surveillance of the grandmother’s attic creates an arena for non-reproductive sexualities ruinous to the paternal order, as the children engage in incest which functions as desire for attention from the mother who has abandoned them.
Examining how Cathy’s incest narrative is prolonged through the serialised format of the saga, I argue that Andrews’ strategy of textual production enables the maternal gaze to parthenogenetically perpetuate itself beyond the ending of the novel and, discussing the publishing phenomenon of misery literature and the popularity of the incest memoir and incest confessions on talk shows with a maternal audience, I draw on theories of melodrama to show how incest Gothic is culturally reproduced for a maternal demographic which vicariously participates in the act of maternal sadism and/or incestuous revenge against the mother through reading, watching and dissemination.

This anticipates discussions in Chapter Six, the conclusion of my thesis, which shows how narratives of child abuse and trauma have been Gothicised and made available through the internet as a viral mode of the maternal gaze. Having analysed the appeal of Andrews’ incest texts for a female audience, I examine hypertextual reader responses, including the circulation, discussion and rewriting of the novels through internet forums and blogs, and I consider how these unpoliced interfaces encourage the infanticidal fantasies of maternal gaze, including the recent case of Rebeccah Beushausen’s Munchausen by Internet (MBI), in which she faked the existence of her terminally ill foetus through her blog. Making abuse and trauma an everyday spectacle for the maternal, I show how demand for these stories insidiously Gothicises the domestic maternal space, as the internet becomes another web weaved by maternal stories.

By establishing the maternal gaze and its attendant uterine architectural and narrative spaces as conventions of the genre which have previously been overlooked, I show how the Gothic is haunted by a pathological desire to re-inscribe our maternal origins; not a
cathartic repetition which purges the traces of the mother from our own selves, but the confirmation of our deepest need to return home.
Part One
The Gothic Heritage of the Maternal Gaze

This part of my thesis discusses how the presence of the maternal gaze became apparent in the genre in the late nineteenth-century Gothic revival. Although the maternal gaze is present in earlier Gothic texts, for example in Miss Havisham's manipulation of Estella and Pip in Dickens’ Great Expectations (1860-61) which I discuss in Part Three, it is in late Victorian and early Edwardian Gothic productions that the maternal gaze is articulated most vividly through a symbolic economy of folkloric and medical discourses which express the womb's searching gaze. As I demonstrate, in these texts the maternal gaze is found in symbolism already extant in the Gothic, primarily that of the vagina and the womb which Luna argues issues the gaze but which has yet to be associated with the metaphorical visual field by gaze theory. Thinking about Gothic maternal symbolism in this way will encourage new approaches to the genre, which has been dominated by the perception of a tyrannical male aggressor, and show how it is instead the presence of the mother's gaze which pervades these Gothic spaces.

Chapter One focuses on the works of the male Irish Gothic writers J.S. Le Fanu and Bram Stoker, who both use the imagery of folkloric and medical discourses as a cipher for concerns surrounding the ambiguous maternal body and the concept of motherhood idealised and beatified by Victorians. While Le Fanu's slightly earlier fairy stories and the vampire novella ‘Carmilla’ (1872) engaged with Irish folkloric beliefs and superstitions of fairies and witchcraft, Stoker's later fin de siècle works 'The Squaw' (1893) and The Jewel of Seven Stars (1903/1912), as well as Dracula (1897), appeared on the cusp of the twentieth century and expanded on Le Fanu's folkloric Gothic legacy, to channel socio-medical discourses of maternal imprinting which betrayed modernity's anxiety of a prehistoric
maternal presence that threatened a retrograde effect on the child as the building block of the British Empire (see Laura Berry).

Henry James’ novella *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) similarly combines discourses of the supernatural and the medical, and in Chapter Two I consider how the governess’ maternal gaze exploits elements of both to hoodwink readers and critics into deciphering the ‘truth’ of the story, so her murder of Miles and hystericalisation of Flora remain largely undetected. Here the maternal gaze exploits the role of language in diagnosing and documenting hysteria, and I show how the governess’ fractured and incomplete story creates a maternal narrative structure which resists masculine control, evidenced by the failure of the male framing narratives at the close of the text. Examining how the governess subverts the symptomatology of hysteria, I argue that her hysterical visions of the ghosts create a spectral panopticon of the maternal gaze which terrorises the household, and I show how this tension between the supernatural and the psychological is repeated in the filmic adaptations *The Orphanage* (2007) and *The Others* (2002), which draw on practices of Spiritualism and memorial portraiture I discuss in Part Two.
Chapter One
The Gothic and Maternal Symbolism in the works of J.S. Le Fanu and Bram Stoker

Le Fanu's most famous work the lurid vampire novella ‘Carmilla’ is saturated with womb imagery, confirming the Gothic maternal mise-en-scène with its treacherous surroundings and intra-uterine ‘blood-stained annals’ (260) which codify a chaotic maternal space, a ‘feminocracy’ which upturns paternal rule (Terry Castle: 254). Portended by the toppling of Carmilla’s carriage at the beginning of the text and emphasised by the carnivalesque of the masquerade at the schloss where Carmilla sets her sights on Laura (Tammis Thomas: 48), this maternal disorder finds a precedent in Le Fanu’s fairytales, narratives which rehearse Carmilla’s maternal gaze through amniotic hinterlands and superstitions which engage with Irish and European folkloric epistemologies of fairies, witchcraft and clairvoyance.

While Le Fanu was a Protestant and son of a Church of Ireland clergyman, the family was steeped in the folklore heritage of their (mother)land in Abingdon, Limerick, a mostly working-class Catholic parish in the kind of rural area prone to fairy episodes, and which middle-class protestants typically viewed as a savage landscape populated by ‘the products of disreputable mothers or even of incestuous unions; unnatural fruits of unnatural behaviour’ (Carole Silver: 67). Le Fanu’s brother William, in his volume Seventy Years of Irish Life (1893), recalled an incident where their father Thomas had to intervene to prevent one of his labourers Mick Tucker from burning his son Johnny whom he believed was a fairy changeling, as this had been the cure prescribed by ‘Ned Gallagher, a fairy doctor of high
repute’, ‘one or two of whom were sure to be found in every town’ (37). According to William Le Fanu ‘among many superstitions none was more general than the belief that the fairies – “the good people”, as the peasantry euphemistically call them – often take a child from its parents, substituting a fairy for it’, and this belief was held by both parents and child, as Johnny ‘ever after firmly believed that he had been away with the “good people” [...]. He still often talked of his fairy life’ (36-37, 38). Engaging with these superstitions Le Fanu’s fairy tales, with some degree of reverence, evoke a pre-Christian, pre-colonial folkloric belief system, which wrote an Irish landscape of viscousy bogs and fairy-dwellings inhospitable to humans. This motherland bred superstitions about fairy midwives, human mother surrogates and changelings which betrayed anxieties surrounding the maternal body and the child it produces, an archaic anxiety which Le Fanu was compelled to repeat through his own folklore narratives.

**Away with the Fairies: Le Fanu and the Folkloric Legacy**

While in ‘Carmilla’ Le Fanu writes the maternal architecturally through the anatomy of the castle, in his earlier folklore narratives the geographical landscape is the maternal body. ‘The Child That Went with the Fairies’ (1870) is set in ‘singularly lonely’ intra-uterine countryside, dominated by ‘a wide, black bog, level as a lake’, a (s)mothering amniotic viscosity which threatens to subsume anything which crosses its path. In Le Fanu’s stories bogs are wombs, and Kelly Hurley understands the threat viscosity poses to subjectivity as originating from the abject maternal body; in her theorisation of slime as ‘Thing-ness’, viscosity threatens ontological understanding as it is neither liquid nor solid, but has an oozing quality which
resists, both physically and taxonomically, definition. Slime, like the unctuous bog, is a 'liminal phenomenon' (1996: 35) which suppurates from the maternal body/land and Hurley specifies the female 'Gothic inner body' as being characterised by 'the Thing-ness of slime and its disgusting smell' (124). P.V. Glob argued that bodies excavated from peat bogs were evidence of sacrifice to earth goddesses, enacting a physical and metaphorical mummification through the return to the land-as-maternal-body, poignantly symbolised by the Tollund Man found in the foetal position (26, 27). The Tollund Man was interred back into the maternal body for the greater good of the tribe, and in Ireland defences against a malevolent presence were similarly rooted to the amniotic landscape, as William Le Fanu wrote how ‘in some places pilgrimages are still made to the holy lakes and wells of well-known healing virtues’ (112).

The bog is an abject maternal landscape which confronts us ‘within our personal archaeology, with our earliest attempts to release the hold of the maternal entity even before ex-isting outside of her [...] It is a violent, clumsy breaking away, with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of power as securing as it is stifling’ (Kristeva 1982: 13), and these viscous maternal discharges are staged by Le Fanu in ‘The Child That Went with the Fairies’ through the Gothic topography of the prehistoric bog land, ‘untrustworthy, defiant and fickle [...] threaten[ing] incarceration and death’ (Catherine Wynne 2002: 93). This is surrounded by an unwelcoming landscape of mountains and gullies (50), and the cabin in which the stolen child Billy's widowed mother Mary Ryan lives, is encircled by 'half a dozen mountain ashes [...] inimical to witches' (ibid.). The threat of maternal malevolence, specifically the child-snatching kind, is implicit within the landscape which opens the text and is intensely expressed by the ominous 'strangely dome-like summit' of the mountain
Lisnavoura which looms over ‘this solitary family’, the ‘hill-haunt of the “Good people”, as the fairies are called euphemistically’ (51). Le Fanu’s naming of the mountain, with ‘lis’, from the Irish ‘lios’ meaning an earthen fort or fairy ring, inscribes the land as possessed by the good people, and the topography situates the maternal space both geographically and hierarchically beyond the limits of patriarchy from which it spirits away its children.

Bordered by the treacherous terrain of the womb, this household is prone to invasion and infection due to its fatherlessness; despite Mary’s attempts to protect her family with holy water and horseshoes (a symbol of the womb, unhelpfully), ‘defences and bulwarks against the intrusion of that unearthly and evil power’ (ibid.), the reader soon learns that hers is a futile effort. As Diane Purkiss shows, young children, particularly babies, share a special bond with fairies – ‘demons’ - because of the liminal spaces they both occupy; like fairies, young children are not part of the acculturated and industrialised society, but rather inhabit their own world of play which still retains vestiges of the chaotic and messy maternal dyad. Unlike the fearful adult the child is seduced by the beauty of the maternal fairy, who promises an unknown time and place suspended beyond the paternal order which replicates the pleasure, excitement and attention experienced in the womb, ‘the blank space on the map’ which ‘produces no stories, evokes no memories’ (Purkiss 2000: 16).

Le Fanu’s maternal fairies also draw on the potency of the sovereignty-goddess, ‘an extremely persistent tradition in early Irish myth’, a pre-Christian, pre-patriarchy, belief which linked the fertility of the land and the sovereign status of Ireland with the female body (Miranda Aldhouse-Green: 70). In turn, the sovereignty-goddess, whose fecundity and sexuality made her an ambivalent and threatening power, was linked in the folkloric consciousness with the cult of the mother-goddess, a figure indelibly written into the
landscape through place names, as well as the boggy hinterland of the womb (ibid.: 106–7). Manifesting the sovereignty- and mother-goddesses through the figure of the fairy, Le Fanu’s narratives weave together several strands of Irish folklore to create a maternal presence which writes Ireland as a personification of the lost (m)other.

In ‘The Child that Went with the Fairies’ she appears in the guise of ‘a beautiful and very grand-looking lady’ who, like Carmilla, arrives in a carriage described as ‘a spectacle perfectly dazzling’ and forecasting chaos (55, 54); as Aldhouse-Green documents, this motif of the carriage-borne mother also occurs in Celtic folklore and symbolises ownership of the terrain over which she passes (114). Making her choice – ‘the boy with the golden hair, I think’ - while ‘bending her large and wonderfully clear eyes’, the children are blinded to her real intentions by the masquerade of the beautiful maternal gaze, and her beauty is equated with motherly goodness by the bewitched children, as ‘her voice sounded sweet as a silver bell [...] and her smile beguiled them like the light of an enchanted lamp [...] she leaned from the window with a look of ineffable fondness on the golden-haired boy’, and ‘held him in her lap and covered him in kisses’ (55). The true intention of the maternal gaze is only betrayed by the fairy’s travelling companion, a black woman with ‘a face as thin almost as death’s-head, with high cheekbones, and great goggle eyes, the whites of which, as well as her wide range of teeth, showed in brilliant contrast to her skin’ (ibid.), a malevolent figure wielding the gaze and evoking the vagina dentata who recurs in ‘Carmilla’ as Matska, and in folklore in the story of Da Derga’s Hostel (Aldhouse-Green: 84).

The mother-fairy’s power to bewitch the mortal child echoes the ‘fascinatrice’ documented in the fifteenth-century witchcraft tract the Malleus Maleficarum (first Latin edition: 1487), who lured innocents away for sacrifice and consumption at the witches’
Sabbath (Hans Broedel: 136), and this beautiful maternal fairy spirits Billy away from his family to ‘the dreaded hill of Lisnavoura’ (52), where ‘he was hidden from their loving eyes’ (57). As Richard Boothby discusses, while during infancy ‘fascination is absolutely essential to the phenomenon of the constitution of the ego’, because it enables the infant to concentrate on the mother’s gaze and create focus amidst ‘the uncoordinated diversity of its primitive fragmentation’ (31), re-entering into fascination once the ego has begun to form independently of the mother has the opposite effect, as the maternal gaze fragments the subject’s body so that it cannot return to the Symbolic without being permanently damaged. While ‘dead to mother, brother, and sisters’ Billy’s (re)entry into the unmapped maternal void means he is forever caught between life and death as ‘no grave received him’, and his fractured spirit returns to the familial hearth often (57, 56).

This motif of the mother-fairy who spirits the child away from their widowed Symbolic mother is also found in Hans Christian Andersen’s fairytale ‘The Snow Queen’ (1845), where shards of the Devil’s mirror pierce Kay’s heart and eye so he sees everything ‘distortedly’, allowing the Snow Queen to bewitch him (229). Like Le Fanu’s fairy, the Snow Queen is described as ‘dazzling’, blinding the child to everything else apart from herself - ‘In his eyes she was perfect’ (ibid.) - and it is this distortion and manipulation of the child’s vision which is central to the Snow Queen’s power and is galvanised through the shattering of the mirror, forestalling the Lacanian mirror stage. This sense of suspension echoes Kristeva’s concept of female time which takes place in the chora, the womb, where time is not a monolithic linearity as in the Symbolic, but ‘a specific measure that essentially retains repetition and eternity [....] cycles, gestation, the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm’ which trap its inhabitants in ‘a monumental temporality, without cleavage or escape’ (1981:
191). Like Johnny Tucker who returned to his human body in time to save himself being immolated, those who are fascinated by the ‘extra-subjective time, cosmic time […] vertiginous visions and unnameable jouissance’ (ibid.) of the maternal fairy realm can never fully speak it or escape it, and are compelled to relive it: ‘From his diminutive form and his wild ways many of the neighbours thought [Johnny] was a fairy still […] he used to put out the light in the pantry and sit in the dark alone, “pausing”, as he called it’ (William Le Fanu: 38). Sitting in the darkened womb of the pantry, Johnny tried futilely to suspend paternal time, to pause it and return to the maternal space of the chora.

While fairies regularly stole children, there are also examples in Celtic folklore of young brides being abducted to bear a half-human, half-fairy child, and the spiriting away of midwives and nursing mothers to deliver the fairy baby and care for it (see W.B. Yeats’ play The Land of Heart’s Desire (1894) and also J.M. Barrie’s Peter Pan (1911)), and this is the subject of another of Le Fanu’s folkloric narratives ‘Laura Silver Bell’ (1872), set in the ‘savage surroundings’ and ‘barren territory’ of the womby ‘black peat and heath’ (94). Katharine Briggs cites a Welsh story in which a fairy calls on a human midwife to tend to the pregnant human girl he has spirited away to his grotto (142-4); in this narrative the midwife accidentally rubs into her eye an ointment intended for the fairy baby thus revealing the supernatural nature of her task, and the fairy father blinds her so that she cannot witness anything else which may expose their existence to the human realm. So, within these folkloric discourses blindness symbolises knowledge which can be acquired in the maternal spaces of the fairy realm, but can never be taken away from it, and Janet Bord discusses ideas of revelation and blindness bound up in the fairy ointment and how fairies destroy human eyesight in order to keep themselves secret (138-139).
Le Fanu expands on these tensions between maternal and paternal realms of vision, as Mother Crake, the midwife the fairies choose to deliver Laura Silver Bell's baby, had also brought her into the world and covets her with a ‘dark and saturnine aspect’, a ‘searching gaze’ which infects Laura's vision, as 'the dark looks of Mother Crake were always before her eyes' (97, 98, 100). Like her namesake in ‘Carmilla’, Laura’s own mother died after childbirth, and so she is forever trapped in the shadow of the maternal gaze. This is reflected in the matrilineal naming of Laura after her dead mother, conferring maternal ownership of the child who is destined to bear her name (the Lauras find an intertextual namesake in Christina Rossetti’s sapphic ‘Goblin Market’ (1862), another feminocracy where sisters Laura and Lizzie must resist the call of the lascivious male goblins).

Already enmeshed in one form of maternal possession through her name, Laura is tangled in Mother Crake’s surrogate gaze, the sage femme who delivered her and whom she often visited ‘for the secret indications of the future’ (96). Mother Crake is a wise woman ‘secretly skilled, tells fortunes, practices charms, and in popular esteem is little better than a witch’ (94), but her clairvoyance is precious to Laura, whose past is occluded from her by the shadow of maternal death. Mother Crake’s gaze is a liminal one which occupies both the supernatural and Symbolic spheres, and Le Fanu reverses the established gaze dynamics of his folkloric narratives by having a deceptive male demon-lover who pretends to be an aristocratic lord, rather than a maternal fairy, bewitch Laura, as Mother Crake jealously intones 'the lass is witched, the lass is witched!' (100). Unbaptised and prone to supernatural attacks, Laura is seduced for her own ‘power of generation’ antithetical to the patriarchal order (Jason Harris: 130), which comes to pass as she falls pregnant with a fairy daughter, ‘such an imp! With long pointed ears, flat nose, and enormous restless eyes and mouth’
Although admitted entrance to the fairy realm to deliver Laura's fairy daughter, Mother Crake's clairvoyant maternal gaze ultimately fails as we are told 'she never more told fortune or practised spell', as 'Laura Silver Bell, wise folk think, is still living, and will so continue til the day of doom among the fairies' (104). One of Le Fanu's lesser-known fairytales, 'Laura Silver Bell' articulates a complex interlocking of gazes, as that of Mother Crake, mobilised through practices of witchcraft, midwifery and clairvoyance, battles the lingering maternal gaze of Laura's deceased mother, the suspicious surveillance of her neighbours and the fairy-lover searching for a human womb.

The abduction of children by fairies in Irish folklore and literature symbolises the social, political and agrarian tensions felt in nineteenth-century Ireland towards British imperialism that threatened cultural and geographical dispossession for future generations, as well as religious friction between poor and working-class Catholics and middle-class Protestants (Wynne 2002: 166). What is also weaved into these narratives of (dis)possession is the fear of the prehistoric native power of the fairy-sovereignty goddess, expressed in these tales as an otherised maternal presence that snatches children away from mothers who obey paternal rule. Moreover, while there is something of the Gothic unspeakable in the way that both Le Fanu and his brother refer 'euphemistically' to the 'good people', like the Gothic unspeakable they, and we, are compelled to tell these stories.

These superstitious narratives of maternal usurpation etched into the landscape through place names are galvanised through a matrilineal oral heritage, as mothers, aunts and nursemaids would captivate children with old wives’ tales and fairy stories, mythologising and disseminating discourses of maternal power throughout the nursery (Adam Fox and Daniel Woolf: 17-18, 31-32). Having inscribed the maternal gaze into his
homeland and history through the amniotic territory of the bog (more recently the infanticidal Gothic landscape in Susan Hill's *The Woman in Black* (1983)), Le Fanu established a precedent for the devouring mother who uses her gaze to bewitch her prey, and he continues this in 'Carmilla', using Eastern European suspicions of the vampire to write the mythology of the maternal gaze.

‘You and [eye] are one forever’: ‘Carmilla’

In ‘Carmilla’ the maternal topography is concentrated architecturally into the intra-uterine Gothic castle, as Laura is seduced by her dead mother who returns to invade the *schloss* in the guise of Carmilla, a sapphic vampiric presence who has a profound effect upon Laura:

My father asked me often whether I was ill; but with an obstinacy which now seems to me unaccountable, I persisted in assuring him I was quite well [....] I had no pain, I could complain of no bodily derangement. My complaint seemed to be one of imagination, or the nerves [....] It could not be that terrible complaint which the peasants attribute as a vampire, for I had now been suffering for three weeks, and they were seldom ill for more than three days when death put an end to their miseries. (241)

While this passage implies Carmilla’s presence is more than vampiric, it also gestures towards the maternal through the occlusion of the father; although she is clearly ill Laura obstinately denies him this knowledge: ‘Horrible as my sufferings were, I kept them, with a
morbid reserve, very nearly to myself’ (ibid.). This occlusion of knowledge creates a space within the schloss antithetical to patriarchal surveillance, and this threat to paternal rule is hinted at in the beginning of Laura’s first-person retrospective narrative; while she initially geographically and nominally locates herself through reference to her patrilineage, explaining ‘my father is English, and I bear an English name’, in the same breath she neuters its power by revealing she ‘never saw England’, invoking a prehistory of the archaic mother through her description of Styria as ‘this lonely and primitive place’ (208). Paternal rule is further exposed as precarious as the Gothic mise-en-scène is unsubtly established; Laura tells us the schloss, possessing a ‘Gothic chapel’, nestles in a shadowy forest with a winding stream over which arches a ‘Gothic bridge’.

Le Fanu’s evocative description here is not simply architectural terminology; symptomatic of the language of the genre which Victor Sage and Allan Smith identify as ‘transferring an idea of the otherness of the past into the present’ (1), it self-reflexively locates Laura’s narrative in a mode which obsessively codifies itself as maternal through abjected intra-uterine spaces and structures. We are told that ‘the nearest inhabited schloss of any historic associations is that of old General Spielsdorf, nearly twenty miles away to the right’, who is revealed to be a failure as a father, unable to prevent Carmilla from seducing and killing his motherless niece Bertha (208), and the paternal jurisdiction of the tale is further undermined by the nearby ‘ruined village’, occupied by ‘the mouldering tombs of the proud family of Karnstein’, the maternal lineage of both Laura and Carmilla and the site of the chaotic and ambiguous execution of the latter (ibid.). This archaic and primitive territory in feudal Styria invites the excavation of the mother buried deep in the prehistory she shared with the child before the intervention of patriarchy which systematically
endeavours to repress the (dis)order of mother/child dyad, and it is the schloss which becomes the site of this excavation. The power of this simultaneously native and foreign maternal prehistory is galvanised by the weakening of Laura’s father’s Englishness and the breakdown of his language in the text (the Lacanian Law), as his native tongue is threatened by the use of French and German by Laura’s governesses, producing a confused ‘Babel’ inside his home which infects his own command over English (209), exposed through his failure to quote Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*: ‘I forget the rest’ (215). This impotency of the father’s language-as-Law is expressed most acutely by his namelessness, which contrasts starkly with Carmilla’s/Millarca’s/Mircalla’s perpetuity of names and writes him out of his own patrilineage and household.

**Puerperal Narratives and Mothers’ Names**

As fairy place names betray the anarchic pre-history of the Irish landscape mapped and acculturated through geography, so does the denigration and demarcation of the maternal body as abject expose the insecurity of the Symbolic subjectivity, as the body assimilated and ordered through language is threatened by the recollection of its abject origins. The maternal body provides a dyadic, narcissistic subject-position for the child which challenges the notion of a subjectivity acquired through a linguistic structure characterised by lack, frustration and prohibition, and it is only when leaving the dyad does the maternal body become problematic. Kristeva elaborates this as a ‘primal mapping of the body that I call semiotic’, a method of plotting and inscribing the self which is a ‘precondition of language [...] dependent on meaning, but in a way that it is not that of *linguistic* signs nor of the
symbolic order they found’ (1982: 72). The maternal gaze created in the chora of the womb proves more potent than paternal language as it is structured in the Symbolic, and, as will be explored in relation to The Turn of the Screw, the maternal gaze exploits linguistic and narrative failures to destroy the father's Law, as Carmilla threatens order with her own chaotic speech, as Laura explains how ‘her agitations and her language were unintelligible to me’, that she talks ‘wild nonsense’ (225, 236). Strengthening the subversion of the foreign ‘gabbling’ in which Laura’s governesses indulge (214), Carmilla as the archaic mother invades the schloss through the deterioration of paternal language.

As Luna explains, the mother/child dyad is ‘defined by a lack of language that further emphasises the infant’s dependency upon [the] mother’, that the mother becomes the interpreter of the child who consequently ‘cannot negotiate the world without her’ (17). Until the child can speak, it is relegated to the mother’s ‘realm of visual exposure’ (ibid.); to see the child is to own it, to re-absorb and reiterate it as part of the abject maternal through ‘the mother’s proprietary gaze’ (48). Vestiges of the socialised subject's maternal existence lie dormant, but with the constant threat of erupting through and breaking the paternal contract. Thus the schloss is only an illusion of the patriarchal monolithic structure; huddled in the dark forests of Styria it struggles to live up to its Gothic antecedents, epic Radcliffean structures that feed from their sublime settings. Instead, the castle in ‘Carmilla’ is prone to infection and transformation by its archaic maternal surroundings.

As Norman Holland and Leona Sherman discuss, the castle as Gothic trope harks back to the maternal dyad, ‘becom[ing] all possibilities of a parent or body’, ‘stand[ing] as a total environment in one-to-one relation with the victim, like the all-powerful mother of earliest childhood’; the castle is ‘a recapitulation of that earliest stage in human
development when the boundaries between inner and outer, me and not-me, are still not sharply drawn, and cannot distinguish itself from the mother’ (282, 283). Not the father’s province, the castle is the originary site of female power which has been ‘usurped’, as Kate Ellis describes it, by the paternal despots of the genre (218). Erroneously perceived as the domain of the father who is hoodwinked into believing the extent his own power, the castle is revealed as the metonymic womb from which issues a maternal surveillance that threatens to annihilate those it houses.

This annihilation comes from the unnatural protraction of the state of pregnancy that existence in the womb-space symbolises; far beyond the proper limits of gestation, the desire of the mother to re-consume the child back into her body transforms the castle into a fecund space which ‘invites the maternal to engage in a reverse parasitic relationship since a symbiotic one is impossible’ (Luna: 34). As such, Laura’s narrative (re)tells the pursuit of the absent mother that recurs consistently in the Gothic which warns that reunion with her can only be disastrous for the child. Moreover, it is the return of the mother through her metonymic wombs which recreates the narcissistic gaze of pregnancy:

Always invisible, the child within the womb can only allude to its own existence by stretching its mother’s stomach. Only by looking at her body is the mother capable of realising the physical existence of her child, which characterises pregnancy as inherently narcissistic. The gaze of the mother is, therefore, confined primarily to her own wellbeing, which by proxy testifies to that of her child, who in turn experiences the mother as a confining space by way of the womb. (Luna: 40)
For the maternal to regain the narcissism pregnancy occasions the absent mother must forever retain the child in her vision and like ‘Laura Silver Bell’ in ‘Carmilla’ this is played out symbolically through the concept of matrilineage. The advent of Carmilla, descendant of the degenerate Karnsteins, is defined in terms of her own subjection to maternal surveillance which she subsequently inherits. Her entrance into the narrative is heralded by the upturning of the carriage in which the ‘fairy guests’ - Carmilla, her own mother and the black servant Matska - with ‘gleaming eyes and large white eyeballs, and her teeth set as if in fury’ - are travelling (214, 219). Described as a ‘very unusual spectacle’, the accident and Carmilla’s recovery and invitation to stay at the schloss introduce the presence of the maternal gaze in the text:

Curiosity opened my eyes, and I saw a scene of utter confusion [...] a lady, with commanding air and figure had got out, and stood with clasped hands, raising the handkerchief that was in them every now and then to her eyes. Through the carriage door was now lifted a young lady, who appeared to be lifeless. My dear old father was already beside the elder lady [...] who did not appear to hear him, or to have eyes for anything but the slender girl who was being placed against the slope of the bank. (215-6)

Carmilla’s apparent lifelessness betrays her true presence as Laura’s mother, who is herself subjected to the scrutiny of the maternal gaze, figured as ambivalent from the outset through Laura’s observation that ‘the lady threw her daughter a glance which I fancied was
not quite so affectionate as one might have anticipated from the beginning of the scene’ (217). Although critics have designated Carmilla as a spectral ancestral mother, with William Veeder describing her as the ‘demonic shadow mother’ (215) and Joseph Andriano tentatively suggesting that ‘Laura and Carmilla are related through the mother, then’ (104), it is clear to me that Carmilla is Laura’s mother, whose physical presence cannot be assuaged through the critical assignation of spectrality or ancestry.

The return of lost or absent mother(s) is ruinous to patriarchy and its narratives of subject-making, as Carolyn Dever explains how the child ‘must eventually read the mother as inadequate in order to constitute a subject-position independent of hers’ (3). In these narratives the absent mother is a plot device which initiates the child into the Symbolic, and while these narratives may involve a Freudian fort/da ‘pursuit of the lost object’ of the mother, it is her sustained absence which allows the child to develop a sense of self, as ‘normative subjectivity [...] is articulated through a poetics of loss’ (4). Dever finds this structure of pursuit in the novel of Sensibility, the Realist Bildungsroman and crucially the Gothic (22), and Tania Modleski argues that it is the pursuit and eventual separation from the absent mother in the Gothic which allows the female child to become completely independent from her, to discover she is not turning into her mother (71). Hence, up to now the maternal is perceived as always on the peripheries of the genre, unobtainable and spectral and fuelling the Gothic plot through her absence. However, while for the Gothic the mother is more useful dead than alive, she becomes problematic when she subverts the pursuit dynamic and does the pursuing herself.

While Michelle Massé would have us believe that the Gothic suppresses the maternal body through ‘gentee abuse’ in which ‘as a pawn [...] she is moved, threatened, discarded,
and lost' (108), it is evident from the Gothic's compulsion to repeat the loss and return of the mother in such violent and nihilistic ways that she is a bewildering force far larger than the narrative, linguistic and architectural structures which fail to contain her. When that which was thought lost is suddenly found, chaos ensues:

As the cornerstone of patriarchal discourse, the circumscription of the mother is a structural necessity; if that circumscription should fail, that absence should become a presence, the entire structure comes tumbling down. (Dever: 51)

The Gothic, punctuated obsessively with the return of the repressed and absent mother and her metonymic wombs, functions as an abortive Bildungsroman as the Gothic climax consistently articulates a nihilistic union with the found mother resulting in the death of subjectivity, 'the collapsing of the two selves which would further lead to the collapse of all such selves' (Hung-Jung Lee: 25), expressed at its most intense in the genre as the death of the child itself.

That she is compulsively written into the Gothic betrays the inexorable desire to return to the maternal body, despite, or because of, the annihilation that attends the exquisite jouissance of reunion. For Kahane this is the ‘precipice on the edge of maternal blackness to which every Gothic heroine is fatefuly drawn’, the ‘merging with a mother imago who threatens all boundaries between self and other’ (1985: 340). Through the re-materialisation of the mother, the Gothic narrativises the narcissism attendant to the womb-space, the schloss, ‘which rather than promoting life, seeks to suspend it' (Luna: 40), and can
only result in the child’s extinction if it continues to remain inside. Those who escape, like Radcliffe’s heroines, may get their happily ever after, but they never get their mother.

This is certainly Luna’s contention, whose analysis of Coleridge’s poem ‘Christabel’, a textual precursor to ‘Carmilla’ (see Arthur Nethercot), emphasises the maternal topography of the Gothic castle. Like ‘Carmilla’, the poem only ‘preliminarily alludes to the presence of a masculine force’, which is superseded by ‘an existence marked by signs of a deceased mother who has translated the maternal bond of proprietary ownership of her only child’ (31-2). Thus, when Laura explains in the opening pages of the first chapter that her mother, ‘whom I do not even remember, so early did I lose her’, died during her infancy (209), the narrative is immediately engaged with this poetics of loss which condemns its protagonist to pursue the original object of desire, the mother and her attention, her gaze, back into the womb-space. Nor does the mother remain passive during this pursuit, but is insatiable in her desire to re-consume the child, especially if the loss occurred through the death of the mother during the child’s infancy, or from the effects of childbirth. Irvine Loudon shows that during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the bacterial infection puerperal fever which developed into blood-poisoning accounted for roughly half of all maternal deaths, and that among women of child-bearing age ‘maternal mortality was second only to tuberculosis in the leading cause of death’ (6), while Dever notes that ‘novels of this period are infected with a puerperal fever of their own’, and that ‘the death rate of mothers in the Victorian novel is elevated far beyond the mortality rates among the same population of living women during this period [...] it is far more dangerous to give birth in a fictional world’ (11, 19).

Puerperal fever was the cause of Mary Wollstonecraft’s death after giving birth to Mary Shelley in 1797, the author of *Frankenstein* (1818), the original Gothic narrative of the
trauma of birth (Loudon: 2). This gynaecological tragedy became a common plot device for the pursuit of the lost mother, and discussing obstetrical death (which also ignites the maternal gaze in ‘Laura Silver Bell’ and The Jewel of Seven Stars), Luna argues that if the mother has not had the opportunity to come to terms with the child’s leaving of her body and its departure into patriarchy, this will result in the ‘refusal to acknowledge the child’s identity as a separate being’ and her spectral endeavour to recreate the womb, ‘an enclosed system of existence that precludes the existence of anyone else’ (42). The childhood fantasy Laura recalls in the first chapter becomes a reciprocal repetition of maternal loss, performed in the womb of the bedroom:

I saw a solemn but very pretty face looking at me from the side of the bed. It was that of a young lady who was kneeling, with her hands under the coverlet [...]. She caressed me with her hands, and lay down beside me on the bed, and drew me towards her, smiling: I felt immediately delightfully soothed, and fell asleep again. I was wakened by a sensation as if two needles ran into my breast, just below my throat, very deep at the same moment, and I cried loudly. The lady started back, with her eyes fixed on me, and then slipped down onto the floor, and, as I thought, hid herself under the bed. (210)

The pretty young lady is Carmilla, who professes to have experienced a similar dream in her infancy in which Laura takes up the role of (m)other:
I must tell you my vision about you; it is so very strange that you and I should have had, each of the other, so vivid a dream that each should have seen, I you and you me, looking, as we do now [...]. I saw you – most assuredly you – as I see you now; a beautiful young lady, with golden hair and large blue eyes, and lips – your lips – you as you are here. Your looks won me; I climbed on the bed and put my arms around you, and I think we both fell asleep. I was aroused by a scream; you were sitting up screaming. I was frightened, and slipped down upon the ground, and, it seemed, to me, lost consciousness for a moment [...]. Your face I have never forgotten since. I could not be misled by mere resemblance. You are the lady whom I then saw. (222)

Here the maternal gaze is aroused by a vision, and the transposable nature of Laura and Carmilla harks back to the dyadism of the womb which is also evoked by the overt sexuality of the dreams, what Margot Backus defines as an incestuous rescripting of Laura/Carmilla’s Oedipal crisis which rejects the paternal model as ‘the little girl becomes the direct object of a [mother’s] eroticised caresses’ (129). As Creed discusses:

The lesbian vampire relationship [...] emphasises those areas – orality, death, incest – which work to cement the mother/child relationship rather than bring out the separation which is necessary for the institution of sociality and the law [...]. the figure of the mother vampire refuses the separation necessary for the introduction of the father [...] as the oral sadistic mother, she keeps her lover/child by her side
in a relationship which symbolically collapses the boundaries between milk and blood as well as violating the taboo on incest. (1993: 71)

This resonates with Nancy Chodorow’s understanding of the Oedipal phase of the child’s development, where girls retain the primary maternal attachment more than boys:

Mothers tend to experience their daughters as more alike, and continuous with themselves. Correspondingly, girls tend to remain part of the dyadic primary mother-child relationship itself. This means that a girl continues to experience herself as involved in issues of merging and separation, and in an attachment characterised by primary identification and object choice. (166)

Carmilla simultaneously fulfils the role as Laura’s mother and Laura’s love-object-as-extension-of-mother in the lesbian dynamic, and vice versa. In mirroring one another, Laura and Carmilla’s dreams symbolise their shared prehistoric knowledge of the dyad and the womb-spaces of ‘Carmilla’ symbolise the mother’s attempt to recreate the oneness and narcissism of pregnancy. What is problematic is deciphering who is haunting whom; what appears to be frightening about Carmilla in Laura’s dream, like her creeping under the bed, is figured as the response of a frightened child in her own recollection. Similarly, the child Laura’s terror is expressed through a scream which in Carmilla’s dream transforms into something fearsome; in the intensity of the maternal bond subjectivities dissolve and one
body, emotion or reaction cannot be discerned from the other: ‘You are mine, you shall be mine’ Carmilla asserts, ‘and you and I are one forever’ (226).

Implicit within this prolonging of the dyad through the maternal line is the notion that the girl’s identity need only be individuated by reference to the mother, heralding a parthenogenesis of female subjectivity disastrous to the paternal order. This is performed through Carmilla’s matronymic incarnations of Millarca and Mircalla and the uncanny resemblance she shares with the portrait that belonged to Laura’s dead mother, which like Carmilla, has recently returned to the schloss: ‘I remembered it; it was a small picture, about a foot and a half high, and nearly square, without a frame [...] It was quite beautiful; it was startling; it seemed to live. It was the effigy of Carmilla!’ (232). Evoking the uncanny Doppelgänger which disturbs the ego, this doubling also serves to puncture the integrity and expectations of masculine visual logic, and, as will be discussed in Part Three, is repeated in Virginia Andrews Dollanganger saga where Cathy is the mirror of her mother. Performing an ‘aesthetic of disruption’ (Norman Bryson: 142), Carmilla’s dual presence as person and simulacrum, ‘living, smiling, ready to speak in this picture’, creates a clash of signifiers and defies the spatial and temporal predicates of the male gaze - while Laura delights in this spectacle, her father ‘looked away’ (ibid.). Replicating herself in these ways enables Carmilla to rupture the paternal scopic fields of vision and surveillance, and as Laura’s father turns away she languidly assumes ownership of the gaze, ‘leaning back in her seat, her fine eyes under her long lashes gazing on me in contemplation [...] smil[ing] in a kind of rapture’ (ibid).

Like Christabel, Laura lives ‘a wombed-in existence’ (Luna: 34), intensified by the advent of Carmilla whose presence bars knowledge from the father as Laura withholds
information from him and rejects his intervention: ‘I would not admit that I was ill, I would not consent to tell my papa, or to have the doctor sent for; ‘he was quite out of hearing, and to reach him involved an excursion for which we none of us had the courage’ (238, 242). As Ken Gelder notes, the text is punctuated with instances in which Laura is initiated into the sensual world of Carmilla without the father’s knowledge, which ‘allows readers the privileged position of seeing what occurs in the privacy of Laura’s bedroom’, which is ‘contrasted with the ignorance of the otherwise self-satisfied “paternal figures” whose home is literally their castle’ (64). Within the schloss as illusory bastion of patriarchy Laura’s and Carmilla’s bedrooms are wombs wherein the maternal hold over the child is consummated, pockets that exist within the father’s province but operate absolutely beyond his knowledge. Carmilla locks her bedroom door, a habit Laura adopts after ‘having taken into my head all her whimsical alarms about midnight invaders and prowling assassins’ (236-7), an act which physically and symbolically severs contact with the paternal household and creates within it a space that cannot be accessed by external male agency.

A subversion of the Bluebeard archetype of the locked room which contains horrors/delights forbidden to the curious victim-maiden, this marking of her territory through the locked door, symbolising the hymen that obstructs penetration, enables a maternal spatial sublime as the unknowable ‘inside’ encapsulates ‘the ancient, barbaric, disorderly, passionate’ (Mark Madoff: 51; in another intertextual spin of the fairytale web Angela Carter’s rewriting of ‘Bluebeard’ ‘The Bloody Chamber’ (1979) refers to an ill-fated wife, a Romanian countess named Carmilla (26)). Le Fanu rehearsed this motif inversion in ‘Madam Crowl’s Ghost’ (1870), where the eponymous spectre reveals the recess in which she fatally incarcerated her nine-year old stepson. His wombed-in death is heightened by the
explanation she had fabricated for his disappearance, that he had drowned in the amniotic river: 'There was na doubt it was the poor little boy that was missing [...] that was shut up to die thar in the dark by that wicked beldame, whar his skirls, or his prayers, or his thumpin’ cud na be heard, and his hat was left by the water’s edge, whoever did it, to mak’ belief he drowned’ (14). Narrativising these womb deaths, Le Fanu rehearses the archetype of a maternal Bluebeard later consolidated by Stoker through the Weird sisters in Dracula and more recently by Andrews in Flowers in the Attic, as I discuss in Part Three.

In ‘Carmilla’ this notion of a fatal maternal space which mimics yet forbids paternal surveillance is symbolised by the lost uterine ‘secret passages’ which riddle the schloss (242), which Jerrold Hogle defines as a Gothic cryptonymy where the labyrinthine space steeped in ‘vestiges of death [...] irresistibly attracts [...] characters towards the frightening archives of ancestral violence and guilt’ (330). Whereas eighteenth-century Gothics, through Walpole’s Manfred and Radcliffe’s Montoni and Schedoni, pitched the male tyrant as the gatekeeper to these familial vaults of sin, late Victorian Gothics concerned with the tensions between maternity and sexuality rewrote this convention, and Carmilla’s presence marks the schloss as the devouring maternal body wherein the sins of the father cannot compare to those of the mother, who seeks to reunite with her child, at all costs, including infanticide and incest.

**Cat’s Eyes: The Feline-Familiar’s Maternal Gaze**

Through ‘Carmilla’ Le Fanu resurrected folkloric superstitions of the devouring mother, not only the vampire but also fairies and witches, and as Robert Tracy discusses she shares attributes with the ban si (banshee), ‘a woman of the dead [.... who] crave[s] human beings,
especially children [...] luring them away to live a kind of half-life under the earth’ (xxii), while Jason Harris notes how the banshee sucks the blood of those she spirits away to her earthy womb-spaces (134-5). Like the witch, Carmilla who is described repeatedly by Laura as a pretty ‘creature’ has the ability to transform into an animal, and Le Fanu uses the symbol of the cat-familiar as a harbinger of the maternal gaze, tapping into anxieties about maternal malevolence which were expressed culturally through superstitions of witchcraft.

Jane Gallop decodes the coquettish French feline euphemism Freud employs in his study ‘Dora’ - ‘J’appelle un chat un chat’ (‘I call a cat a cat’) - as the cat connoting the vagina, where “chat” or “chatte” can be used as a vulgar (vulva) slang for the female genitalia’ (140). Freud takes a ‘titillating, coy, flirtatious [...] French detour and calls a pussy a pussy’ (ibid.), and in her psychoanalytic interpretation of Edgar Allan Poe’s short story ‘The Black Cat’ (1843) Marie Bonaparte argues further that the (pussy)cat as symbolic of the vagina is (sub)consciously present in ‘common speech and thought’: The cat, like the female organ, has thick hair, exciting and sensuous to the touch [...] all the traces of this little feline are feminine in their grace and treachery, even though a claw, at any moment, may issue from the velvet paw’ (466). Bonaparte makes clear the castrating potential of the welcoming cat, and goes on to explicate the link between the witch as ‘wicked mother’ and the cat familiar: ‘The cat, the wicked or dangerous mother’s familiar, appears in legend as through the latter’s shadow, reflection or double’ (ibid.).

Within the contexts of both psychoanalysis and witchcraft the cat as symbolic of the vagina, the entrance to the womb, carries the maternal gaze as the cat’s eye becomes symbolic of the evil eye, ‘the fascination’ of the mother’s look, which bewitches and hypnotises its victims to embrace an early death in the womb-space (Broedel: 23). In
'Carmilla' it is a vicious black cat, one of Carmilla's many manifestations, which haunts Laura's dreams and is explicitly linked to the return of the repressed maternal which desires to devour her:

I saw [...] a sooty-black animal that resembled a monstrous cat [...] its pace was growing faster, and the room rapidly darker and darker and its length so dark that I could no longer see anything of it but its eyes. I felt it spring lightly on the bed. The two broad eyes approached my face, and suddenly I felt a stinging pain as if two large needles darted, an inch or two apart, deep into my breast a little below my throat. (237)

Here the black cat fits the description of the 'shadow, reflection or double' of Bonaparte's 'dangerous mother' familiar, and it is the gaze, not the mouth or teeth, of the feline which mesmerises Laura and immediately precedes its bite, and the fangs are only felt, not seen. Woken by her own screams, Laura sees a female figure at the end of her bed: 'It was in a dark loose dress, and its hair was down and covered its shoulders. A block of stone could not have been more still [...] As I stared at it, the figure appeared to have changed its place, and was now nearer the door; then, close to it; then the door opened, and it passed out'(ibid.). This reverie, which heralds a later one in which she sees Carmilla 'standing near the foot of my bed, in her white nightdress, bathed, from her chin to her feet, in one great stain of blood', portends the 'not unwelcome possession' of Laura by the maternal gaze as she becomes more languid, more melancholy, more like Carmilla and thus prone to descending back into maternal abyss via the bite of the cat/vampire, the animalistic *vagina dentata*
which guards the entrance to the gazing womb (241, 240).

As Broedel's analysis of the *Malleus Maleficarum* shows, witchcraft was culturally perceived as a conduit for an unbridled demonic and destructive female sexuality which found agency through the gaze as it was believed that ‘only women hurt children with their poisonous glances’ (174; my emphasis):

The gaze of certain persons – menstruating women for example – has a natural power capable of bringing about physical effects, and that in some angry or disturbed old women this gaze may be sufficient to do real harm to young and impressionable minds and bodies. (23)

The menstruating, mourning womb issues the gaze in search of the child it desires, the absence of which is heralded so accusingly by the shedding of itself, no longer required for the gestation of a baby. The dream of bloodstained Carmilla is especially potent as it symbolises the shedding of the empty womb of the forsaken mother through the menstrual imagery of the bloodied nightdress. In this vision Carmilla’s presence is invoked by a voice ‘sweet and tender, and at the same time terrible, which said “Your mother warns you to beware of the assassin”’ (241), a prophetic and ambiguous remark; Carmilla clearly has murderous intentions towards Laura, but, from the perspective of the mother who has been abandoned by the child for the paternal order, ‘the assassin’ is the patriarchal order which has snatched away her offspring, and with it the dyadic narcissism it afforded her. Later echoed by Stoker in *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, this image of the white dress marked by the
maternal stain serves as a reminder of the hungry womb, and Carmilla’s own contention that ‘love will have its sacrifices. No sacrifice without blood’ (236).

Any doubts surrounding the feline’s true identity are shattered by General Spielsdorf’s narrative, in which he describes witnessing the predator attack his niece Bertha, and then mutating into Millarca, one of Carmilla’s cunning anagrammatical guises: ‘The black creature suddenly contracted towards the foot of the bed, glided over it, and, standing on the floor about a yard from the bed, with a glare of skulking ferocity and horror fixed on me, I saw Millarca’ (265). The enraged maternal gaze turns on the man intent on sabotaging its objectification and consumption of the child, and in these texts the black cat’s ferocious gaze is that of the maternal, and the creature as both a manifestation of mother and her familiar recalls the associations of perverted maternity attributed to witches in folklore.

As Purkiss shows, the witch’s familiar symbolises anxieties about the agency of the maternal body as witches, like Carmilla, had the ability to transform into their animal state to execute their evil intentions. The perversion associated with this polymorphous capacity is represented most intensely through the image of the witch breastfeeding her familiar as if it were a child (1996: 130), as witch-as-mother is simultaneously suckling the familiar which represents her child and herself. Purkiss contends that this cyclical image of consumption disturbs the suspicious cultures by which it was conceived, as the boundaries between self and other are blurred by the self-sustaining and solipsistic maternal body of the witch. The relationship with the familiar becomes ‘an elaborate maternal [...] interchange’, and it this that is explicitly represented by the familiars which manifest as ‘living or dead children already belonging to the witch’ (135, 136). As such, the black cat in these texts is bound within a heritage of the familiar to the perverted and violent maternal instinct of the witch;
to behold a cat in a Gothic text is not only bad luck, but a portent of the forsaken maternal gaze whose vengeful return is imminent.

The heritage of the infanticidal witches’ familiar has been plotted throughout folkloric and anthropological studies of witchcraft, and the *Malleus Maleficarum* documents an occurrence of a woman who transformed into a cat and killed infants in the cradle (Broedel: 45). Montague Summers identified in *The Vampire: His Kith and Kin* (1928) Eastern superstitions of the Chordewa ‘vampire cat’ which could be found in the folklore of the Oraon hill tribe of Bengal, ‘a witch who is able to change her soul into a black cat and who then frequents the houses where there are sick and dying people’ (168-9). Already linked to malevolent maternal power through folkloric epistemologies of witchcraft, the cat also serves as a conduit for the returning vengeful gaze of the repressed revenant maternal. Le Fanu’s fairy tale ‘The White Cat of Drumgunniol’ is an overture to the folkloric themes of the witch, the banshee and the cat woven in ‘Carmilla’, as a banshee transforms into a white cat, ‘with green eyes as big as halfpennies’ (61), whose periodic manifestations portend the death of those unfortunate enough to encounter her, while ‘Laura Silver Bell’ also has a black cat familiar with ‘green eyes [which] glared as large as halfpennies’ (100). More recently, *Sabine* (2005) a novel by A.P., is indebted to Le Fanu’s depiction of the lesbian vampire mother/child dyad and the cat-familiar. This association between vampires and witches as Gothic sisters is affirmed by Faye Ringel, who writes that ‘the witch as sexual temptress may also be envisioned as the Lamia with her serpent associations, or the vampire, a literal or spiritual life-drinker’, and lists Coleridge’s Geraldine and her descendant Carmilla as embodying both witch and vampire characteristics (255).
Like the feeding of the familiar, Carmilla's (pussy)cat bite also functions as a subversion of breastfeeding through the metaphorical mixing of milk and blood, an act of maternal nurturance perverted into one of revenge against the child who had selfishly taken succour from her body only to abandon it. This recalls a feline superstition Bonaparte was told by her nurse, ‘a Corsican both devoted and primitive’: ‘One must never, she said, leave a baby alone in a room with a cat, for the cat will always seek the warmth of the baby's chest and the babe will be stifled’ (477). Like the mother's gaze the breast is an objet a, ‘a cause of desire’ (Lacan 1964: 168), which was once indefinable outside of ourselves and which must be lost and desired in order to constitute subjectivity against it, and so reuniting with the breast carries the danger of losing ourselves to the maternal, and Joan Copjec argues that this is the anxiety that underpins the orality of vampirism (35-6). Isabella Beeton in her Book of Household Management (1861) warned the nursing mother against falling asleep during breastfeeding, as 'she wakes languid and unrefreshed from her sleep, with febrile symptoms and hectic flushes, caused by her baby vampire' (489). Already imbued with sinister undertones, the Victorian anxiety felt about an excessive sexualised consumption on the part of the child is inverted by Stoker and Le Fanu in their maternal vampires.

The maternal breast, like her gaze, is the objet a which can only represent annihilation in the Symbolic, shown in ‘Christabel’ by the exposure of Geraldine’s disfigured breast which transfixes and mutes Christabel: ‘Behold! Her bosom, and half her side—/A sight to dream of, not to tell!/O shield her! Shield sweet Christabel!’ (11: 252-254). As I show in Part Three oral and visual fixation with the mother's breast occurs in Flowers in the Attic, and like the gaze the breast becomes a marker of the desire to devour the child which it transfixes, and gain satiety from its body as it had done from hers in order to regenerate and
perpetuate herself through the dissolution of its subjectivity. Breastfeeding in the Gothic becomes an uncanny event, repeated yet inverted as mother denies her own breast and instead leeches from the child's (Angelica Michelis: 11).

The maternal presence, inscribed through discourses of witchcraft and folklore, haunts Le Fanu’s fiction, and we see Carmilla use her witch powers of manifestation and feline transformation in order to enact her breastfeeding upon the adult Laura (237); vampirism, blood, witchcraft, the cat and the gaze and breastfeeding comprise a metonymic incestuous cycle which mirrors the narcissism of the mother/child dyad, a generative power which simultaneously threatens annihilation which is articulated by the Decadent writer Rachilde (Marguerite Eymery-Vallette) in ‘The Blood Drinker’ (1900). In Rachilde’s tale a peasant girl is devoured by the Moon mother’s gaze ‘domineering, imperious, open and round like a golden hole’, a symbol of the devouring maternal/eternal feminine, and in her ‘silent vampire’s flight’, the Moon seeks out the girl and ‘she sucks her in, she swallows her up into her open, golden pit-mouth everything that is of the spirit or of blood’ (quoted in Bram Dijkstra: 339). This greedy surveillance initiates both the girl’s menstruation and her sexual desire, which is then consummated with a boy under the scrutiny of the Moon, ‘who watches them as the pupils of a hefty cat might watch a pair of mice’ (ibid.). The story climaxes with the girl killing her new-born baby as ‘the Moon shines; the Moon, flower of fire, who lives off the blood of women!’ (ibid.). ‘The Blood Drinker’ echoes Rachilde’s contention that ‘motherhood is the supreme deceit’ (in Maryline Lukacher: 118).
Carmilla’s (Un)ending

Carmilla and her various matronymic reincarnations as Mircalla and Millarca perpetuate the uncanny return of the repressed mother maternally descended from the abject Karnstein dynasty, a ‘bad family’ of ‘blood-stained annals’ (233, 260). Both Carmilla and Laura are implicated in a matrilineage of abjection which jettisons masculine intervention, as Carmilla-as-vampire is positioned as the disease which ‘plague[s] the human race’ with her ‘atrocious lusts’ (243), but a disease to which the paternal figures in the text are blinded. Carmilla is an infection which resists masculine detection, as Martin Willis argues; although in the text ‘vision is tied explicitly to disease’, it is the ‘consistent failure to see that Carmilla is the exciting cause of disease’ which characterises the structures of patriarchal surveillance thwarted by the maternal gaze (119, 117). Moreover, Carmilla’s vampiric rebirths are a parthenogenetic process which renders masculinity obsolete and ‘demonstrate[s] the horrors of unbridled maternal power’ (Creed 1993: 47), a contention echoed by Angelica Michelis:

[The] maternal cannot be contained in the Gothic form [....] it is precisely this spilling over, this dissolution of boundaries that exemplifies the vampire and its body [....] the anagrammatical maternal body of the vampire reproduces itself in and as a new name, a new identity that will always bear the trace of reproduction itself. (13, 15)

This perpetuation of Carmilla is mirrored structurally through the failure of the masculine frame narratives to rein in Laura’s story at the close of the text. Originally
serialised in *The Dark Blue* from December 1871 to March 1872, ‘Carmilla’ is the last of five stories which constitute *In a Glass Darkly*, presented as Dr Hesselius’ case histories through the meta-narration of a devoted disciple. In the prologue to the first story ‘Green Tea’, this disciple asserts Hesselius’ authority, explaining ‘In Dr Martin Hesselius, I found my master’ (4). However, the disciple’s proprietary narrative is completely absent at the close of the collection; like Laura’s nameless father’s loss of language, Hesselius’ discourses of science and logic have failed him, and his authority is revealed as fleeting and precarious at best at the opening of ‘Carmilla’, his only commentary being ‘an elaborate note’, an aside presented as a ‘paper attached to the narrative which follows’ (207), an illusion of patriarchal narrative control exposed as a flimsy palimpsest which peeled back reveals the maternal at its core.

While Tamar Heller argues that ‘the narrative structure of “Carmilla” reproduced the epistemological structure of the tale, in which male knowledge subjects female experience to scrutiny’ (80) this cannot be the case, as neither Hesselius’ nor the disciple’s narrative is resumed at the end of the tale, mirroring the framelessness of Carmilla’s portrait which symbolises her ‘infectious refusal to remain bound by male forms’ (Elizabeth Signorotti: 612). The absence of patriarchal closure leaves Laura’s ambivalent narration to end the text, with a languorous daydream that longs for her lover/mother’s return:

To this hour the image of Carmilla returns to memory with ambiguous alterations – sometimes the playful, languid beautiful girl; sometimes the writhing fiend I saw in the ruined church; and often I have started from a reverie, fancying I heard the light step of Carmilla at the drawing-room door. (272)
The reestablishment of patriarchy which attended the violent murder of Carmilla is revoked by Laura’s lingering desire and the knowledge that Carmilla’s own mother and Matska are still at large; echoing the sense of the maternal infinite established through the fracturing of the original serialised format of the story, Carmilla’s parthenogenetic naming, the frameless portrait and the cyclical act of breastfeeding, this de-structuring of the text mobilises the maternal and allows her to leak through the gaps and invade the Gothic. Carmilla may have been physically staked, but death proves no hindrance for the mother whose sole desire is to devour her child, as Luna confirms that despite her death, or perhaps because of it, ‘the figure of the mother remains inescapable’ (32). In separating the mother and child once again, the Symbolic order has only succeeded in repeating the moment of maternal loss which the child is compelled to relive through narratives of Gothic pursuit, as Laura does in her mourning memories.

**Bram Stoker’s ‘Jaws of Hell’ and The Uncanny Mark of the Maternal**

Le Fanu’s fairytales excavated the presence of the maternal gaze in Irish mythology which he transposed onto the Gothic through the vampiric Carmilla, a source of inspiration for Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897). While I focus on Stoker’s lesser-known Gothics, it is *Dracula* which most notoriously inhabits the point at the genre’s crossroads where anxiety and desire collide, evidenced acutely by Jonathan Harker’s encounter with the Weird Sisters:

Two were dark, and had high, aquiline noses like the Count’s, and great dark, piercing eyes [...]. the other was fair, as fair as
can be, with great, wavy masses of golden hair and eyes like pale sapphires. I seemed somehow to know her face, and to know it in connection with some dreamy fear, but I could not recollect at the moment how or where. (37)

Jonathan’s reaction is a typically Gothic mix of the neurotic repulsion/attraction dynamic which saturates the novel, as he recalls in his journal ‘there was something about them that made me uneasy, some longing and at the same time some deadly fear. I felt in my heart a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips’ (37). These red lips sheathing ‘white sharp teeth’ (38) are the *vagina dentata* which Joseph Bierman identifies in Stoker’s works as ‘organising the childhood fantasy of the [...] *claustrum*, which represents the interior of the mother’s body as an orally-regressive safe haven’ (22). The sight of them ignites Jonathan’s desire to be devoured by the womb, the fate of the baby which Dracula brings for the sisters to feed on, and later in the text of the children on Hampstead Heath the Bloofer Lady attacks. Both Bierman and Barbara Almond discuss Stoker’s childhood invalidism and the attendant prolonged passivity in the care of his mother as a source of his oral fixation, and Stoker was clearly troubled by these voracious women, as Robert Eighteen-Bisang and Elizabeth Miller comment about his notes for *Dracula* that ‘this scene [the sisters] must have been embedded in [his] imagination from the start, for it emerges again and again like a recurring dream’ (280).

Replete with orally-aggressive symbolism and womb-spaces of crypts and coffins, *Dracula* compulsively codifies the maternal as monstrous whilst simultaneously being compelled to explore and repeat the idea of returning to the womb, a repetition which narrativises and perpetuates its uncanny effect. Stoker was similarly compelled to write the
devouring maternal body into his lesser-read texts, weaving elements of myth and superstition into his Gothic as well as drawing on socio-medical patriarchal discourses which, despite their scientific imperative, found their basis in old wives’ tales and practices. Both *The Jewel of Seven Stars* (1903/1912) and his earlier short story ‘The Squaw’ (1893) engage with the socio-medical concept of maternal imprinting, the belief that the pregnant mother’s sensory experiences, especially what she sees, could physically impact upon her unborn child’s body. This belief betrayed a masculine medical anxiety about the power of the unquantifiable womb and evidenced the enduring influence of superstitions and old wives’ tales. Stoker’s narratives combined the folkloric and the medical, using superstitions and symbolism of the malevolent mother as well as drawing on scientific gynaecological theories which find their origins in the folklore.

Although entry into the Symbolic demands the child disavows the maternal body, its position within the paternal contract is always precarious and it is the birthmark, the shadow of the womb cast onto the skin, which seals its return to mother. For Žižek, skin is the primer of subjectivity, as he explains that ‘the true object of horror is not the shell without the slimy body in it [but] the “naked” body without the shell’ (1999: xvii); to disrupt the skin’s integrity is to fracture these discrete boundaries and reawaken the abjection which characterised the subject’s dyadic bond with the mother. In her analysis of ‘Christabel’ Luna shows that the mother who is marked or disfigured represents a rupture in the bodily integrity for which the paternal order stands. Already abjected through her maternal position, the marked mother infects those around her through the spectacle of her mark, which tacitly signals towards the vulnerability of their own body. The sight of the mother is a ‘visual affliction’ which in the case of Geraldine’s ‘mark of shame’ leaves an
‘indelible vision that cannot be shaken off even in the light of day’ (44, 46). The mother’s ability to manipulate and undermine the vision of those who look upon her compels within the subject a sense of their own uncanniness and exposes the true nature of their bodily integrity as a sham.

Stoker explores this in Dracula through Mina Harker’s scarring from the communion wafer, as while she is not a mother until the end of the text, Mina is figured as maternal through her assertion ‘we women have something of the mother in us that makes us rise above smaller matters when the mother-spirit is invoked’ (230). In the novel women, and by Mina’s association mothers, are characterised as a direct threat to the perceived moral and genetic purity of the British race as the Count, himself a maternal figure surrounded by uncanny wombs of castles, crypts and coffins, has spawned a matrilineage of contamination: ‘My revenge is just begun! I spread it over centuries, and time is on my side. Your girls that you all love are mine already; and through them others shall yet be mine’ (306). Having communed with the womb-monster Dracula in his own breastfeeding ceremony of the ‘Vampire’s baptism of blood’, Mina becomes infected and infectious, her body rejecting patriarchal medical and religious intervention from Van Helsing as her skin recoils from the touch of the wafer, nullifying the power of the (Holy) Father (284, 322):

As he placed the Wafer on Mina’s forehead, it had seared it – had burned into the flesh as though it had been a piece of white-hot metal [...]. Pulling her beautiful hair over her face, as the leper of his old mantle, she wailed out: -
'Unclean! Unclean! The Almighty shuns my polluted flesh! I must bear this mark upon my forehead until the Judgement Day'. (296)

Jonathan’s perception of Mina as leprous specifies her contaminative potential and implicates her in the matrilineage of pollution the novel writes. As Kristeva contends, the wounds of leprosy are particularly abject because they signal towards the rupturing maternal body, the wound of the vagina, as the origins of the self, and these wounds are the manifestations of the subject’s attempts to ab-ject the mother from themselves, a ‘fantasy of self-rebirth’ where the devouring mother is herself devoured (1982: 102). Mina’s wound is the manifestation of the conflict between the maternal and the (Holy) Father, waged on the battleground of the child’s body. ‘Madam Mina, our poor, dear Madam Mina, is changing’ Van Helsing laments, and her body bears the mark of her maternal inheritance, ‘tainted [...] with that devil’s illness’ (323, 355). The dissolution of Mina’s Symbolic subjectivity is written across her skin, and forms a third, ‘evil’ and cursed eye which symbolises the destructive and possessive gaze of the womb. Linked to the matrilineal heritage of witchcraft, the evil eye is ‘one of the uncanniest and most widespread superstitions’ (Freud 1919b: 146).

Stoker connects the maternal gaze with the scar, and while Dracula considers the effects of the marked mother in the paternal order, in ‘The Squaw’ and The Jewel of Seven Stars Stoker’s unease towards mothers is symbolised through the birthmark she imprints onto the child.
Making her Mark: Maternal Impressions and the Womb’s Searing Gaze

For the psychoanalyst Helene Deutsch the trauma of birth was preceded by the ‘abnormal psychic charge’ of pregnancy (1945b: 135), and this charge sears a mark onto the child which guarantees its mother’s return. Such scars are the birthmarks and bitemarks which occupy Stoker’s and Le Fanu’s texts and reverse the logic of vision where the image is marked on the retina. Searing onto the child’s flesh a brand of her ownership, the womb’s gaze mutilates and scars it as a means by which to later identify and snatch it back into the maternal fold. The trauma of breaking away from the maternal body in birth is not only manifested as a psychological compulsion to return to her, but also more immediately through the bodily wound, with trauma being etymologically rooted to the Greek τραύμα, for wound. Thus the maternal body, on losing the child to the patriarchy, inscribes both the child’s body and psyche with her gaze, a traumatisation which can only be allayed through return to, and repossession by, the mother, the fatal experience of maternal jouissance.

This mutilation is enacted in the womb-spaces of the texts where the dyad is protected from paternal interference. With The Jewel of Seven Stars and ‘The Squaw’, the mark of the mother is created by the womb’s gaze during pregnancy, ostensibly the effects of stress felt by the mother but symbolically a psychical imprinting upon the flesh of the foetus which renders it unable to break away from her grasp. Similarly, the punctures in the skin made by the vampire’s bite are a birthmark, evidence of the jaws of the vagina dentata’s attempt to re-consume the child back into the womb, or to stop it from leaving. These maternal scars are imprints of the uncanny, what Freud termed ‘that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar’ (1919b: 124). The feeling of the uncanny is a phenomenological scar, branding the subject with
eruptions of the repressed past and dis-locating them from the present. The uncanny is the shadow of the past shared with mother, the locus of which is the womb and after birth the maternal space of bedroom, nursery, the mother’s arms, and so the strange and displacing feeling of the uncanny is a psychical recognition of the womb within one of its metonymic spaces. For Freud this occurs at the uncanny’s most intense juncture of beholding female genitalia, ‘the entrance to the man’s “old home”, the place where everyone once lived’ (ibid.: 151). Freud elaborates that concomitantly if the neurotic man (Jonathan in Dracula) envisages a certain place or landscape that compels the uncanny then this is also a remnant feeling of the mother’s genitals or womb (ibid.). Thus, like the gaze the uncanny is born of the mother and stalks the child as it enters the paternal contract. The birthmarks which punctuate these Gothic texts are the uncanny womb’s branding, a symbol of the mother’s control over the child, an imprint of maternal ownership which warns of her return, the womb’s gaze searing into the child.

The concept of maternal imprinting can be traced from classical and Biblical allegories (Jacob in Genesis: 30: 37-39), through the hoax of Mary Toft who in 1726 claimed to have given birth to a litter of rabbits (Philip Wilson: 6), to sexological and medical studies in the nineteenth century, and betrays a patriarchal concern about maternal autonomy during pregnancy. The theory inhabits an uneasy space in the annals of medical discourse; long discredited as a legitimate diagnosis for birth defects and congenital disorders it remains a revered belief in individual communities, a maternal proverb passed down through generations which accords the pregnant mother great power, dictating that she can imprint the child through her emotional and sensory experiences, especially, as the womb’s searing gaze testifies, through what she sees. As Ann Oakley explains, the theory of maternal
impressions would now be translated as the effects of general stress on the pregnant body (24), but historically this stress had been attributed to sensory perception, and writing in different countries and centuries, James Blondel (who in 1727 branded the theory a 'vulgar error'), Havelock Ellis, Jan Bondeson and Cristina Mazzoni all discuss maternal impressions caused by the mother's gaze. Bondeson cites the commonplace belief that the congenital disorder from which Joseph Merrick 'the Elephant Man' suffered in the nineteenth-century was the result of these 'prenatal influences' (158), while more recently Mazzoni recalls the superstitions of her own mother and her grandmother, who 'would get vociferously angry if anyone with any deformity or plain ugliness would come into the house during my mother’s pregnancies', and ‘insisted that all of her ten children were so attractive because in the course of her pregnancies she never set eyes on anyone less than beautiful’ (12).

In ‘The Psychic State in Pregnancy’ (1906) Ellis refers to examples found in ‘medical journals of high repute’ including The Lancet, which suggest that the child’s deformity or birthmark is the result of the pregnant mother seeing something monstrous, the trauma of which marks the child:

> Early in pregnancy a woman found her pet rabbit killed by a cat which had gnawed off the two forepaws, leaving ragged stumps; she was for a long time constantly thinking of this. Her child was born with deformed feet, one foot with only two toes, the other three, the os calcis in both feet being either absent or little developed. (Lancet May 4, 1889, in Ellis: 218)
Here the mother's vision catalyses the imprinting while eidetic meditation upon the spectacle causes the child's deformity, and this diagnosis is validated by 'able psychologist' Dr Henry Rutgers Marshall, who emphasises the solipsism shared by the pregnant mother with her foetus from which paternal intervention is prohibited:

There is a reciprocity of reaction between the physical body of the mother and its embryonic parasite [...] within the consciousness of the mother, there develops a new little minor consciousness which, although but lightly integrated with the mass of her consciousness, nevertheless has its part in her consciousness taken as a whole, much as the psychic correspondents of the action of the nerve which govern the secretions of the glands of the body have their part in her consciousness taken as a whole [...] It must, if this is so, be said that before birth, on the psychic side, the embryo's activities form part of a complex consciousness which is that of the mother and embryo together. (in Ellis: 226)

Marshall’s explanation reflected concerns of male-governed gynaecological discourse of the nineteenth century, that within the refuge of the womb mother and child share an impenetrable physiological and psychic bond that is unknowable and unquantifiable by medicine or psychology. Kristeva writes that in the womb occupied by the foetus ‘no one is present, within that simultaneously dual and alien space, to signify what is going on’ (1980: 237), and educated, cultured men resorted to old wives’ tales and superstitions for explanation, as Ellis admits that ‘pregnancy, even for us, the critical and unprejudiced
children of a civilized age, still remains, as for the children of more primitive ages, a mystery’ (292).

In her examination of the medical specularisation of the female body Roberta McGrath shows that while the female reproductive system has been historically ‘scavenged’ by a clinical male gaze in an attempt to understand the secrets of the womb and reassert masculine authority and disavow and fetishise female difference, the womb and the ‘disruptive troublesome body’ for which it functions synechdochically ‘can never be totally subordinated by discourse’ because it represents a state of abjection which always prohibits invasion from the paternal (10, 8). A marginal yet singularly powerful space, the womb creates a gaze which sears into the skin a talisman of its ownership over the child. Skin is the margin that separates the totalised subject from its unclean and abject origins, the vulnerable topography of subjectivity, and so if that of the child is marked during pregnancy by the womb’s gaze it voids its subject-making effect. The skin bears witness to the ravages of the maternal gaze through scars, birthmarks and bitemarks, which, along with the vagina dentata, form part of Stoker’s iconography of the devouring mother.

**The Jewel of Seven Stars: The Hand that Rocks the Cradle**

*Is the Hand That Rules the World*

Stoker articulates the maternal gaze through the motifs of the cat and the birthmark and the hand in his eighth novel *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, originally published in 1903, and re-issued in 1912 with a revised, ostensibly less ominous, ending which William Hughes describes as ‘a deliberate act of self-censorship on Stoker’s part’ which ‘thwart[s] epistemological doubt’
written in the original (132, 139). While aggressive female Oriental sexuality had preoccupied Richard Marsh’s earlier Egyptian invasion novel *The Beetle* (1897), where a priestess from the cult of Isis descends on London in her animal form to gather victims for her rituals, mesmerising and mutilating them in such a manner that Hurley reads the creature’s attacks as a ‘Gothicised version of rape, inflicted upon male and female bodies alike’ (1993: 193), it is the maternal, as opposed to a sexual, female spectre which invades Stoker’s London through the embodiment of Tera, an ancient Egyptian queen whose mummified form is plundered and probed by the Egyptologist Abel Trelawny, who wishes to perform the ‘Great Experiment’ of her resurrection.

During Trelawny’s expedition, on which he embarked with his van Helsingesque friend Corbeck, Tera’s mummified hand is torn from her body by a Bedouin guide, and this disturbance of her tomb precipitates the death of Trelawny’s pregnant wife back in England, who dies giving birth to their daughter Margaret, perpetuating the puerperal narrative that pervaded nineteenth-century fiction. Wrenched from the mother at the most crucial moment, Margaret bears the scar of both Tera’s dismemberment and her own traumatic birth in the form a birthmark on her wrist which serves to bind her indelibly to the mummy’s body, and a vengeful Tera returns to reclaim her after several years when Trelawny performs the Great Experiment. Margaret is betrothed to her father’s solicitor Malcolm Ross who narrates the text, and so Tera’s return in the original ending in which all of the participants in the Experiment apart from Ross die, serves as the intervention of the maternal gaze before it loses the child to patriarchy through its mechanism of heteronormative marriage.
That Stoker rewrote the ending to include Margaret’s and Ross’ innocuous happily-ever-after attests to the nihilism of the original and the damage the maternal gaze can cause, and although *Jewel* is a text which attempts to reinforce discourses of the male gaze, articulated through the scrutiny of Sergeant Daw’s criminal investigation and magnifying glass and Trelawny’s fetishistic collection of artefacts, an act of archaeological voyeurism that climaxes at the unwrapping of Tera, it is the maternal gaze which triumphs, in the original ending at least, in repossessing its object of desire, the child. Margaret is marked by the womb’s gaze with the portentous birthmark made literally at the hand of the mother, and Tera’s disembodied hand perpetuates her power by enacting her own strategies of fracturing, not only on the bodies of her victims but also, as in ‘Carmilla’, the narrative structure itself.

These connections between hand and visual agency carry implications of the uncanny, castration and death which can be traced throughout a Gothic trajectory of spectral hand narratives including Le Fanu’s ‘The Authentic Narrative of the Ghost of a Hand’ (1863), while the Decadent Jean Lorrain’s short story ‘The Spectral Hand’ (1895) links the hand with the gaze through the Gothic *mise-en-scène* of the séance: ‘A female figure appeared plainly to me [....] and she stared fixedly at the Marquise [....] and you know, don’t you, what it signifies when a spectre of that kind looks long and hard at one of the living [it is] an infallible indication of approaching death’ (181). The device of the disembodied or severed hand mobilises the gaze throughout the Gothic, and like other carriers of the gaze, like the mother’s breast and the familiar, the spectral hand punctures the Symbolic order and obstructs patriarchal agency, which is intensely manifested in the original 1903 ending of *Jewel* when Margaret dies during the Great Experiment, preventing Malcolm from taking
her own hand in marriage. As Aviva Briefel demonstrates, hands in Jewel perform a
(dis)possession of autonomy, and the actions of Tera’s dismembered hand contests
Trelawny’s and Ross’ attempts to objectify both her own body and that of Margaret, the
daughter she wishes to snatch back from the paternal order:

From their first interaction, [Ross] is obsessed with seizing her actual hand: ‘Miss Trelawny’s hand somehow became lost in my own’; ‘There was a long pause, and I ventured to take her hand for an instant’; ‘Margaret Trelawny’s hand was a joy for me to see – and touch’; ‘She put out her hand. I held it hard, and kissed it. Such moments as these, the opportunities of lovers, are gifts of the gods!’ and so on. (2008: 269)

Ross’ act of kissing Margaret’s birthmark is not only symbolic of his acceptance of it but also his desired ownership within the Victorian heterosexual paradigm, and the tensions of possession and control implicit in the marital contract, of taking someone’s hand in marriage, are initially demonstrated through the symbolism of the hand in the novel; like the artefacts of Tera’s tomb, Margaret is something to be collected, owned and controlled by the masculine hand which is controlled by the sexual focus of the male gaze. However, as Luna argues, the ‘erotic vision’ of the male gaze which ‘desires consumption of the other’ cannot compete with the maternal gaze, which strives not only for consumption but a literal ‘repossession of the child [...] that is indeed problematic since having sprung from her body there is present an almost inalienable right to that child which motivates the mother’s actions’ (14).
Thus, men’s attempts to own Margaret are swiftly challenged by Tera’s own hand as the harbinger of her gaze which haunts the text in an attempt to snatch Margaret back. Katherine Rowe argues that this invasion of the spectral hand in the Gothic presents ‘a challenge [to] the concept of autonomous human agency’ and symbolises the ‘loss, theft or withering of the capacity to act with real personal or political affect’ (xi, 4); whereas the somatic, connected hand is culturally embedded with patriarchal ideological constructs of manual production, control and selfhood, the disembodied hand which pervades the genre violently dislocates and punctures these assumptions, rupturing the paternal order which seeks to rule Margaret through the institution of marriage, and succeeds in symbolically castrating Ross by denying him the opportunity to ‘take’ her hand. Thus, the maternal spectral hand as carrier of her gaze poses a threat to the ontological and phenomenological fabric of the Symbolic order; whereas the male architects of the Great Experiment are left helpless and unable to act, it is Tera who succeeds in snatching Margaret back into the maternal fold.

**From Tomb to Womb: The Mummy Returns**

Although the original ending displays the ultimate expression of this violence through the death of the child, Tera’s initial act of punishment is against Margaret’s mother as her maternal rival, a pretender to the maternal gaze who has acquiesced to the paternal contract. As Luna contends, the mother’s death during childbirth ‘prevents her from

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*The mummy thought to be the inspiration for Tera is housed in the Egyptian Gallery at the Hands on History Museum in Hull. Believed to be a princess and acquired by a British diplomat, the mummy was donated to Whitby Museum, where Stoker would have viewed it, in 1903 (the year of the novel’s original publication), and sold to Hull museum’s director Thomas Sheppard in 1930.*
visually recognising and accepting [the child’s] newly acquired status as an other, a separate entity whose life is no longer physically intertwined with her own’ (8). Through these puerperal narratives maternal death renders the mother/child dyad perpetual, and Margaret’s traumatic entrance into the world correlates with the plundering of Tera’s womb/tomb, a colonial rape which Tera avenges through the astral-murder of his wife and the attack on Trelawny which opens the narrative, and eventually the murder of Margaret, in the original ending at least.

The tomb is repeatedly figured as an uncanny womby terrain inhospitable to patriarchy. The entrance to the tomb lies high up in a cliff face in the Valley of the Sorcerer, a ‘narrow, deep valley’ that ‘showed a wide opening beyond the narrowing of the cliffs’, covered in cabalistic signs including ‘disjointed limbs and features, such as arms and legs, fingers, eyes noses ears and lips’ (96-7), portents of castration against penetrating what lies within, which signal towards Tera’s own disembodied and autonomous hand. Trelawny comments that in excavating a tomb so inaccessible Tera’s precautions were taken ‘against the disturbances of human hands’ (146), both the male priests who were threatened by her intelligence and explorers and plunderers who might sabotage her plans for resurrection. Dismembered limbs have warned of familial chaos since they scuttled down the passageways in the first Gothic novel *The Castle of Otranto*, and Freud argues that they are profoundly uncanny because they are metonymic of castration: ‘Severed limbs, a severed head, a hand detached from the arm [...] feet that dance by themselves [...] all of these have something highly uncanny about them, especially when they are credited, as in the last instance, with independent activity’, and in the same breath he links bodily dismemberment and castration with the womb (1919b: 150).
The disembodied castrated/castrating limb harks back to a pre-Symbolic time with the mother before subjectivity was acquired through the privileging of the phallus, a time shared in the womb symbolised by the anatomy of Tera’s tomb. Reached through the vaginal Valley of the Sorcerer, the tomb itself is comprised of a ‘pit shaft’ that must be descended to reach the inner chamber of the ‘Mummy pit’ where Tera’s sarcophagus lies (116, 113), a chthonic grottoesque space which symbolically and etymologically implies the grotesque and ‘cavernous anatomical female body’ (Russo: 1). Mirroring the neck of the cervix as the entrance to the womb, and foreshadowing the secret and treacherous cavern beneath Trelawny’s house in Cornwall where the Great Experiment takes place ‘whose further end tapered away into blackness’ (171), the treacherous maternal hinterland of the tomb is the devouring *vagina dentata*, which Trelawny and Corbeck fear (or fantasise as Freud would have it) would ‘bury us there alive’ (115).

The walls of the tomb/womb speak that Tera was a formidable Queen who came to power after her father’s death. Pictured wearing the White and Red crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt, which flouted gender codes and implied divinity and her resurrection ‘for it was a rule, without exception in the records, that in ancient Egypt either crown was worn only by a king; though they are to be found on goddesses’, Tera’s history is written in terms of knowledge she possesses and that others desire. Tutored in magic ‘she had won secrets in strange ways’ and ‘had power to compel the Gods’ (111-112), a power which threatened the priesthood who subsequently tried to ‘suppress her name’, ‘a terrible revenge [...] for without a name no one can after death be introduced to the Gods, or have prayers said for him’ (112), which is evidenced on the external cliff-face of the tomb in which the hostile priests had carved ‘Hither the Gods come not at any summons. The “Nameless One” has insulted them
and is forever alone. Go not nigh, lest their vengeance wither you away!' (107).

Tera is the Gothic unspeakable, a dangerous maternal body of knowledge which corresponds with Karen Macfarlane's contention that the mummy of fin de siècle fiction ‘embodies fantasies of imperial immortality and anxieties about the extent of imperial control’ and symbolises the conflict between ‘the known and the unknowable’ (4), Tera represents the desire to unearth female secrets, and so the colonial penetration of the tomb becomes an attempt to control the womb as the first body of knowledge the child experiences, establishing Jewel as a text which betrays the anxiety of a ‘profoundly ignorant’ patriarchal surveillance which fails to understand the depths of the archaic maternal body it once knew (145). As Trelawny attests, echoing Havelock Ellis:

Men may find that what seemed like empiric deductions were in reality the results of a loftier intelligence and a learning greater than our own [....] as yet we know nothing of what goes on to create or evoke the active spark of life. We have no knowledge of the methods of conception; of the laws which govern molecular or foetal growth, of the final influences which attend birth. (160)

Portending the climactic sublimity of the Great Experiment where the participants are blinded by the intra-uterine ambience of (re)birth, Trelawny explicitly links Tera’s bodies of knowledge – what she knows and what she is – to the opacity of the womb and the unquantifiable and sublime machinations of the maternal body (Patricia Yaeger: 1993). Nodding towards Nathaniel Hawthorne’s short story ‘The Birthmark’ (1843), in which a
scientist experiments upon his wife to the point of her death in order to remove the tiny hand-shaped birthmark on her cheek, *Jewel* expresses masculine anxieties about the pursuit and possession of the female body of knowledge and reflects nineteenth-century medical concerns about the inability of the male gynaecological gaze to penetrate the womb. The anxiety about unknown maternal ‘influences’ over the foetus obsessively punctures the text through Margaret’s birthmark, the scar of the womb’s gaze which enacts a symbolic dismembering of her subjectivity and binds her back to the maternal body.

Tera’s tomb/womb is the origin of her surveillance coded as vengeful and malevolent through devouring and dismemberment, maternal acts of the uncanny which reveal the ‘true maternal instinct whose sheer desire is for the literal death of her child’ (Luna: 26). Dismembering the child perversely functions to reconstruct it as part of the mother/child dyad, and this is what Margaret’s birthmark, the shadow of Tera’s disembodied hand, signals towards. Margaret is inextricably linked to Tera as the mother who precipitated her traumatic birth; she is both haunted by her mother(s) and a projection of her, as Trelawny ‘could never forget that her birth had cost her mother’s life’ (117). This oneness is established by Ross’ recollection of first meeting the ‘queenly figure’ of Margaret at a costume ball, who had dressed as an Egyptian princess:

Tall and slim, bending, swaying, undulating as the lily or the lotus. Clad in a flowing gown of some filmy black material shot with gold. For ornament in her hair she wore an old Egyptian jewel, a tiny crystal disc, set between rising plumes carved in lapis lazuli. On her wrist was a broad bangle or bracelet of antique work, in the shape of a pair of spreading wings wrought in gold, with the feathers made of coloured
gems. For all her gracious bearing toward me [...] I was then afraid of her. (55)

Accentuating the hand, the symbol of maternal repossession, Margaret is the image of terrifying Tera, implicating her by association in the violence against her father, a suspicion which is felt throughout the narrative by Daw and Ross, despite his apparent love for her. This is further implied through the vampiric associations Tera and Margaret share; as Carmilla professed that 'love will have its sacrifices. No sacrifice without blood' (236), Ross places Tera in the same violent sanguine economy, as he describes how she achieved her resurrection by 'wading to it through blood' (180). This violence is not only enacted against Margaret through the birthmark it also taints her by association, casting her as an object of distrust and fear. This is most succinctly conveyed through Ross' ambiguous remark that 'Margaret herself was at stake!', echoing the brutal staking of lily-girl Lucy Westenra and intertextually tapping into Stoker's vampire mythos of sadistic female sexuality.

When Tera is unwrapped and revealed to be the mirror of Margaret, wearing the same 'Disc and Plumes' her child had worn to the ball (204), the suspicion of their collusion is verified, and their 'dual existence' confirmed. This phrase, borrowed from the frame narrative of 'Carmilla' which describes Le Fanu's tale as involving 'some of the profoundest arcana of our dual existence and its intermediates' (207), and repeated several times throughout Jewel, expresses Ross and Trelawny's deepest fear for, and of, 'Margaret's strange condition': 'If it was indeed that she had in her own person a dual existence, what might happen when the two existences became one?' (186). The success of the Great Experiment in
the original text answers this question: reintegration into the maternal dyad can only occur through the annihilation of the child’s subjectivity, its existence.

Exploiting her unspeakable ‘nameless’ status which the priests hoped would quell her and adopting multiple identities Tera performs a strategy of parthenogenetic naming similar to Carmilla’s, as hers and Margaret’s oneness is galvanised through the matronymic reciprocity of their names, as Lisa Hopkins notes that ‘the mirror-effect [of] “Tera” reverse[s] the latter half of Margaret’ (1998: 136). Also a linguistic pun on ‘terror’ and ‘terra’, the Latin for Earth which grounds her in the mythology of the chthonic prehistoric maternal, Tera’s and Margaret’s names bind them together through a matrilineage of what Holly Tucker defines as ‘onomastic marking’ (38), an oral-linguistic maternal imprint which is manifested corporeally through Margaret’s birthmark. While Dracula’s debt to Le Fanu requires little explication as Stoker carries on the intertextual weaving of the maternal vampire where ‘Carmilla’ left off, the similarities between Jewel and Le Fanu’s tale are not so violently explicit but instead deeply embedded, making the (maternal) bond between the texts harder to tease out and weaken in the fabric of the Gothic. Like ‘Carmilla’, Jewel stages the re-establishment of the dyadic bond shared between the dead mother and the daughter she has lost to patriarchy, a subjectivity which absorbs the selfhood of the latter to the point that the two fold in and fall into one another. Like the linguistic cat’s cradle of Tera’s and Margaret’s names echoing the uncanny repetition of Carmilla’s reincarnations, this falling carries a sense of the maternal infinite which is acutely expressed through Tera’s parthenogenetic ability to rebirth herself through resurrection; not only is her plundered tomb/womb the site of trauma which induces Margaret’s birth, it is the place where she has lain - ‘for these forty or fifty centuries she lay dormant in her tomb - waiting’ (151) - gestating, waiting to give
birth herself, to herself, through a union with the child which her gaze seeks through the metaphoric harbingers of the maternal.

The rape of Tera’s tomb/womb is symbolised most intensely through the theft of her mummified hand which had protected the titular Jewel of Seven Stars. Her hand is an object of uncanny beauty for those who behold it, as Ross describes that ‘in the embalming it had lost nothing of its beautiful shape; even the wrist seemed to maintain its pliability’ with skin ‘of a rich creamy or old ivory colour; a dusky fair skin which suggested heat, but heat in the shadow’ (81). The anatomical doubling of the seven fingers displayed by the hand, ‘there being two middle and two index fingers’ (ibid.), should, but does not, warn its admirers of its uncanniness, and those who covet it inevitably meet a violent end at the spectral hand of the mother, whose clutches sear her mark into the skin of her victims, which like Margaret’s birthmark functions as a shadow of the gaze of the womb.

Desired by ‘covetous glances’ (100), Tera’s hand is a colonial and sexual commodity stolen repeatedly throughout the novel. Its removal from her body replicates the trauma of separation during birth, and awakens Tera into vengeful desire for recompense in the form of Margaret, who bears the scar of her mother’s wound, ‘the shattered, bloodstained wrist’ (204). Tera’s hand invades the text through uncanny shadows and doublings; whilst reading van Huyn’s original narrative of Tera’s history which initially excited the colonial desire of Trelawny, Ross fancies ‘I had seen across the pages streaks of the shade, which the weirdness of the subject had made to seem like the shadow of a hand’ (102), a shadow then made flesh:

There lay a real hand across the book! What was there to so overcome me; as was the case? I knew the hand that I saw on
the book – and loved it. Margaret Trelawny’s hand was a joy
to me to see – to touch; and yet at that moment, coming after
other marvellous things, it had a strangely moving effect on
me. (103)

This association between Margaret and Tera Ross is reticent to make is sealed by the
birthmark later revealed to him: ‘On her wrist was a thin jagged red line, from which seemed
to hang red stains like drops of blood! She stood there, a veritable figure of patient pride’
(138).

Margaret’s birthmark is doubly threatening, not only as a scar of the maternal gaze
which inverts the logic of vision and pertains to Tera’s ownership of her, but its shape and
position forecast death, dismemberment and castration at the will of the vengeful mother.
Tera’s hand simultaneously taps into the theme of the spectral hand in the Gothic which
Deborah Harter argues fractures the subjectivity of those who behold it as it forces ‘a
palpable confrontation with the human body itself’ (27), and engages with the notion of the
hand as the visual signifier of a portent, a belief upheld by the ancient Egyptian practice of
chiromancy (palmistry). Her hand also draws on and subverts the symbology of the Hand of
Fatima, an open palm with an eye in the centre (known as the Hamsa, Khamsa and Hand of
Miriam in Islamic and Judaic beliefs), an amulet with the capacity to ward off the evil eye
(Juan Cirlot: 137). Cirlot also suggests that the image of the hand in the eye symbolises
clairvoyance, which is echoed in Trelawny’s contention that Tera must have possessed
‘extraordinary foresight [....] far, far beyond her age and the philosophy of her time’ (143).
Undermining these ideas of strength and resistance to the evil eye, Tera’s hand recalls that
of the Graeae in Greek mythology, a triumvirate of crone sisters to Medusa, herself the
bearer of the castrating gaze, who shared one eye between them which they would take in
turns to use by holding it in the palm of their hand.

The hand which carries the eye is a conduit for the malevolent maternal gaze, as its
mark, both that which it leaves on those who try to thwart her and the birthmark replicated
on Margaret’s wrist, is the imprint of the womb’s gaze. This notion of the hand carrying the
gaze into the paternal order is compounded by the association Trelawny makes between the
jewel, fashioned by Tera’s own hand ‘to compel all the Gods’ (112), and Medusa:

> When the hand was lifted, the sight of that wonderful stone
> lying there struck me with a shock almost to momentary
> paralysis. I stood gazing on it, as did those with me, as though
> it were that fabled head of the Gorgon Medusa with the
> snakes in her hair, whose sight struck into stone those who
> beheld. So strong was the feeling that I wanted to hurry away
> from the place. (99)

Similarly, in *Dracula* the spectacle of Lucy Westenra as Bloofer Lady is likened to Medusa by
Seward:

> The eyes seemed to throw out sparks of hell-fire, the brows
> were wrinkled as though the folds of flesh were the coils of
> Medusa’s snakes, and the lovely, blood-stained mouth grew to
> an open square, as in the passion masks of the Greeks and
> Japanese. If ever a face meant death – if looks could kill – we
> saw it at that moment. (212)
Like Lucy Tera has the ability to castrate through her resemblance to Medusa, and it is the agency of her hand that carved the stone which communicates this threat; here, the hand and its oriental creative ability has the power to dazzle Trelawny and, like Medusa, petrify him. This association is galvanised in van Huyn’s internal narrative which describes the dead Bedouin chief, one of whose men had taken Tera’s hand during the plundering of her tomb, as ‘staring horribly up at the sky, as though he saw there some dreadful vision’ (102). Murdered by Tera’s disembodied hand, the chief is also left with the symbol of the womb’s gaze burned into his skin, an imprint of her seven digits which functions as a (birth)mark of repossession, echoing Ellis’s discussion of a case of maternal imprinting where ‘a lady when pregnant was much interested in a story in which one of the characters had a supernumerary digit, and this often recurred in her mind. Her baby had a supernumerary digit on one hand’ (220).

The titular Jewel of Seven Stars, like the hieroglyphics she painted on the walls of her tomb, demonstrates Tera’s manual and creative agency and functions as a marker of her hand’s autonomy, resisting Trelawny’s attempts to objectify and control it through the act of collection, enacted through colonial rape of Tera’s tomb:

This hand was strange to see, for it was the real hand of her who lay enwrapped there; the arm projecting from the cerements being of flesh, seemingly made as like marble in the process of embalming. Arm and hand were of dusky pale white, being the hue of ivory that hath lain long in air. The skin and the nails were complete and whole, as though the body had been placed for burial overnight [....] there was, too, an added wonder that on this ancient hand were no less than
seven fingers, the same all being fine and long, and of great beauty. Sooth to say, it made me shudder and my flesh creep to touch that hand that had lain there undisturbed for so many thousands of years, and yet was like unto living flesh. (98-99)

Here van Huyn's internal narrative demonstrates Victorian Orientalist codes of Otherisation applied to the exotic female body considered simultaneously attractive and repulsive, as Tera's dusky ivory hand is emblematic of beauty and death, an image echoed in H. Rider Haggard's 'Smith and the Pharaohs' (1913), which describes a 'mummified hand, broken off at the wrist, a woman's little hand, most delicately shaped [....] withered and paper-white, but the contours still remained; the long fingers were perfect, the almond-shaped nails had been stained with henna, as was the embalmers' fashion' (16; cited in Briefel 2008: 266). As Susan Stewart argues, the act of collecting fetishises the object by placing it in a web of referent objects which attempts to erase and 'replace origin with classification' (153), both the geographical and historical origins of the object, and those of the collector, the mother's body. Trelawny's desirable collection is described in terms of colonial consumption, as 'the great hall, the staircase landings, the study and even the boudoir were full of antique pieces which would have made a collector's mouth water' (78), and as the object of beauty Tera's hand is ostensibly the fetish substitute which disavows the threat of castration posed by the 'lacking' maternal body; however, its spectrality and mutability resist these attempts to collect and control her and bring the maternal violently to the fore. Hers is the 'liminal limb which draws the subject into the marginal state' (Rowe: xi) and threatens ontological integrity.
Furthermore, while the Egyptian mummy was an exoticised object of repulsion and desire for the Victorian upper-class male antiquarian which conflated the feminine aesthetic of the passive yet beautiful tapered hand with the grotesque aspects of death and decay, Tera’s hand denies this attempt at fetishisation through its creative activity, ‘emasculat[ing] the viewer with the efficacy of a craft that has preserved it for thousands of years’, of which the hand, now an artefact, was itself ‘a source of production’ (Briefel 2008: 266). Similarly, despite attempts to objectify and fetishise it, Tera’s disembodied hand as the quintessential symbol of castration underpins this threat as posed by the mother’s body from which it has been taken. Consequently, disembodying Tera has the effect of mobilising her as her vengeful astral projection is made possible through her dismembered hand:

Her hand was to be in the air – ‘unwrapped’ – and in it the Jewel of Seven Stars, so that wherever was air she might move even as her Ka might move! [....this] meant that her body could become astral at command, and so move, particle by particle, and become whole again when and where required. (112)

Perverting the concept of the male collector’s voyeuristic hoard, articulated by his hand’s physical acts of taking and possession, Stoker weaves a knotted narrative of the maternal castratrix through reference to Medusa and the haunting presence of the uncanny dismembered hand.

Implicit in the act of collecting is the interaction between hand and gaze as the former performs the objectification which originates from the latter, and it is the continuing
autonomy of Tera’s severed hand which proves problematic, as its legacy of creativity invests it with energy that resists the restraint of classification and threatens the precarious foundations of the collection. As Stewart explains:

The pleasure of possessing an object is dependent upon others. Thus the object’s position in a system of referents [...] and not any intrinsic qualities of the object or even its context of origin, determines its fetishistic value. The further the object is removed from use value, the more abstract it becomes and the more multivocal is its referentiality. The dialectic between hand and eye, possession and transcendence, which motivates this fetish, is dependent upon this abstraction. (164)

It is both the spectrality of Tera’s hand and its history of creative production, its ‘use value’, that enable it to obstruct the male gaze’s instruction to the appropriating hand and resist collection and identification, and furthermore, expose other metonymic fetishised objects as implicitly referring to the mother’s body which they desire to substitute and disavow. Despite Trelawny’s attempts to resist the maternal hold by penetrating Tera’s tomb and collecting and objectifying its artefacts, this only succeeds in excavating the mother as his choice of object is so deeply rooted to its origins - literally the mummy’s body - that her return, especially in this Gothic mise-en-scène, is inevitable. Furthermore, its ability to replicate itself upon other bodies through the birthmark, the imprint of the womb’s gaze, makes Tera’s hand multivalent and unconquerable, which is mirrored by the seven claws on Margaret’s cat Silvio and the mummified cat’s polydactyl paws, the ‘hypnotic’ quality of
Margaret's own ‘rare and beautiful’ hand and the ‘strange hand’ in which she writes to Ross for help (103, 8, 7). Infecting the narrative through these acts of repetition, shadowing and doubling, modes of the uncanny which signal towards their maternal origins, Tera’s hand re-members the maternal body and the first traumas of separation it represents, which Trelawny’s collection had sought to forget.

**Pussycat, Pussycat**

As in ‘Carmilla’, *Dracula*, and as we will see ‘The Squaw’, in *Jewel* Stoker employs the trope of the cat as familiar to the maternal gaze through its symbolic associations with the mother’s genitalia and the *vagina dentata*. Tera infiltrates the Trelawny household through two felines, her own mummified pet, ‘an appeal to Bast’ the Egyptian cat goddess which Trelawny foolishly keeps in his bedroom and which attacks him in his sleep, and Silvio, Margaret’s cat who is linked to Tera through his polydactylism, as his seven claws, ‘like razors!’ on each paw, mirror her supernumerary digits (26, 90). The mummy cat with its impenetrable ‘obsidian eyes’ becomes the conduit for Tera’s astral body and uses the ‘fierce force of her familiar’ (28, 152) to harm those who thwart her possession of both the Jewel and Margaret. This is demonstrated by the cuts on Ross’ wrist, ‘the same wound as Father’s!’ (45), again thought to be inflicted by Silvio during a shadowy tussle in which Margaret resists something unseen, which clearly has its sights set on her:

[She], too, had stood up and was looking behind her, as though there were something close to her. Her eyes were wild,
and her breast rose and fell as though she were fighting for air. When I touched her she did not seem to feel me; she worked her hands in front of her, as though she were fending off something. (44)

This tension of in/visibility is crucial to Tera's mobilisation in the novel, as it is her ability to see without being seen, via the medium of her familiar, which gives her maternal gaze power. Although still engaging with the realm of ocular vision, Tera's astral and animal incarnations constitute what Luna defines as the ability to ‘transcend [...] limited subjectivity and merge with the gaze of the world, thus allowing one to gaze upon others, subjecting them to their own lack, to their own void within’ (55). Her astral and animal gaze ‘mocks the very limits of the physical body’ (54), manifesting a familiar presence (in both senses) which ensures that it is not she who is the spectacle but Margaret, her chosen object of desire, and Margaret’s own vision is infected by Tera as Ross describes her as feline; her ‘great, beautiful black eyes’ (64) share a darkness with the mummy cat’s and transform from being ‘raised’ to her male companions in a docile and submissive manner (11, 20) to indecipherable as she is re-possessed by the maternal gaze: ‘There was something in her voice so strange to me that I looked quickly into her eyes. They were bright as ever, but veiled to my seeing the inward thought behind them as are the eyes of a caged lion’ (186).

Through her visual absence, (it is her foetid ‘mummy smell’ which is most palpable to the male senses, sending them, but not Margaret, into an impotent stupor (17, 61, 62)), Tera supersedes the male gaze by creating a network of maternal surveillance through the medium of the feline familiar, metaphorically implying the presence of the vagina from
which the womb’s gaze is issued. Like the teeth of Dracula’s vamps, and as I discuss below those of the Iron Virgin in ‘The Squaw’, Stoker’s obsession with the *vagina dentata* erupts into his narratives again, as the mark of the mummy-cat, like the imprinting of Tera’s hand onto the Bedouin chief’s neck and Margaret’s wrist, inflicts a bloody memento of the victim’s origins onto their own body. This mark of the cat intertextually nods to Le Fanu’s ferocious felines, as both ‘Carmilla’ and ‘The White Cat of Drumgunniol’ (1870) weave the image of the cat as manifestation of the female/maternal spectre who bites, wounds and marks the subject into their narratives. In particular, ‘The White Cat’ shares with *Jewel* the act of imprinting the portentous mark of the maternal occasioned by a traumatic event the cat provokes; foreshadowing Tera’s deathly grasp, the narrator’s great-uncle falls victim to the banshee cat-woman, whose ‘spectral blow’ renders ‘five fingerpoints on the flesh of his shoulder’, ‘singular marks [which] resembled in tint the hue of a body struck by lightning’ and ‘remained imprinted on his flesh, and were buried with him’ (64).

Tera’s aggressive Egyptian feline maternal gaze is also later invoked in Sax Rohmer’s *The Green Eyes of Bast* (1920), where the villainess Nahémah, described as a feline ‘psycho-hybrid’, is born after an evil spirit in cat form terrorises her mother, who imprints the trauma onto her unborn baby (274). Like Le Fanu, Stoker repeats and reaffirms the cat-familiar as metaphor of the maternal to uncanny extremes, explicitly writing Tera into the discourses of witchcraft and superstition which engaged with ideas of the evil eye, clairvoyance and prophetic vision, and in *Jewel* the mother’s searing omnipotent gaze is focused through a symbology of dismembered hands, familiars and birthmarks which speaks of witchcraft, castration and the trauma of separation from the maternal body.
A Tera Which Has no Name:
The Sublime Gothic Unspeakable of the Maternal Gaze

Although the unwrapping of Tera is voyeuristically pitched as an ‘indecent [...] almost sacrilegious’ climactic moment for the male colonial gaze (one which was regularly repeated throughout the period at ‘unwrapping’ parties), as Ross describes a mixture of shame and desire at ‘gazing with irreverent eyes on such an unclad beauty’ (203), it is the palimpsestic act of unwrapping itself, as ‘the whole material and sordid side of death seemed startingly real’ which reveals the true nature of the relic (201). Taking possession of the voyeuristic eye, the spectacle of Tera contests the male gaze’s desire to imbue her with desirability and allay her threat of castration, and compounds Raymond Bellour’s observation about mummification that ‘the mother’s body, fetishised to death [...] becomes the body that murders’ (324). Although mummifying Tera cocoons and preserves the sensuously inviting maternal body, her (un)wrappings betray the true cost of returning to it: ‘What was before us was Death, and nothing else’ (ibid.). This observation portends Margaret’s imminent end in the original version, as Tera is described to be ‘the image of Margaret as my eyes had first lit on her’, and Trelawny murmurs ‘It looks as if you were dead, my child!’ (204), echoing the uncanny maternal doubling effect Le Fanu employs in ‘Carmilla’ and which, we will see, saturates Andrews’ Dollanganger Saga. As Freud aptly surmised: ‘The double has become an object of terror’ (1919b: 143, my emphasis).

Unwrapping Tera the party discover she was mummified with a wedding gown, a dress ‘not intended to be worn by the dead!’ (203), a decoy alluding to the failed heterosexual romance narrative of Ross and Margaret, for the dress is intended to be worn when mother and daughter reunite. Tera’s bridal gown is mirrored by Margaret’s own white
dress which becomes Ross’ beacon in the gloomy cavern during the experiment, and also her white nightgown stained with the spilt blood of Trelawny, implicating her in the maternal violence. It is not only Tera who wades through blood it seems, and echoing the image of the bloodstained Carmilla, Ross explains ‘never again shall I forget that strange picture she made, with her white drapery all smeared with blood which [...] ran in streaks towards her bare feet’ (33). When the experiment goes awry, it is through this doubling that Tera hoodwinks Ross into thinking he is rescuing Margaret from the cavern after it is plunged into darkness during the experiment:

I saw a movement of something white where the sarcophagus was [...] I groped my way across the room to where I thought Margaret was. As I went, I stumbled across a body. I could feel by her dress that it was a woman. My heart sank; Margaret was unconscious, or perhaps dead. I lifted her body in my arms [...] It may have been hope that lightened my task; but as I went the weight that I bore seemed to grow less and less as I ascended from the cavern. (210-11)

As Tera astrally projects herself to freedom leaving only her bridal gown and the Jewel as evidence of Ross’ fatal mistake, he returns to the cavern ‘with a terror which has no name’ to find the rest of the party petrified to death, ‘gazing upward with fixed eyes of unspeakable terror’, and Margaret, who had ‘put her hands before her face, but the glassy stare of her eyes was more terrible than an open glare’ (211).

Like Medusa, the vision(s) of Tera - the sight of her and her own vision-as-gaze - have the power to kill, and the unspeakable trauma of Margaret’s reunion with the maternal
gaze is indelibly written across her face. Here, vision inured to the paternal logic of looking is locked in a battle with the victorious maternal gaze made sublime by its refusal to be bound by empirical and phenomenological understanding. Reversing Edmund Burke’s gendered notions of the masculine sublime associated with ‘the authority of the father’ (101) and the feminine beautiful rehearsed by the Radcliffian Gothic, the manifestation of Tera evokes the maternal gaze at its most potent, exposure to which can only result in the witness’ death as the womb-like and heady mise-en-scène performs an ‘overpowering and overwhelming [...] mental rape’ which Christine Battersby identifies as being traditionally associated with the masculine sexualised aesthetics of the sublime (75).

While the aesthetics of the sublime were geared toward the comprehension of the limits of one’s own faculties through a recognition of the inability of the senses to empirically quantify a sublime object, a blockage Kant describes as ‘a momentary checking of the vital powers’ which protects the spectator from the nihilistic force of the sublime spectacle (76), the maternal gaze sears through this blockage with fatal consequences. What is crucial to surviving the sublime spectacle is the cognitive refusal to acknowledge its entirety, an absence which concedes something is missing and echoes Lacan’s concept of lack where the child entering the Symbolic accepts that language signifies, but does not embody, the lost object of the mother. Through language desire is born, and Philip Shaw summarises that ‘the lost [maternal] object can never be represented’, and becomes ‘the indicator of the central impossibility, the void of ‘Thing’ at the heart of the Symbolic which can never be presented in reality but which must nevertheless be presupposed if reality is to cohere’ (134). Language and the sublime correspond to what Thomas Weiskel terms the semiotics of sublime (17), the tacit recognition of lack which simultaneously sustains the
Symbolic and exposes it as illusory. To glance off the sublime object is safe, even enjoyable, but to behold it in its entirety is to acknowledge the hollowness of existence without desire, which ceases to exist when the object of desire is fully observed.

Those who witness Tera reunite with the maternal lost object, but this reunion can only culminate in a fatal experience of maternal jouissance, a pleasure too much to bear, and the recognition of their annihilation is written across their petrified faces, as Ross remembers that ‘they had sunk down on the floor, and were gazing upward with fixed eyes of unspeakable terror’, that ‘Margaret had put her hands before her face, but the glassy stare of her eyes through her fingers was more terrible than an open glare’ (211). This petrification is another mark of the maternal gaze, and here ‘terror’ and ‘terrible’ are pregnant with meaning; implicitly calling to Tera, it also recalls Burke’s understanding of terror, that ‘no passion so effectively robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reason as fear’, that ‘whatever therefore is terrible, with regard to sight, is sublime too’ (53). Observed by the ‘fixed eyes’ and ‘glassy stare’ of her victims, like Medusa the vision of Tera, in both senses, inverts the gendered conventions of the masculine sublime and enthral her victim’s gaze, rendering them helpless to the fatal effects of her sublime maternal body. Here Tera’s sublimity reveals the limitations of recent feminist sublime aesthetics which sidestep the violence of the gaze and instead concede notions of ‘a visual caress’, a ‘celebration of blindness’ (Joanna Zylinska: 117). The maternal gaze does not choose blindness but blinds, and as Luna asserts the maternal gaze in search of the child ‘becomes capable of inflicting pain that reeks of malevolence and seeks the annihilation of the other’: ‘Vision becomes the conspirator of death, an accomplice in the re-establishment of maternal power’ and
returning to the womb of the cavern in the Experiment ‘is a compulsion toward self-annihilation’ (3, 98).

With the completion of desire must come the end of existence in the paternal order upon which desire is founded, and Ross is the only survivor of the experiment in the original ending because his vision is mistaken when he believes he sees Margaret’s white gown in the gloom of the cavern; to realise it was Tera would have been fatal. He sustains the pretence of lack while the others fall inexorably back into the maternal abyss, and he continues to generate this lack through his account of the event, as like the priests threatened by her power, he attempts to write Tera the Nameless One out of the narrative by not speaking her name. However, his Gothic phrasing of a ‘terror which has no name’ and ‘unspeakable terror’ implicitly invokes the maternal which reaffirms her victorious position at the end of the text, and exposes the inability of the Symbolic to quantify and control the maternal through the structures and strictures of language. Tera exploits her nameless state to haunt the end of the text as a sublime being whose gaze has petrified her victims into objects to be fetishised, yet resists objectification herself.

The 1903 version of the novel provides a wholly uncanny ending which inverts the idea of the Gothic text as a mode of patriarchal surveillance, placing the maternal gaze in the position of power as the reader can only imagine Tera’s intentions now she has emerged from her mummy’s cocoon. The act of reading the text remembers the trauma of separation and manifests the maternal gaze which seeks to reunite with the lost child. The text is the site at which the mother/child dyad is successfully achieved, as Tera’s escape collapses narrative closure and undercuts the heterosexual romance formula which was later to
become associated with the figure of the Mummy in cultural mythology (Griselda Pollock: 56).

The mother who subverts and escapes the confines of the patriarchal master narrative is present in many of the Gothics I discuss, especially The Turn of the Screw and Flowers in the Attic as well as ‘Carmilla’, but frustratingly Stoker backtracks with an abridged edition and revised ending in 1912 which shies away from the loose ends which made Jewel so textually nuanced. Here everyone survives the Experiment and the body of Tera is nowhere to be found, with the implication being that the resurrection failed as they discover ‘a ridge of impalpable dust’, and ‘in the sarcophagus in the hall, where we had placed the mummy of the cat [...] a small patch of similar dust’, confirming the ‘physical annihilation of the mummy’ (214). As with Mina and Jonathan’s marriage and the birth of baby Quincey at the end of Dracula, the revised ending ostensibly resuscitates and asserts the heteronormative romance narrative as Ross marries Margaret, who wears the ‘mummy robe’ and the Jewel of Seven Stars, and Tera becomes a pitiable memory: ‘Do not grieve for her! Who knows, but she may have found the joy she sought? [...] she dreamed her dream; and that is all any of us can ask!’ (ibid.). Yet, although the revised conclusion is more definitive in its attempt to annihilate the maternal, it also functions as another end(ing) to be untangled, another layer to be unwrapped.

Like Tera, the text is a fragmented body to be pieced back together, a body which resists the act of reading. It becomes a palimpsest which, like ‘Carmilla’, with each peeled back layer, each page turned, is more enmeshed in the maternal mythos Stoker compulsively repeats throughout his fiction, as unwrapping Tera serves to unravel the patriarchal master narrative. Jewel enacts the paradoxical unreadability that sustains a
sublime narrative, and the cathartic act of remembering the maternal (and re-membering
the male subject) and allaying the threat of castration she presents through the fetishisation
of her body is thwarted by a narrative which is decentred and de-structured by its fractured
and impotent attempt at closure. Excavating the maternal in Jewel only serves to reopen the
wound afresh.

Rebecca Pope argues that the ‘patriarchal textualising’ of Jonathan’s framing closure
of Dracula struggles to control the multivalent narrative voices, particularly Mina’s
encrypted stenography (like Margaret’s ‘strange hand’ and Tera’s hieroglyphics) which
writes and appropriates the text (216), and this instability of the monolithic, patriarchal
narrative structure is continued by Jewel as strategies which attempt to uphold order
ultimately have the opposite effect. Tera is both text and author as her hand creates the
story; a maternal palimpsest to be excavated and unwrapped, she writes the trauma of
separation and the violence of the maternal body on the skin of her victims through
birthmarks and imprints. As the voyeuristic unwrapping of Tera testifies, hers is a body to be
read but at a cost, and the fracturing of her narrative is echoed in the uncanny experienced
by the reader which leaves them with the impression of a self ‘in bits and pieces’ (Creed
2005: 29). Reading The Jewel of Seven Stars becomes an act of bearing witness to Tera which
mimics a submission to the death drive which compels those who are written into these
texts to reunite with the maternal body.

As with ‘Carmilla’, while the maternal gaze is ostensibly killed off its residue lingers
to haunt the end of the 1912 text, and the narrative closure which would safeguard the
paternal order against its return is broken down by the inverted double endings, a mirroring
which structures a textual uncanny. Furthermore, the body of the text itself is punctured by
illustrations of the jewel and hieroglyphics (149, 113) which jar not only the narrative but also the act of reading, and van Huyn’s internal colonial narrative of the tomb/womb’s invasion undercuts its own power by enacting a textual fracture which weakens the overarching structure. These linguistic and structural failures of the patriarchal narrative leave the integrity of the Symbolic at risk from the maternal gaze which can now escape and re-enter through these fissures; rejecting patriarchal strategies of closure to invade and infect other Gothic productions, the maternal gaze enacts its own textual surveillance as it flits from text to text, and this notion of surveillance is an anxiety played out in Henry James’ *The Turn of the Screw*, which I discuss in Chapter Two.

By its crudest interpretation, Stoker’s obsessively codified tangle of cats, wounds, claws, jaws and teeth immediately symbolises the castrating power of the maternal body, but moving beyond this Freudian reading I contend that these images function as meta-symbols which hark back to the violence of being wrenched from the mother’s body, a violence which awakens the womb’s gaze in search of the child. Repeatedly woven into the Gothic, this symbology of castration veils a deeper, primal terror which remembers the trauma of separation and renders it a violent act, which in the original edition of *Jewel* is mirrored, that is, both replicated and inverted, by the Great Experiment and Tera’s repossession of Margaret. While the text attempts to objectify Tera through the voyeuristic scenes of unwrapping, she takes the action in hand and manipulates it into a narrative of maternal violence. Luna contends ‘the child will mutilate the mother to annihilate his own origin, to destroy the very link that binds them together’ (102), and so Tera’s disembodied hand points towards the trauma of severance, and equally that of absorption.

Stoker’s repetition of these themes signifies a failed attempt to understand, control
and disavow this trauma, as he never quite makes the final cut and these symbols uncannily resurface throughout his work. Hopkins comments on the formidable presence of Stoker’s mother Charlotte, who would recount to her young invalided son gruesome tales about her childhood during the cholera epidemic in Sligo, including a familiar incident of dismembering where ‘on one of the last, desperate days, [she] saw a hand reaching through the skylight [and] seizing an axe, she cut it off with one tremendous blow’ (2007: 23). Catherine Wynne also notes that ‘Stoker's Gothic imagination is generally attributed to his mother's story-telling’ (2009: 50), and cementing the association he dedicated The Watter’s Mou’ (1895), a smuggling narrative which writes the amniotic seascape as the treacherous and devouring vagina dentata, to ‘my Dear Mother, in her loneliness’ (50). Like his fictional mummy, Charlotte Stoker is bound up in the knotted web of castration, fragmentation, violence and trauma that the disembodied hand carrying the gaze symbolises in the Gothic, a web her stories helped to spin, one in which she trapped her son into repeating.

‘Her eyes look like positive murder’: ‘The Squaw’

Stoker's fiction betrays how he was haunted by his mummies, and ‘The Squaw’ is a typically lurid example of his writing, an unseasonal story of a disastrous honeymoon published in the 1893 issue of Holly Leaves, the Christmas edition of the Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News. ‘The Squaw’ repeats the Gothic scenario of the return of the vengeful maternal gaze through the vessel of a cat, the birthmark and the maternal womb/tomb, this time in the form of the Iron Virgin, and Andrew Maunder uses Gallop’s (de)coding of the cat as symbolic of the vagina to argue that Stoker’s wronged (pussy)cat with ‘white, sharp teeth',
mirroring those of Dracula’s Weird sisters, that ‘shine[d] through the blood which dabbled her mouth and whiskers’ (53), embodies the ‘coded language of the feline’ which simultaneously implies the devouring *vagina dentata*, ‘the vagina that kills’, and disavows it as too vulgar and dangerous to be named outright within the context of a middle-class publication (Maunder: 130).

The story begins with a ‘quarrelling’ couple honeymooning in Nuremberg, who in the second week ‘naturally wanted someone else to join [their] party’ (51, 50), and so befriend the brash American Elias P. Hutcheson, hailing from ‘Bleeding Gulch’, Nebraska (50), the portentous motherland to which he will soon return. Hutcheson accidentally kills a kitten in an attempt to impress the couple, and it is the revenge of the mother cat, which he likens to the eponymous Apache mother squaw, that returns him to the Bleeding Gulch as the feline (implausibly) traps him inside an Iron Virgin.

The unnamed husband’s narrative is densely populated by the womb in the form of the cat, the Iron Virgin and the enraged squaw-mother, and these aspects collude to avenge the deaths of the womb’s offspring by contriving the death of Hutcheson, who murders the kitten and gleefully narrates the death of the squaw’s baby and her subsequent execution following her bloody vengeance. As both Maunder and Lillian Nayder have commented, the interrogation of motherhood in ‘The Squaw’ is underpinned by a narrative troubled by the rise of North America as a colonial power and the historical antagonism between white Anglo-Saxon settlers and Native Americans. The imbalance of power which characterised the oppression of the indigenous Native American population and the acquisition of their land by the ‘pioneering’ white man is expressed through the story told by Hutcheson of the squaw, who takes revenge ‘on a half-breed what they nicknamed “Splinters” ‘cos of the way
he fixed up her papoose which he stole on a raid just to show that he appreciated the way they had given his mother the fire torture. She got that kinder look so set on her face that it jest seemed to grow there’ (53-4). The internal narrative of the squaw writes a colonial history of violence and revenge enacted by and against mothers which is staged on the motherland, and Nayder suggests that ‘The Squaw’ ‘reminds the reader of the cruel repression involved in the American settler’s history’ (77), and Maunder continues this idea to argue that Hutcheson’s journey back to the Bleeding Gulch via the Nuremberg Torture Tower ‘is an act of recalling and paying for the costs of America’s settlement and colonisation’ (129).

Here Stoker returns to the colonist-as-rapist motif he explored in The Jewel of Seven Stars where the penetrated body of the mother/land is avenged through acts of maternal violence, and the racial frontiers of North America’s colonisation becomes the backdrop for the commandeering and controlling of the maternal body and its offspring. This subject of the colonial rape of virgin territory which Stoker revisited in Jewel feminises the geographical body of land invaded and oppressed by the male explorer and compounds the sense of maternal revenge which pervades the text; as Hutcheson, like van Huyn, Trelawny and Corbeck, represents the ‘colonist-as-rapist’ (Maunder: 129), so his punishment must reflect this sexual violence. In this sense, his symbolic, and most likely physical, castration is entirely appropriate.

As in ‘Carmilla’ and Jewel, in ‘The Squaw’ the maternal gaze of the vengeful womb is carried by the cat, who is described as having ‘eyes like green fire’ that ‘look like positive murder’ (53, 55), and foreshadows the child-snatching Bloofer Lady’s ferocious feline gaze: ‘She drew back with an angry snarl, such as a cat gives when taken unawares, then her eyes
ranged over us. Lucy’s eyes in form and colour, but Lucy’s eyes unclean and full of hell fire, instead of the pure, gentle orbs we knew’ (*Dracula*: 211). The tale also finds an intertextual precursor in Poe’s ‘The Black Cat’, which expresses a fear/desire to return to the womb through incarceration and premature burial, and Bonaparte reads Poe’s tale in the context of his mother troubles, seeing the cat as the castrating ‘mother-totem’ (471).

Stoker’s cat causes Hutcheson’s death in the Iron Virgin, a femininely-figured carnivorous torture device which devours and blinds – castrates - her victims:

> It was a crudely-shaped figure of a woman, something of a bell order, or to make a closer comparison, of the figure of Mrs. Noah in the children’s Ark, but with the slimness of waist and perfect *rondeur* of hip [...]. It was only, however, when we came to look at the inside of the door that the diabolical intention was manifest to the full. Here were several long spikes, square and massive, broad at the base and sharp at the points, placed in such a position that when the door should close the upper ones would pierce the eyes of the victim, and the lower ones his heart and vitals. (59, 60)

The penetrating and orally-aggressive Iron Virgin embodies the ambivalence of the sacred paradox of being simultaneously virginal and maternal, and Stoker’s reference draws on a heritage of female violence and cruelty towards children, as the contraption was employed by the Hungarian ‘blood countess’ Erzsébet Báthory (1560-1614), who was tried and executed for the brutal deaths of eighty young girls she purportedly tortured for the rejuvenating property of their virgin blood (many sources claim she killed over six hundred, see Raymond
McNally and Clive Leatherdale both argue it is likely that Stoker would have been aware of Báthory’s exploits from Reverend Sabine Baring-Gould’s *The Book of Werewolves* (1865), which he read for his research for *Dracula* (Eighteen-Bisang and Miller: 129). Baring-Gould documented how ‘when she was ill, and could not indulge her cruelty, she bit a person who came near her sick bed as though she were a wild beast’ (141), and this vampiric behaviour, reminiscent of the Bloofer Lady, is also evoked in ‘The Squaw’ through the figure of the Iron Virgin.

Stoker’s devouring mothers join other maternal vampires of the *fin de siècle* who consumed children and adolescents to remain youthful, most notably Arabella Kenealy’s ‘Beautiful Vampire’ Lady (Devilish) Deverish who psychically consumed children’s energy, and Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s ‘Good Lady Ducayne’ who owns ‘unnaturally bright eyes magnified to a gigantic size’ by a ‘double eyeglass’ (6; both 1896). As Kristine Swenson writes, these ‘menopausal vampires’ are ‘post-reproductive’ and drink to ‘continue to appear reproductively fit’ (32), and so are implicitly maternalised, articulating a grief about never achieving motherhood and its attendant narcissism. Stoker explicitly codifies the Iron Virgin as vampiric and maternal; an oversized, monstrous, *vagina dentata*, the shape - the ‘perfect rondeur of hip’ - evokes the female body as inherently, expectantly, maternal, and draws associations with the wife Amelia who we learn has conceived on the honeymoon, while its name, evocative of the Virgin Mary, carries the possibility of conceiving without physical penetration.

As Luna contends, the status of the virgin womb is ‘an annihilating one if not discarded, since its preservation will not tolerate the perpetuation of the human race’, and that the virgin ‘is an ideal whose womb is purposefully wasted by being barred from the
possibility of engendering life’ (36). For Luna, the virgin womb can only ever symbolise death, and this is expressed in ‘The Squaw’ through the Iron Virgin whose greedy jaws are the portal to a wombed-in fate. Stoker’s reference to Noah’s wife is also significant as it rewrites the biblical emphasis on patrilineage and ‘the generations of Noah’ (Genesis, 5: 32, 6: 9), and forges a place for her maternal agency. That the shapely Mrs Noah is mentioned in the same breath as the devouring spikes of the Iron Virgin cements the archetypal maternal as innately vicious through the invocation of previously innocuous and sacred figures of Noah’s wife and the Virgin Mary, the ultimate yet impossible state of motherhood, ‘the standard no woman can live up to but to whom Victorian women [...] were compared’ (Natalie McKnight: 14).

The womb’s destructive gaze, heralded by the spikes of the Iron Virgin which invoke the glistening teeth of the cat and the vagina dentata, foreshadows the ‘jaws of hell’ and the ‘jaws of his death-trap’ Stoker later writes into Dracula (314, 355) and dismembers and decontextualises the victim’s body, as Luna contends that the mother recognises the child ‘not as a whole entity unto himself, but as a fragmented being constantly dependent on [her]’ (7). The puncturing of skin which the spikes/claws/teeth of the womb perform against the body mitigates the integrity of the subject, and enables the maternal to reinstate them in the all-encompassing narcissism of the mother/child dyad. Like a Venus Flytrap the Iron Virgin lures its prey in, and the irrepressible, fatal, desire felt on the part of the child to return to the jouissance of the womb is demonstrated by Hutcheson, who with idiotic bravado insists that he must experience the terror of the deathly contraption: ‘Now, Judge, you jest begin to let this door down, slow, on me. I want to feel the same pleasure as the other jays had when those spikes began to move toward their eyes!’ (63). Like Tera’s
wrapped form the shape of the Iron Virgin titillates the male spectator, and what is intriguing is Hutcheson's happiness at the prospect of (re)entrance into the maternal space, as his ‘face was positively radiant as his eyes followed the movement of the spikes’ and he insists ‘don’t you rush this business! I want a show for my money this game – I du!’ (63, 64).

Here, recalling the blindness-as-castration myths of Oedipus and Medusa, the dynamics of the maternal gaze are played out through a torture which renders the victim/child blind and thus implicitly empowers the sight of the mother as a destructive and devouring force.

Hutcheson’s return to the womb is a final and bloody one; the vengeful mother-cat reappears and blinds the operator of the Iron Virgin, causing him to let go of the (umbilical) cord which holds the door open and trap Hutcheson inside its jaws:

And then the spikes did their work [...] when I wrenched open the door they had pierced so deep that they had locked in the bones of the skull through which they had crushed, and actually tore him – it – out of his prison till, bound as he was, he fell at full length with a sickly thud upon the floor, the face turning upward as he fell [...] Leaning against the wooden column was the custodian moaning in pain whilst he held his reddening handkerchief to his eyes. And sitting on the head of the poor American was the cat, purring loudly as she licked the blood which trickled through the gashed sockets of his eyes. (65-6)
The maternal gaze in this horrific scene is foreshadowed by the interplay of vision observed by the narrator between his wife and the cat which immediately precedes Hutcheson’s death. It is the pregnant Amelia who observes the animal first, as her husband notes:

When I looked at her again [I] found that her eye had become fixed on the side of the Virgin. Following this direction I saw the black cat crouching out of sight. Her green eyes shone like danger lamps in the gloom of the place, and their colour was heightened by the blood which still smeared her coat and reddened her mouth. (64)

Invoking the rage of the squaw, the cat covered in the war paint of her kitten’s blood is the essence of the orally-aggressive *vagina dentata*, an image that portends the feasting on Hutcheson’s blood at the close of the narrative. What is telling is the confluence of maternal gazes at play as the pregnant Amelia, who like the cat has fiery green eyes, is the first to notice the beast yet does not alert her companions, and it is her husband who cries ‘the cat! Look out for the cat!’ (64). Embedded within Amelia’s silence is a complicity in the horrific violence of the vengeful pussycat, and her predecessor the squaw, enacted against the men who have wrenched their children away from their hold.

This maternal spectacle proved ‘too much for poor Amelia’, who faints and has to be removed from the torture chamber (60). Yet, beneath her delicate disposition lurks a similarly vengeful womb, which imprints upon her unborn baby the sign of the Iron Virgin that forever indebts the child to the mother: ‘That she felt it to the quick was afterwards shown by the fact that my eldest son bears to this day a rude birthmark on his breast, which
has, by family consent, been accepted as representing the Nurnberg Virgin’ (61). Having sat accidentally on a ‘torture chair’ ‘full of spikes which gave instant and excruciating pain’ (59), Amelia is impregnated by the *vagina dentata*, eschewing the phallus of the paternal order and mimicking the parthenogenetic virgin womb which portends annihilation for the patriarchal order. Stoker’s implication is clear; even the bodies of the most submissive women can mutate into vicious monsters if that which they treasure the most, the child and the narcissism it gives them, is taken away, and ‘The Squaw’ pathologises a biological inevitability of maternal monstrosity: 'Under the guise of portraying [her] as a sensitive and impressionable woman shocked “to the quick” by the Virgin’s inner spikes, [Stoker] suggests that [Amelia’s] womb, like that of the Iron Virgin, is hostile to patriarchy – lined with teeth that leave their mark on the chest of her eldest son’ (Nayder: 90).

The child marked by the womb, whether during pregnancy, its evacuation/escape or (re)entry, can never fully attain subjectivity, as the skin which designates bodily integrity has been indelibly inscribed with the mark of the mother. The birthmark is the focus of trauma enacted against the child’s body by the maternal gaze, the evidence of the womb’s attempts to keep the child inside. ‘Evocation of the maternal body and childbirth induces the image of birth as a violent act of expulsion through which the nascent body tears itself away from the matter of maternal insides’, Kristeva argues; ‘now, the skin apparently never ceases to bear the traces of such matter’ (1982: 101). The marked child occupies an ambivalent position in the Symbolic; it has managed to negotiate its way in but now, bearing the scar of the mother, it cannot be accepted because its birthmark ‘points to the imperfection of the bodily surface and the opening of the maternal body during childbirth’ (Creed 1993: 70-71). Thus the hostile womb spites the paternal realm by tarnishing and infecting the child with the
Chapter One – The Gothic and Maternal Symbolism

mark of its ownership.

Hutcheson’s macabre death is punishment for severing the mother/child dyad, executed through his own final return to the gazing womb which destroys his subjectivity through the denial of visual capacity, a symbolic castration. That blindness in ‘The Squaw’ is caused by the vagina dentata recalls the Byzantium and Greek myths of Gello and Lamia (meaning ‘lecherous vagina’ or gluttonous gullet’), spiteful vampiric women governed by their ravenous wombs who stole eyes from their child victims (Purkiss 2000: 22, 24, 25). In these myths as in ‘The Squaw’, the spectre of the scorned and devouring mother is underpinned by the blinding of her victims; although it is the child’s flesh and blood which is most physically sustaining to these mothers, she is still dominated by the desire to commandeer their vision. In these narratives the object of the maternal gaze is that of the child, and requisitioning their gaze exposes the defunct nature of their standing in the Symbolic, as Luna contends: ‘If one’s subjectivity is largely constituted by visual perception which in itself can be illusory, then the self, rather than resting on a firm foundation, is actually situated upon a lack, a lurking emptiness that one seeks to deny’ (54). The robbing of vision by the maternal gaze becomes a strategy which is paradoxically enlightening, as it reveals the impotence of the gaze as enacted through the visual register alone, and the power of that of the maternal which is wielded through both anatomical and metonymical registers.

Foetal Desire: Reading the Death Drive

As Sedgwick discusses, premature or ‘live’ burial is a Gothic theme articulated as both a textual and symbolic palimpsest the reader must uncover. Gothic topographies become
palimpsestic womb-spaces, and Tera's wrappings, sarcophagus and tomb in *Jewel* and the Iron Virgin within the Torture Tower in 'The Squaw' house a panoramic maternal gaze which becomes more intense and ravenous with each layer to be uncovered by victim, witness and reader; as such the womb as palimpsest repeated throughout the genre becomes a structural device for 'the Gothic salience of “within”' (Sedgwick 1980: 4). The Gothic seemingly offers the cathartic means for the ego to vicariously experience the death drive, ‘an instinct of destruction directed against the external [Symbolic] world’ through reunion with the maternal (Freud 1923b: 646). The death drive which both energises and devours the ego’s libido (Jean Laplanche: 124) is embodied in the Gothic by a desire to return to one’s maternal origins, a desire which, if fulfilled, is translated as trauma in the Symbolic. We see this in ‘The Squaw’, as Hutcheson’s delight in entering the womb of the Iron Virgin, being suspended on the precipice of maternal abyss in an attempt to conquer/colonise it and experience it as safe and pleasurable, is soon thwarted by the stronger desire of the maternal to avenge the child it lost to the Symbolic and ‘fill the originary space’ (Luna: 92). As the castrating jaws of the Iron Virgin snap shut under the force of the vengeful pussycat, the trauma of the death drive is realised as a spectacle which others are helpless but to witness.

Consequently, what is expressed in ‘The Squaw’ and the original ending of *The Jewel of Seven Stars* is the notion of both characters and readers bearing witness to the effects of the maternal gaze; through the narration of the survivors the climactic scenes in these texts reveal the fatal effects of the wombed-in existence upon the bodies of Hutcheson and the participants of the Great Experiment, and their witnessing anticipates that of the reader/viewer who constructs the scene eidetically in their mind’s eye. As Creed discusses:
The uncanny gaze [of the reader/viewer] brings to light things that ought to have remained hidden about the nature of the male Symbolic order [....] however, these things on their own are not necessarily uncanny. The uncanny sensation must be produced by the text itself, through the methods it adopts to uncover the uncanny. (2005: 27)

Creed explains that ‘the structure of this gaze places the beholder in an unexpected, often frightening, position in relation to the object of the [maternal] gaze’, and that as a result ‘the spectator experiences a sense of fractured identity, of the self in “bits and pieces”’ (29). This reciprocates Stoker’s contention in ‘The Censorship of Fiction’ that ‘the strongest controlling force of the imagination is in the individual with whom it originates’, that ‘no one has the power to stop [the imagination]’ but (unconvincingly) asserts that the author ‘can control his own utterances’ (482). Not only is the reader implicated in the manifestation of the maternal gaze, encountering it through the Gothic re-enacts the ‘fracturing of identity’ compelled by the trauma-repetition of the death drive as the nihilistic desire to descend back into the thrall of the maternal. Through bearing witness to the maternal gaze we activate it, and so as Luna contends the death of its textual victims ‘becomes necessary if we ourselves as readers, and the audience as well as the characters within, are to regain control of their own capacity to gaze’ (90). Consequently, in reading the Gothic we activate and enable the maternal gaze; we become its accomplice.

Le Fanu and Stoker’s texts express concerns and desires about the nature of maternal instinct, desire and possession, articulated through the maternal gaze which is mobilised through the folkloric and socio-medical symbolic economy that connotes the searching and
devouring womb from which the gaze is issued. The maternal gaze presides over its
treacherous terrain of the intra-uterine castle and the hinterland of the amniotic bogscape,
and is repeated compulsively through portents including the fairy, the cat-familiar, the hand
and the birthmark. Acknowledging the potency of these archetypes and superstitions while
investing them with new meaning, these authors participate in weaving the framework of
cultural and folkloric epistemologies of the maternal, and their rich intertextualities create a
taut metafiction which perpetuates the maternal gaze to the point of omniscience. It is this
notion of the maternal gaze being conceived by a narrative and growing beyond it to enact
its own extratextual surveillance that resists patriarchal modes of structure and closure
which I explore in *The Turn of the Screw*, and Chapter Two will examine how James’
notoriously unreadable and impenetrable unnamed governess manipulates language and
narrative, the foundations of the Symbolic, to resist patriarchal scrutiny and enact her own
fatal panopticism through her hysterical visions, which are compulsively repeated through
critical interpretations and filmic adaptations.
Chapter Two

‘The more I saw the less they would’:
Subverting Hysteria and Surveillance in
*The Turn of the Screw*, *The Orphanage* and *The Others*

Chapter One discussed how the maternal gaze used folkloric and socio-medical discourses to travel through the works of Le Fanu and Stoker who codified their texts as maternal with *vagina dentata*, birthmarks, cats, hands and wombs. These archetypal Gothic symbols weave an iconographic web of the womb and vagina, the birthplace and conduit of the maternal gaze, and their omnipresence casts the genre as an inherently maternal arena within which patriarchal anxieties of origin are created and expressed. In these writers’ works, womb-spaces are penetrated and excavated by the masculine need to explore, control and disavow the nihilistic threat of the maternal body. Part Two continues these themes of invasion and surveillance by considering Henry James’ *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) and its filmic intertexts *The Others*, directed by Alejandro Amenábar (2001) and *The Orphanage*, directed by J.A. Bayona (2007), to demonstrate how the maternal gaze exploits the conflict created between discourses of the supernatural and the psychological to create its own regime of maternal surveillance.

As Shoshana Felman discusses, *The Turn of the Screw* provokes endless critical responses which attempt to decode the events which lead to Miles’ death. The apparitionist vs. non-apparitionist muddle in which critics find themselves is demonstrated by the various turns of Edmund Wilson, who in 1948 partially retracted his original contention that the governess ‘is a neurotic case of sex repression’ (1934: 102), after Robert Heilman’s counter-
argument in 1947 against Wilson’s Freudian reading which emphasised the governess’ detailed description of the ghoulish Quint despite never having seen him, contending ‘there can be no firmer dramatic evidence of the objectivity of the apparition’ (433, 437). Having conceded Heilman’s point, in 1959 Wilson turned again, publishing an addendum to his previous revision after John Silver suggested in 1957 that the governess may have imagined Quint in such detail due to having heard descriptions from external sources (see M. Slaughter for a comprehensive overview). From Wilson’s flustered responses we can see that the effect of James’ tale is precisely its resistance to being decoded, and this futile preoccupation with divining a finite, empirical truth distracts both reader and critic from the governess’ actions, which result in the unarguable fact that the text ends with the death of a child at her hands in loco parentis. *The Turn of the Screw*, *The Others* and *The Orphanage* are all littered with the bodies of children who died under the care of a mother/figure, and I want to offer an interpretation of these texts which exposes, rather than occludes, the infanticidal actions of the governess in James’ novella and her counterparts in the film.

The etymology of the spectral vocabulary - ‘spectre’, from the Latin *spectare* and *specere* - ‘to look at’, ‘phantom’, from the Greek *phos* - ‘light’, and ‘apparition’ from the Latin *apparere* - ‘to come forth’ – paradoxically implies that there is something to be seen (Dani Cavallaro: 75). This implication problematises the ontological givens of presence and absence, seen and unseen, which underpin the empiricism of the male gaze limited to the visual register, a problem which has subsequently characterised scholarship that has futilely sought visual proof of the ghosts. Consequently, my concern with *The Turn of the Screw* and its intertexts is not to engage with this problem and argue either an apparitionist or
psychosexual reading, but to expose the infanticidal maternal gaze which exploits both potential interpretations to incite readings and responses which are more concerned with disproving one another in an exchange of critical one-upmanship than identifying the governess' culpability. Taking my lead from the psychoanalytical critical heritage which understands the text as a document of the governess' Oedipal hysteria, I demonstrate how the hysteria presented by the mother-figures in *The Turn of the Screw* and its adaptations is rooted to a deeper and more fraught attachment and traumatic separation from their own mother, a trauma which, as I showed in Chapter One, ignites the maternal gaze and prompts it to travel between Gothic texts in search of the child.

This chapter demonstrates that these mother-figures, under the masquerade of selfless maternal benevolence, subvert institutional modes of surveillance, medical scrutiny, and narrative and architectural structures associated with the Oedipal hysteria diagnosis to convert the patriarchal domain into the womb-space wherein the child is fatally consumed. In *The Turn of the Screw*, the governess exploits the diagnostic models of nineteenth-century medical discourses of hysteria to create her own maternal hysterical narrative in which her visions form a spectral panopticon that transforms the paternal household at Bly into Luna's 'maternally internalised scopic field' where paternal interference is prohibited (5). The figure of the infanticidal maternal caregiver reappears in *The Orphanage*, as Laura returns to the orphanage of her own motherless childhood and collects sick and dying children to care for there, presenting a masquerade of maternal sacrifice which I show echoes the symptoms of Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy, where the mother purposely makes her child ill in order to attract attention and sympathy from the medical profession. Finally, *The Others* reveals how the maternal gaze has succeeded in capturing the child and
reinstalling it back into the womb. With the revelation that the Stewart family are already dead, the film becomes an example of the inevitable nihilism which attends any sustained entry back into the maternal visual realm, and the children’s photosensitivity is revealed as their mother’s hysterical fantasy which traps them in the house and exposes them to the gaze of the womb.

As I show, all three texts engage in a dialogue concerned with the maternal gaze’s commandeering and exploitation of patriarchal medical knowledge, which is deployed duplicitously to forge a persona of the maternal martyr, a smokescreen for her infanticidal maternal gaze.

‘We’ll see it out’: The Turn of the Screw and the Hysterical Panopticon

_The Turn of the Screw_ as a story of infanticide plays the potential readings of the hysteria and supernatural narratives off against one another to weave a web of confusion in which to trap the child, the narrators and the reader, and as Wilson has suggested, James himself. Elements of both the spectral and the psychological converge to enable the maternal gaze to smother and reclaim the child, and I show how the governess exploits the notion of hysteria-as-performance through her visions and the breakdown of the masculine frame narratives to mimic the incoherent and unreliable nature of hysteria case studies. Eschewing the phallocentric Freudian interpretation of hysteria which privileges the notion of a psychosis rooted in the Oedipal dynamic, I return to the classical diagnosis, which diagnosed hysteria as a symptom of the barren womb wandering around the body in search of a child, to show how the governess exploits Freudian expectations and performs hysteria through her unreliable narration of her hallucinations-as-spectral visions, and so rearticulates her
psychosis as one born out of a desire not for the father but the child, a psychosis which simultaneously echoes the trauma of her own maternal loss.

It is precisely the impossibility of divining an empirical ‘truth’ from the text, either spectral or hysterical, which enables the governess to resist our attempts to decode her and powers the maternal gaze to haunt beyond the end of the story. The confusion which saturates the text and its critical responses obscures the governess’ true raison d’être, to claim a child for her empty gazing womb, and it is this she triumphs in, as the text concludes with her smothering Miles in her deadly embrace:

With the stroke of the loss I was so proud of he uttered the cry of a creature hurled over an abyss, and the grasp with which I recovered him might have been that of catching him in his fall. I caught him, yes, I held him – it may be imagined with what passion; but at the end of a minute I began to feel what it truly was that I held. We were alone with the quiet day, and his little heart, dispossessed, had stopped. (266)

Evoking the classically Gothic (maternal) abyss which swallows its victims whole, the governess maintains her masquerade of maternal benevolence to the last as she describes this murder scene in terms of saving Miles from the spirit of Quint who possessed him, and who she banished from the child’s body, along with his heartbeat. With the death of Miles, the little gentleman, the last vestiges of the patriarchal line at Bly have been killed off, and while Flora is spared the same fate her mistreatment at the hands of the governess becomes the childhood trauma which condemns her to become the next hysterical.
Oscar Cargill suggests that James’ sister Alice James’s own experiences of neurasthenia ‘strongly tempted him to exploit the extraordinary dramatic possibilities of her disease’, and that he overlapped the governess’ hysteria narrative with the supernatural element in order to disguise his inspiration (238). James was surrounded by hysteria, and his novella appeared three years after Freud and Breuer's Studies on Hysteria (1895), and both texts display symptoms of the fin de siècle anxiety surrounding female repressed desires and their eruption into the social order. As Elaine Showalter and other ‘hysterians’ have shown, although Freud, like Jean-Martin Charcot before him, did not explicitly pathologise hysteria as a female preserve, that the large majority of his patients were female served as implicitly empirical ‘proof’ that women were more susceptible to the disorder than men. Hysteria was not simply a medical diagnosis but also a model of patriarchal social control, implemented by a male medical gaze which pored over the female body like a text to be read.

Such specious statistics served to bolster Victorian psychiatric opinion that women were more vulnerable to insanity than men due to the instability of their reproductive and nervous systems, and so theories of ‘reflex insanity’ were ‘specifically and confidently linked to the biological crises of the female life-cycle – puberty, pregnancy, childbirth, menopause – during which the mind would be weakened and symptoms of insanity might emerge’ (Showalter 1985: 55). A sense of biological inevitability pervades these theories, as women were viewed as ‘the victim[s] of periodicity’ (Horatio Storer in Showalter, ibid.), and doctors exacted pressure on their patients to perform in a certain way to conform to their expectations of hysteria. It is this very pressure to perform, to be hysterical, which the governess exploits to mobilise her maternal gaze and possess the children.
Following the aftermath of the World Wars and more recently the Gulf War, psychoanalytic and feminist scholarship shifted the diagnostics of hysteria to include male sufferers who exhibited symptoms of a psychosomatic response to the trauma of warfare. However, as Julia Borossa and Showalter observe about cases diagnosed in the First World War, although soldiers exhibited similar symptoms to those of the female hysteric, male patients were understood culturally to be suffering from shellshock (later renamed Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), a term popularised by the work of C.S. Mayers and W.H.R. Rivers (Borossa: 62, Showalter 1985: 174). Consequently, while hysteria as a psychiatric diagnosis was superseded in the inter-war years by less heavily-loaded terms such as ‘psychosomatic’ and ‘conversion disorder’, in the cultural consciousness it remains gendered as feminine, and the term continues to be an insult waged against excessively emotional, melodramatic women.

Subsequently, post-structuralist and feminist scholarship has subverted the gendering of hysteria by commandeering the hysteric as a rebellious heroine. French feminists including Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous have rewritten hysteria through écriture féminine, a feminine libidinal textual economy which inscribes the desires of the unconscious and undermines phallocentric binary thought and language and the primacy of the phallus in the Oedipal aetiology of hysteria. This female body of writing emphasises non-linear, cyclical narratives which embody female desire, recalling the pleasures taken in the maternal body before its disavowal occasioned by the child’s entry into the paternal contract, and draws on the girl’s originary pre-Oedipal attachment to the mother which Freud eventually conceded in ‘Femininity’ in 1933. Through the concept of écriture féminine linear patriarchal structures of temporal and spatial narrative form and control are
undermined, and hysteria becomes a linguistic weapon with which to upturn and invert the monolithic realist narrative structure which has canonically stood as an affirmation of patriarchal social and cultural values. Consequently, *The Turn of the Screw* becomes a feminine text, both in content and structure, which defies the realism of its Jamesian heritage and undercuts the Law-of-the-Father as represented by Symbolic language upon which realism is precariously predicated.

**The Hysterical Precedent**

The epistemology of hysteria fashioned the condition as a female preserve by locating its origins in the female reproductive system, and its name derives from the Greek *hysteron*, meaning womb. In classical philosophy the womb was considered a volatile organ which if left empty would migrate around the body in search of a child, as Plato surmised in the *Timaeus*:

> A woman’s womb [...] is a living thing within her with a desire for childbearing. Now when this remains unfruitful for an unreasonably long period of time it is extremely frustrated and travels everywhere up and down her body. It blocks up her respiratory passages, and by not allowing her to breathe, throws her into extreme emergencies, and visits all sorts of other illnesses upon her. (1290c)

The bereft womb rebels against the body which has failed to satiate it with its desired state of pregnancy, and the illnesses it compels were translated as symptoms of hysteria, with
respiratory ailments termed ‘suffocation of the mother’ (Harold Merskey and Susan Merskey). The disease was bound to the maternal body, and when anatomists conceded that the womb did not wander, hysteria was relocated to the nervous system, causing women to be branded the nervous sex, or alternatively their hysteria was eroticised and attributed to nymphomania (Showalter 1997: 15).

Yet, although the epistemology of hysteria is born of ‘the troubled womb’ (Juliet Mitchell 2000: 11), from the seventeenth century it was predominantly linked to the brain and recast as a neurological condition, and by the nineteenth century diagnoses had moved away from the womb’s role to favour the notion of a traumatic event, the impact of which manifested as hysterical symptoms through the (female) body. Charcot, a neurologist, subscribed to this idea of hysteria originating from the nervous system and diagnosed it as a disease which was caused by either a hereditary defect or a traumatic wound to the central nervous system. Freud, who studied under Charcot, continued with this idea of past trauma, but a psychical rather than physiological one. Initially he postulated the Seduction Theory, which proposed that hysteria stemmed from a traumatic sexual experience in childhood, usually paternal abuse. Both problematic and implausible, Freud retracted this theory and attributed hysteria to the eruptions of the Oedipal desires in the conscious mind of the patient. An equally suspicious concept which attributes blame to the patient for desiring her father and wishing to have his baby, Freud’s reformulation of hysteria, for many feminists, only reinforces the gendering of the condition as an exclusively female malady rooted in the dysfunctional heterosexual desires of the female reproductive system (for an excellent overview of Freud’s Oedipal thinking see Bennett Simon and Rachel Blas (1991)). Lacan’s understanding of female hysteria is similarly dissatisfying, constellating the subject’s
sexuality as a lack which she must mediate through the figure of the father and his phallus, condemning her to serve the paternal metaphor which dictates her being, as the hysteric’s desire is only ‘to sustain the desire of the father’ (1964: 38).

In its classical etymology hysteria was symptomatic of the bereft, lamenting womb wandering around the body, but with the advent of the psychoanalytical gaze intent on commandeering the female body the condition was refashioned as the response to a trauma rooted to the all-powerful father. Re-constellating hysteria as a response to the daughter’s repressed Oedipus complex, Freud and Breuer fathered an idea in which they themselves became embroiled, as their patients Dora and Anna O. experienced hysterical pregnancies with the paternity of the phantom babies attributed to their respective analysts which attested to their virility, analytical and otherwise (Mitchel 2000: 67, 68). Contemporaneous to Studies on Hysteria, the governess’ ghosts in The Turn of the Screw ostensibly symptomatise these repressed Oedipal tensions, but I want to return to the classical diagnosis to show how she is only concerned with capturing the orphaned children and reinstalling them into the womb-space, as she ostracises the uncle, the father of the text, and commandeers Bly, transforming it into a space of maternal panopticism controlled by her gaze and what it sees, or not, as the case may be.

‘Something like madness’: Performing Hysteria

Like the imprinting womb, the hysteric’s body became a site of contention for the male medical gaze which demanded it be regulated through regimes of diagnosis and surveillance, to which the patient must submit to be cured. At la Salpêtrière hospital under
Charcot’s ‘scrutinising eyes [...] deeply set in the shadow of their own orbits’ (Alexandre Souques, in Showalter 1997: 31), patients were required to ‘perform’ for a voyeuristic medical gaze and were sketched and photographed (Showalter 1985: 152-4; see also Georges Didi-Huberman). Patients also had to exhibit their symptoms in twice-weekly performances of diagnosis when Charcot would circumscribe them with his expert medical opinion (Showalter 1997: 31; see also Brant Wenegrat). This lecture/demonstration/freak show echoed the regimes of voyeuristic spectatorship inmates of Bethlem psychiatric hospital were subjected to in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when members of the public would pay a penny to ‘observe’ patients (Franz Alexander and Sheldon Selesnick: 114).

Charcot’s patients were rendered exhibits through his desire to diagnose, and this economy of hysterical submission and dominant surveillance was confirmed by his bribing of patients to act up their hysteria for a more captivating performance, as Georges Didi-Huberman explains how ‘every hysteric had to make a regular show of her orthodox “hysterical nature” [...] to avoid being transferred to the severe “division” of the quite simple and so-called incurable “alienated women”’ (170-171). This notion of performance is extrapolated by Irigaray who argues that hysteria functioned as a simulacrum of female sexuality, which the hysteric had to mime through the masculine mode in order to retain a semblance of her own desire. The hysteric must filter herself through the ‘specular logic of patriarchy’, the masculine diagnostic discourse which privileges the Oedipal model as structuring unconscious drives and desires, in order to survive patriarchy (Toril Moi: 134).

Women had to hystericise their bodies to maintain their tenuous grasp on sanity which could only be granted to them by their male doctor, and inevitably this ‘seduction’ of the fatherly doctor by the young female patient played into Freud’s theories of hysteria.
Hysteria becomes a simulacrum of femininity reflected through the Oedipal model, distrusted as it has been cajoled into performing itself for the satisfaction of the male doctor. For Freud, hysteria is predicated on the subject’s lack of penis and the resultant desire to have sex with her father to regain the penis and bear him a child, a penis-substitute, and the hysteric’s narrative reflects this lack through the lacunae which characterise their account.

Consequently, with its gaps, fissures, contradictions and obscurities the governess’ narrative reads like a case study of Freudian hysteria. However, I want to show how hers is a very knowing performance which exploits the conventions of masculine diagnostics – scrutiny, surveillance, narrative with the Oedipal model at its centre, incarceration – in order to take control of the household at Bly. Certainly, hysteria could be faked as well as performed, and Alison Winter discusses the case of the O’Key Sisters, Jane and Elizabeth, who were mesmerised and ‘cured’ of their hysteria in public demonstrations by John Elliotson between 1837 and 1838, and subsequently denounced by the medical press (67-100). It is this rebellious exploitation of hysteria and its socio-cultural reception which makes the governess’ symptomatic performance self-reflexive and manipulative, and transforms our understanding of The Turn of the Screw into that of a text reclaiming the genealogy of hysteria as matrilineal, rather than Oedipal, as the governess’ maternal gaze both desires the child and refers back to its own maternal origins, the hysterical womb.

Any display of desire for the uncle-as-father or rape fantasies about Quint are the maternal gaze’s mimicking of Oedipal desire, decoys which distract the reader from her fatal desire for the children, and the governess systematically rejects communication with, and intervention from, the uncle. Furthermore, though her relationship with the internal frame narrator Douglas, whose sister became her charge after the death of Miles, the governess
exploits heterosexual desire as predicated on the sublimation of the Oedipus complex, as his infatuation with her enables the telling of the story in a way which vindicates her actions as expressions of watchful maternal benevolence, while simultaneously repeating them through the act of storytelling. David McWhirter argues that, belonging to James’ ‘experimental phase’ and written in a ‘feminised cultural and literary realm’, the text occupies a space of ‘radical uncertainty’ for James which becomes a ‘loose cannon’, as the author as well as his readers are ‘engulfed [...] in an anomalous narrative space’ which is linked inextricably to the hysterical female body (122, 127, 128-129). Similarly, Wilson suggests that despite James’ intention to write a ‘bone fide ghost story’ he has produced a hysterical narrative which refuses to be classified as such: ‘One is led to conclude that [...] not merely is the governess self-deceived, but that James is self-deceived about her’ (141, 143). In ‘supreme authority’ (179) the governess’ maternal gaze hoodwinks and corrupts both Douglas and James as conduits, and manipulates the hystericisation of the female reproductive system in order to infect the patriarchal space, overturn it and transform it into a womb-space.

The governess mimics hysteria, turning patriarchal diagnosis, characterised by hysterical visions, the inability to speak, dramatic fits and fractured narratives, back in on itself. The text is a hysterical narrative, but not as Freudians would read it. Instead the maternal gaze mocks the symptomatology of hysteria – itself a performance - as the governess’ behaviour echoes the signs of madness for which doctors scavenged the female body. While she acknowledges to herself that her ‘obsession’ with seeing the ghosts could ‘have turned to something like madness’ (229, 203), in her exchanges with Mrs Grose the emphasis is placed both on the governess’ own calm and control - ‘we should keep our heads
if we should keep nothing else’ (207, 209) - and Mrs Grose’s lack thereof, as the governess implies that the housekeeper would be mad to ask for help from the uncle and that she is the voice of reason without whom the household would be doomed: ‘If you should so lose your head as to appeal to him for me [...] I would leave, on the spot’ (226).

The governess has an awareness of madness, and in addition to her hysterical visions and ambiguous and skewed command of language, she performs the convulsions of hysteria and the attendant restraint and incarceration; obsessing about Quint and Jessel, she explains that ‘they harassed me so that sometimes, at odd moments, I shut myself up to audibly rehearse – it was at once a fantastic relief and a renewed despair – the manner in which I might come to the point. I approached it from one side and the other, while, in my room, I flung myself about, but I always broke down in the monstrous utterances of names’, and elsewhere describes how ‘I had to shut myself up to think’, that ‘someone had taken a liberty rather monstrous’ and ‘that was what, repeatedly, I dipped into my room and locked the door to say to myself’ (229, 193; my emphasis). Here the repetition of verbal outbursts reads like a hysteric’s case study, while her action of self-imprisonment simultaneously mimics that of the patriarchal medical gaze and enables the governess to stake a space of her own from which to meditate on and transmit the spectral presence of her gaze throughout the household.

This central internal space which looks out upon and controls the rest of the inhabitants mirrors that of the tower in the Benthamite panopticon, an architectural structure used for prisons and mental asylums throughout the nineteenth century where a central tower presides over a circular building of cells which each holds an inmate or lunatic, ‘like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which every actor is alone, perfectly
individualised and constantly visible’ (Michel Foucault: 200). The central tower houses the observer, who sees everybody but who themselves cannot be seen. Through envisioning the ghosts of Quint and Jessel the governess weaves a spectral web of surveillance in the centre of which she lurks, as she notes how the children in her ‘inexorable […] perpetual society’ perceived her as the all-powerful surveyor who controls their freedom: ‘I was like a jailer with an eye to possible surprises and escapes’ (231). As Foucault comments, ‘the panoptic mechanism […] makes it possible to see constantly and to recognise immediately […] visibility is a trap’ (200).

As well as visions and hallucinations, In Studies in Hysteria Freud and Breuer list a number of disturbances of vision as symptoms of Anna O.’s hysteria, including amaurosis (temporary loss of vision), amblyopia (lazy eye), diplopia (double vision) and macropsia (enlargement of objects in the visual field), and the inability to read (39). This located hysteria within the visual field of desire to see, and in the case of hysterical blindness as an anxiety about something seen. Discussing ‘psychogenic disturbance[s] of vision’ (1910) Freud explicitly linked hysteria with the visual field as the site/sight of pleasure, and hysterical blindness and hysterical visions are responses to a trauma or desire which the subconscious has failed to repress and which the subject is forced to repeat and meditate on through visual hallucinations, sending the visual register into overdrive (216). According to the Freudian reading the governess’ latent sexual desires, which as the ‘young, untried, nervous’ daughter of a ‘poor country parson’ in her position of loco parentis she had been forced to repress (Wilson 1938: 180, 178), break through into her consciousness and manifest as the ghosts, which Stanley Renner argues are so uncannily similar to Quint and Jessel because her hysteria draws on Victorian physiognomic stereotypes which reflected sexual immorality
(238-9). However, reading her hysteria as symptomatic not of Oedipal desires but of a longing of – and for - the maternal body which lacks the child, as opposed to the phallus, reconfigures her visions as the maternal gaze endeavouring to absent the child back into the empty womb.

The governess’ belief in the ghosts represents an insistence upon her own visual agency which simultaneously curtails that of others who fail to see the ghosts, effectively inducing their blindness. Her body is a vessel through which the maternal gaze mocks, in both senses of the word, symptoms of hysteria to create its own spectral panopticon through the hallucinations of Quint and Jessel, a scopic regime which envelops Bly and creates a blindspot that rejects the intrusion of patriarchal surveillance.

**Contesting the Male Gaze: The Maternal Spectral Panopticon**

The governess’ hallucinations mobilise her maternal gaze, and by envisioning these spectres invisible to everyone else she multiplies her own visual capacity and her ability to re-consume the child back into the maternal fold, as she tells a confused Mrs Grose that she is afraid of ‘not seeing’ Miss Jessel’s ghost again, as this would call into question her visual supremacy: ‘I don’t know what I don’t see – what I don’t fear!’ (207, 206).

To galvanise her gaze the governess exploits her own spectral status in the household. As Eve Lynch discusses, in the nineteenth century domestic servants occupied a liminal position in the middle- and upper-class household which was exacerbated by their paradoxical presence as an outsider: ‘Like the ghost, the servant was in the home but not of it [....] like the spectral spirit, servants were outsiders in the home secretly looking in on the
forbidden world of respectability' (67). As such her position as governess further obscures matters - occupying conflicting spheres of society, governesses were typically from middle-class families which had fallen into financial ruin; a déclassé with good breeding but no dowry, these young women were forced to seek work, transgressing Victorian codes of feminine propriety and inspiring distrust in their employers. As Millicent Bell explains: 'She had to be a lady to carry out her role, but was surely not ladylike in working for her living' (94). Unmarried and in direct contact with children, the governess had to maintain a veneer of sexual innocence, although this, along with her liminal social status, was often subject to questioning, and the psychologist Gustave Bouchereau in his discussion of nymphomania warned parents that nurses and servants ‘should be kept under strict surveillance by the parents, because it is not uncommon that under the influence of hysteria or of a morbid disposition they subject the children to manipulations which affect their health and compromise their existence’ (865).

In ghost stories servants are allied with the supernatural, a threat to the patriarchal order of the house, and in The Turn of the Screw we see this alliance at its most intense, as servants themselves become spectres, or, in the case of the governess, witness to the spectres. This liminality is heightened by the governess’ namelessness, an embodiment of the Gothic ‘unspeakable’ which, like Carmilla’s and Tera’s aliases, resists signification and denies the reader knowledge, galvanising her omnipotence which is echoed intertextually by the nameless heroine-narrator in Daphne du Maurier’s Rebecca (1938), an adaptation of Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre (1847) which Alice Petry argues James parodies in The Turn of the Screw (61).
Looking after the children, the governess exploits her marginalised position to become the spectral maternal presence which Kahane argues pervades the Gothic, creating an omniscience of the maternal gaze cemented through the modes of surveillance and panopticism. *The Turn of the Screw* narrativises an anxiety about maternal power, as the governess manipulates patriarchal ideas of observation and the gaze to perform her own fatal surveillance, and real or imagined, the ghosts become the conduit through which the governess shatters the illusion of patriarchal order at Bly, succeeded through her murder of Miles the ‘little gentleman’ (183). The link between the governess and ghosts as overseers is made explicit in the scene where she rehearses her hysterical visions and takes the place of Quint peering at the window and is apprehended by a shocked Mrs Grose, about whom the governess muses ‘I wondered why she should be scared’ (196). Crucially, her role of surveillant is not compromised by her own visibility as she is employed to ‘look after’ the children, and so the governess’ gaze infiltrates the patriarchal space under the guise of selfless maternal care for her charges, and her true intent, her ‘honest instinct’ (Luna: 94), remains invisible. Mrs Grose and the children are subjected to the same tension the panopticon occasions in the inmate, that of never knowing whether or not they are being watched by the central surveillant, a sense of all-seeing yet unverifiable observation fundamental to Bentham’s principle: ‘Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power’ (Foucault: 201).

Through her panopticism the governess perverts clinical regimes of the control of hysteria and renders impotent masculine modes of surveillance and discipline; instructed by the children’s uncle not to disturb him, she controls of communication between Bly and the
outside world, severing contact and transforming it into a madhouse over which her gaze presides (the house, invaded by a female surveillant who challenges the patriarchal institutionalisation of hysteria, finds a namesake in Nelly Bly, the *nom de plume* of the American journalist Elizabeth Cochran, who in 1887 infiltrated Blackwell’s Island Insane Asylum for women in an undercover assignment for the *New York World* and exposed conditions of abuse and neglect, which she published in *Ten Days in a Mad-House*, exclaiming ‘what, excepting torture, would produce insanity quicker than this treatment?’ (64)).

The governess and her ghostly hallucinations weave a web of surveillance over Bly which plays on the notions of spectrality - supernatural, domestic and feminine – to convert the house into a panoptic space, governed by those unseen whose power is gleaned from their very invisibility. Consequently, when the governess encounters the male gaze it is rendered impotent by the visible presence of the man wielding it, and she actively fantasises about such encounters and imagines meeting a handsome gentleman in the grounds of Bly:

> Someone would appear at the turn of a path and would stand before me and smile and approve. I didn’t ask more than that – I only asked that he should know; and the only way to be sure he knew would be to see it, and the kind light of it, in his handsome face. (190)

The governess imagines an approving male gaze for which she performs, and her willing participation serves to undercut her expected role as object in the gaze dynamic within the Oedipal matrix. Hers is not a masochistic submission to the father-figure, but one which
demands attention from her observer and consequently exposes him, nullifying his gaze’s effect. This initial fantasy precipitates her first sighting of Quint:

What arrested me on the spot – and with a shock much greater than any vision had allowed for – was the sense that my imagination had, in a flash, turned real. He did stand there! – but high up, beyond the lawn and at the very top of the tower [...] the man who met my eyes was not the person I had precipitately supposed [...] An unknown man in a lonely place is a permitted object of fear to a young woman privately bred; and the figure that faced me was - a few more seconds assured me - as little anyone else I knew as it was the image that had been in my mind [...] the man who looked at me over the battlements was as definite as a picture in a frame.

(190-191)

Despite the phallic symbolism in her narrative, as Quint stands atop the tower and bears down upon the governess, it is she who masters the gaze in this encounter; voiding any sexual threat posed by Quint by describing him in the language of the Radcliffean rape fantasy, the ‘permitted object of fear’ which the heroine and reader can furtively meditate upon, the governess curtails any dominance of his gaze through her framing of him as a picture upon which to be looked. This notion of framing as a method of control nods to the male framing narratives which couch the governess’ tale; however the fundamental difference here is that her metaphor represents a perfectly framed and contained image of Quint which is later emphasised through her detailed description of him for Mrs Grose,
whereas by the close of the text the frame narratives of masculine control are nowhere to be seen, as I discuss further below.

The expected masculine author-ity established by conventions of narrative and gaze are challenged by the governess in this exchange, as she links her control over the story and its ambiguity with her own challenge to Quint’s look:

There was a moment at which, at shorter range, some challenge between us, breaking the hush, would have been the right result of our straight mutual stare. He was in one of the angles, the one away from the house, very erect, as it struck me, and with both hands on the ledge. So I saw him as I see the letters I form on this page; then, exactly, after a minute, as if to add to the spectacle, he slowly changed his place - passed, looking at me hard all the while, to the opposite corner of the platform. Yes, I had the sharpest sense that during this transit he never took his eyes from me, and I can see at this moment the way his hand, as he went, passed from one of the crenellations to the next. He stopped at the other corner, but less long, and even as he turned away still markedly fixed me. He turned away; that was all I knew. (192)

Nullifying the male gaze through her narrative control, ‘the letters I form on this page’, here ‘the straight mutual stare’ implies not the dominance of the male gaze but an unspoken reciprocity; she is ‘fixed by him’ but equally he becomes a ‘spectacle’ under her observation. Quint, whose gaze she has created, is limited by his ‘rather small and very fixed’ eyes and is the first to break this dynamic as he turns away, leaving her gaze to endure, and this is
replayed in their encounter on the staircase when Quint turns and breaks ‘our long gaze’ (217). Later when the governess describes her encounter Mrs Grose asks ‘he only peeps?’, evoking the voyeurism of the peeping Tom undercut by its own limited agency of peeping, a pathetic, furtive, impotent action in the face of the governess’ omnipotent maternal gaze (198).

Within the panoptic economy wherein obscurity is key, by perceiving/conceiving the ghosts the governess’ gaze supersedes their threat, replacing it with her own desire to capture Miles, a desire disguised by the smokescreen of concerned maternal benevolence. Simulating the role of object as she does the role of hysteric, she entraps and exposes the male gaze in her text, voiding its power. In performing hysteria, she hoodwinks the reader into thinking it is male approval she desires and that her insanity is the eruption of repressed Oedipal sexuality. Playing up to hysteria, the governess’ masquerade of madness mobilises the maternal gaze which succeeds in capturing Miles - and Douglas - at the end of the text. That she is the only person who ‘sees’ the ghosts does not prove her insanity but rather, within her panoptic regime, accords her with power and control over the household. Real or hallucinatory, these visions galvanise the maternal gaze, enabling it to search out the child and reclaim it.

*The Turn of the Screw* becomes a hysteria narrative which simultaneously makes use of the supernatural apparatus, as the governess’ hysterical/spectral visions make her maternal gaze omnipotent. While the critical heritage sets these two elements of the text apart as mutually exclusive, reading the governess’ account through the lens of the maternal gaze reveals how aspects of each are woven together in her attempt to possess the children. This reciprocity of her hysteria and the visions-as-ghosts is symbolised acutely through
Quint, whose name is evocative of 'squint', a visual affliction also identified as a symptom of Anna O., who also suffered from disturbances of language, another symptom which I show the governess exploits.

‘The story will tell’: Hysterical Language and the Maternal Gaze

Three layers of narrative muffle and distort the meaning of the text, and the governess' own convoluted use of language both heightens the ambiguity of her story and undermines the idea that the child must disavow the maternal body and accept (therapeutic) language as the Law-of-the-Father, language which functions in the Gothic as the 'safety valve' between the subject and forbidden knowledge (Sedgwick 1980: 18). Hers is the typical Gothic narrative form Sedgwick identifies as having difficulty 'getting itself told [...] at every level' (14); introduced as an old and faded manuscript, it seeps through the masculine frame narratives in a protracted and dislocated manner which compounds the 'unspeakable' content, frustrating the reader with its 'muffled form', and 'despair about any direct use of language' (15). Notoriously impossible to decode, the governess subverts the hysteric's stifled voice to speak a narrative that is fluent in Gothic ambiguity and secrecy.

From the outset her story is coded as dangerous through an inventory of Gothic conventions, appearing as a manuscript 'in old faded ink and in the most beautiful hand' (like Tera's), having been sealed 'in a locked drawer' and 'not been out for years' (176). As in Jane Eyre, an earlier Gothic governess intertext concerned with the housing of desires and secrets, the Bluebeard trope of forbidden female knowledge kept secret by a masculine authority is established at the beginning of The Turn of the Screw, and the governess is positioned as a liability whom the act of storytelling attempts to control. However, her own
self-reflexive positioning in the Gothic knowledge dynamic, as she questions ‘was there a “secret” at Bly – a mystery of Udolpho or an insane, an unmentionable relative in unsuspected confinement?’ (192), simultaneously confirms her own status as dangerous, the insane presence she detects, and undercuts the notion of knowledge as a male preserve. Like Jane’s insane alter ego Bertha Mason to whom the governess covertly refers, who speaks with howls and cackles rather than words, the governess’ spectral manifestations (that is, both the ghosts of Quint and Jessel and her own status as servant/maternal spectre) threaten to raze the patriarchal homestead.

However, unlike Bertha who is eventually dispatched so Jane and Rochester can marry to provide a conventional realist happy ending, the governess, set free through the act of storytelling, does not immediately die and so her potential to violate the patriarchal order and its children lives on, as the masculine framing narratives which envelop her account are absent at the close of the text. This abortive framing, which we have already encountered in ‘Carmilla’, creates a structure which resembles the female genitalia and manipulates the very textual structure into the womb space from which the governess’ gaze is issued.

**The Narrative Womb**

While the *Turn of the Screw* is a story told by men, the structural effect of the text is a maternal one, as the two frame narratives which introduce but do not conclude the governess’ account become a vessel for her gaze which escapes through the opened ending. There are two male narrators who frame the governess’ story, the external unnamed frame narrator who hears the story one Christmas Eve from Douglas, the internal frame narrator
who has since died. These frames, which desire to circumscribe and control the governess’ hysterical narrative through an enveloping realist structure, are completely absent at the end of the text, leaving the governess’ maternal gaze free to wander and manifest elsewhere, and as I show it surfaces in The Orphanage and The Others. Her story lies at the centre of the text which becomes a labyrinth the reader must negotiate, a palimpsest with each frame a layer to be peeled back. As James noted with bewilderment, ‘she has “authority”, which is a good deal to have given her’ (1934: 174).

Even these male frame narratives, which evoke the quintessential Victorian gent’s drawing room as ‘the story held us, round the fire’ with female companions dismissed (175, 176), are intruded upon by the maternal in a prefatory tale which connects the spectral to maternal visual agency, of ‘an appearance, a dreadful kind, to a little boy sleeping in the room with his mother, and waking her up in the terror of it; waking her up not to dissipate his dread and soothe him to sleep again, but to encounter also herself, before she had succeeded in doing so, the same sight that shocked him’ (175). Although it is men who tell and hear the story, it is the departed women who reacted to the prospect of the governess’ tale, couched as ‘dreadful’ with ‘nothing touch[ing] it [...] for general uncanny ugliness and horror and pain’, with sheer delight: ‘Oh, how delicious!’ (177-178). While this exaggerated emotional response prefigures the governess’ hysteria, it also implies a female appetite for infanticidal Goths.

Before the story begins it is beset by a devouring female readership hungry for plots of child abuse and infanticide, an aspect of the Gothic discussed further in Part Three with Flowers in the Attic, and the text climaxes with infanticide and the maternal gaze’s triumph over linguistic, narrative and architectural patriarchal structures. Yet, what is more
disturbing than the ending, in which the governess has the smothered body of Miles in her clutches, is the blindness towards her crime in Douglas’ sympathetic and sentimental narration. He explains to his audience that ‘I liked her extremely and am glad to this day that she liked me too’, and defends her as ‘a most charming person’, ‘the most agreeable woman I’ve ever known in her position’ and furthermore ‘worthy of any wherever’ (177). The governess’ mask of heroic maternal benevolence as the self-professed ‘expiatory victim’ of the trauma (201) corrupts Douglas’ perception, as he is blinded to her true nature by his love for her. As Luna explains, this is characteristic of the maternal gaze: ‘The suffering mother does so not out of devotion to her child but because it makes her admirable in the eyes of others. Such hypocrisy encourages women to cleave to victim status and retain power over the child through a guilt that is unwarranted and unviable’ (80). The suffocating mother becomes the suffering one through the masquerade of maternal martyrdom, exploiting the victim-position she fashions for herself, a problematic version of the ‘victim feminism’ Diane Hoeveler describes as ‘an ideology of female power through pretended and staged weakness’ more frequently associated with the Radcliffean heroine (7).

The amorous male gaze hoodwinked by the maternal is exposed as impotent, and this impotency is compounded by the failure of the male framing narratives at the close of the text. Having read her transformation of Bly into the womb, the reader remains in the dark about the fate of the governess, and to remember what happened to her we must go back to the beginning and re-read that ‘she has been dead these twenty years’, but that despite her crime she succeeded in gaining employment as governess to Douglas’ younger sister (176). This masculine narrative failure recalls that of ‘Carmilla’, and the act of going back to the beginning - of the story and our own maternal beginnings - creates a circularity
of reading which perpetuates the maternal gaze, and like Le Fanu’s maternal vampire, the
governess’ maternal gaze first appeared as a serialisation in *Collier’s Weekly* from January to
April in 1898, a format which prolongs and perpetuates the maternal gaze.

The governess’ narrative, which Kiyoon Jang notes is literally one of a ‘*ghostwriter*’
(15), demands this retrograde turn and performs what Jacques Derrida terms ‘invagination’,
the act of folding the narrative back in on itself to rupture boundaries and limits and upset
the laws of the monolithic clean and linear realist narrative. This act of inverting the
narrative forms a structure which mirrors the female genitalia, the conduit of the maternal
gaze, creating an ‘internal pocket larger than the whole’, and ‘the outcome of this division
and of this abounding remains as singular as it is limitless’ (59). The governess’ spectral gaze
harboured by her narrative womb escapes from the mouths of men, and invaginating the
governess’ story renders it ‘interminable [...] unarrestable, inerrable, and insatiably
recurring’, a direct challenge to patriarchal order and logic; it is a narrative ‘terrible for those
who, in the name of the law, require that order reign in the account, for those who want to
know [...] “exactly” how this happens’ (70). Manipulating the story into this maternal
structure perpetuates the ambiguity of its content, echoing the unknown aspects of the
maternal reproductive system which evaded nineteenth-century medical scrutiny and
recalling the wandering womb which issues the hysterical gaze that desires the child. Like
Bly, the narrative is a structural womb in which the maternal gaze at its centre enacts its
desires under cover of ambiguity manifested through the manipulation of hysterical
symptoms of visual, linguistic and narrative disturbance. The textual body becomes the
maternal body, the narrative structure, the gazing womb.
The reader is caught in the maternal infinite and it is through the act of (re)reading and enacting this movement of circularity that we eidetically manifest the governess’ maternal panopticon, and reading the text equals a participation in its infanticidal content, which although it may be repulsive to us nonetheless compels our complicity (Felman: 97). Felman contends that not only do we participate in the text when we read it, through attempting to decipher it, to rescue it, the critical heritage only succeeds in repeating the governess’ own attempts to ‘save’ the children: ‘Through its very reading, the text, so to speak, acts itself out. As a reading effect, this inadvertent “acting out” is indeed uncanny: whichever way the reader turns, he can but be turned by the text, he can but perform it by repeating it’ (101). Each reading which attempts to accord the governess a finite position and divine ‘the truth’ feeds her ambiguity and the text’s impenetrability, and while Beth Newman suggests that readers perform a metatextual gaze which makes the governess ‘easily appropriated as an object of a critical gaze, a relentless scrutiny that seeks to expose [her] more fully than she confessionally exposes herself’ (63), the failure of the critical heritage to understand the governess, locked as it is in an intellectual battle between the ghostly and the psychological, confirms the governess’ panoptic position as all-seeing yet inscrutable, invisible.

Like the circularity of returning back to the beginning and the invaginated narrative, her story traps the reader into repeating it for her, and although in a more measured manner than Stoker, we see that James is also compelled to write the maternal narrative, despite outwardly dismissing it in a letter to Dr Louis Waldstein as ‘a wanton little tale’ which made him ‘blush to see real substance read into [it]’ (October 21st 1898). Perhaps this was due to the provenance of the novella, a ghost story regaled by the Archbishop of Canterbury
Edward White Benson, himself the frame narrator of a ‘mere, vague, undetailed faint sketch’ told to him ‘(very badly and imperfectly), by a lady who had no art of relation, and no clearness’ (entry in James’ notebook, January 12th 1895). This disdainful remark about the unknown lady’s authority echoes fin de siècle anxieties concerning the New Woman and female sexuality which pathologised women writers as degenerate and hysterical, and James himself lamented that ‘the masculine tone is passing out of the world’, that ‘it is a feminine, nervous, hysterical, chattering, canting age’ (in Showalter 1985: 146).

Yet, despite deploring these characteristics, The Turn of the Screw demonstrates James’ own compulsion to write a hysterical narrative which manipulates patriarchal modes of medical surveillance, undercuts the ‘masculine tone’ and ultimately privileges the maternal gaze. Vanessa Dickerson argues that while the ghostly enabled the female writer to explore her ‘in-betweenness’ and the tensions between Victorian codes of femininity and literary professionalism, the work of male writers was written ‘in assurance [...] from a hegemonic position in a society in which the masculine ways of knowing, thinking and doing were automatically acknowledged as best’, and that only women’s ghost stories ‘truly treated the return of the repressed and the dispossessed’ (7-8). Yet, it is precisely because James is writing within the establishment that The Turn of the Screw is so disruptive, being a tale which draws on masculine medical regimes of diagnosis, surveillance and control, only to subvert and destroy them with the hysterical maternal gaze.

As Borossa writes about Charcot’s practice, while hysterics were encouraged to discuss their symptoms they were not always listened to, and anything which challenged the doctor’s diagnosis was dismissed, or branded as malingering (20, 27, 28). The loss of speech was symptomatic of hysteria in two distinct ways, as the somatic reaction to a past trauma
and the doctor’s silencing of the subject. The female patient is trapped into hysteria through the psychoanalytic process, as Freud’s most famous case study Dora is presented as ‘Fragments of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria’, her narrative fractured and in parts absented before it has even been read: ‘The hysterical did have stories to tell, but these – heard but not engaged with – constituted more symptoms [...] to categorise’ (Borossa: 20). Language became the weapon with which patriarchy marginalised the hysterical through diagnosis, and furthermore as Showalter demonstrates, compels symptoms from the patient, as the ‘the globus hystericus, which doctors had interpreted as the rising of the womb, may have been a physical manifestation of this choked-off speech’ (1985: 154).

Like the governess, Anna O.’s ‘deep functional disorganisation of language’, where ‘her speech lost all grammatical structure, the syntax was missing, as was the conjugation of verbs’, accompanied her hallucinations, which included her hair and laces transforming into black snakes and her father’s head replaced with a skull, symptoms which were ‘permanently removed’ through the analytical act of ‘talking through’ (Freud and Breuer: 28-29, 39). For Anna O., whose symptoms disappeared through ‘the talking cure’ (a neologism she coined), Symbolic language as the Law-of-the-Father succeeded in suppressing the visual and linguistic rebellions of hysteria. Unlike Anna O., the governess’ hallucinations are both manifested and galvanised through her cryptic language, and moreover proliferated through the re-telling of her tale. Whereas for Freudians telling the story is a cathartic process which through the linear master narrative extinguishes hysteria, the governess’ narration is an ambiguous and convoluted textual act which confirms the hysteria that continues to enthrall readers.
Her maternal gaze and the spectral panopticism of her visions is spoken through the breakdown of language and, whereas Priscilla Walton reads the governess’ stilted narrative as symptomatic of being ‘displaced and deferred’ through the use of Symbolic language which ‘does not accord women a position from which to speak’ (255), this sustains the assumption that the governess is performing within, and acquiescing to, the patriarchal order. Instead, understood as the maternal gaze in search of the child erupting into the text, the governess’ hysterical infection and atrophying of language is not a struggle towards articulation but a wilful refusal to express and expose herself, and Luna connects the emergence of the maternal gaze with the disintegration of Symbolic language which protects against the maternal body. Thus the governess’ stilted and fissured ‘unspeakable’ narrative attests to the supremacy of the maternal gaze, where ‘at the most voyeuristically pitched moment, the word fails’ (45). Whether hysterically or physically, seeing ghosts which others cannot weaves a spectral web of the maternal gaze that defies verbal explanation, and so language as ‘the means by which death is kept at bay’ ‘becomes mortified’ in the thrall of the maternal gaze (63, 45). So it becomes that in *The Turn of the Screw* the gaze is the death of Symbolic language, as it is mobilised through the semiotics of the womb.

**Trapped in the Umbilical Web**

The governess’ frustrating language is a conduit for her panoptic maternal gaze which searches for the children, as her ghostly accounts insist that a presence watches the house, but one which is invisible to everyone else. As Salecl and Žižek explain, along with the (maternal) gaze the voice is a Lacanian objet a, a residue of the polymorphous pre-Oedipal jouissance which travels with the child into, but has not yet been sublimated by, the
paternal order and its linguistic codes of signification (3). The maternal vernacular which accompanies the gaze is one which does not obey the rules of language as laid down by the paternal Law, and we see this in the governess’ manipulation of linguistic, syntactical and semantic logic to create a dialogue of ambiguity in which both characters and readers are caught, as meaning is constantly and futilely sought. The maternal gaze and voice collude to transform the paternal order into a realm of maternal surveillance to which the child is fatally subjected and, mocking the hysterical model, the governess’ voice conspires with the gaze as objet a. Meaning is muffled by her narrative as her voice weaves an ‘umbilical web’ that traps the children (as well as Douglas, James and readers), which Denis Vasse (1974) and latterly Michel Chion (1999) have theorised is the pre-natal mother’s omnipotent voice weaving around the child in the womb a ‘network of connections’, ‘allowing no chance of autonomy to the subject’ (Chion: 61, 62).

Vasse contends that there is a primal relationship shared by the mother’s voice and the umbilical cord, both of which he sees as objet a, and that once the cord is cut the navel becomes the wound which ‘inscribes at the very centre of the infant the mark of desire [...] that he experiences as a member of his species’ (in Chion: 61). Developing Vasse’s theory, Chion suggests that the voice ‘imaginarily take[s] up the role of umbilical cord’ (62), and hearing the mother’s voice draws the subject back to umbilical web of the womb, wherein, like the gaze, it was experienced as nebulous and omniscient. Consequently the objet a of the maternal voice is a ‘subversion of closure’ (ibid.) which reopens the maternal body, and the womb and the gaze it contains, up to the child. The maternal gaze and voice are connected through their womb origins, and the governess speaks her gaze through her accounts of the ghosts, which create an enveloping sense of spectral surveillance to which
the other inhabitants at Bly are subjected yet cannot themselves perceive, caught as they are in the Gothic cobweb of her visions. As Chion explains, the maternal voice controls the visual register as it ‘creates the desire to see what is going on’ (141), but this desire is never satisfied as the governess explains ‘the more I saw the less they would’ (204). Expressing her belief in the ghosts through her hysterical exploitation of language proportionally decreases the command others have over their own field of vision, as language and narrative are commandeered to become the conduits for the all-encompassing maternal gaze.

Because her voice projects and proliferates the maternal gaze in this way the governess also resists embodiment through language and maintains her own spectrality, as Chion argues that ‘real embodiment comes only with the simultaneous presentation of the visible body with the audible voice’ (144). As the governess’ maternal gaze is manifested through several different bodies, sentient and spectral, visible and invisible, it resists control through language, as only one of its bodies speaks, and only then in an ambiguous and fissured manner. Her spoken account of the ghosts creates a spectral panopticon of the maternal gaze, and her perversion of language as the means through which to manifest the ghosts exposes its own inability to circumscribe the maternal body and understand what Isobel Armstrong terms ‘the hermeneutics of the womb’ (256). Like the hysterics’ narratives documented by Freud and Breuer, the governess’ tale problematically depicts a trauma which the reader cannot know to be truth or fiction, but which nevertheless precipitates extreme consequences.

This means that the governess’ hysteria as conduit for the maternal gaze is not an act of breaking down, or breaking out, but breaking in. Feminist post-structuralist scholarship contends that the female hysterical is aware of the true nature of the paternal order as a sham,
which precariously exists through language, a hollow structure predicated on lack, on absence, nothing. As Bronfen explains, the hysteric’s symptoms become a ‘message in code [.... about] the vulnerability of the Symbolic’, which she delivers because she ‘is so painfully aware of [...] precisely another law that dictates an individual’s fantasies and symptoms; namely, the inevitable yet also inaccessible traumatic impact that she [...] can never fully repress nor directly articulate’ (1998: 11). Another manifestation of Deutsch’s psychic charge of pregnancy which remains with the child, hysteria is the ‘psychical trace’ of the womb, the indelible imprinting of the mother onto the child’s subconscious (Freud and Breuer: 271). As we will see with the governess’ and Flora’s hystericisation of language, the hysteric’s ‘bodily speech’ remembers the maternal connection which existed before the Symbolic linguistic economy, and so her message is coded and indecipherable because she is communicating through and about the trauma of being wrenched from the mother’s body, using the semiotics of the maternal body to do so: ‘It is the body of the mother, after all, which is the main stumbling block for the female hysteric’ (Eluned Summers-Bremner: 188, 191).

As such, the governess’ performance of hysteria foreshadows, in part, the hysteric-as-rebel, theorised by feminists like Cixous and Irigaray, whose symptoms are a lament for the lost maternal body. The inconsistent, fissured and ambiguous narratives of hysteria Freud and Breuer documented circumscribe the libidinal space of the maternal body which exists beyond linguistic signification, the Kristevan semiotic of the ‘primal mapping of the body’ which is a ‘precondition of language’ (1982: 72). In this space Symbolic language as a signifying process does not yet exist; instead sounds and orality express the pre-Oedipal primary processes which occur in the maternal dyad. These ‘basic pulsions’ as Toril Moi describes them are gathered in what Kristeva identifies as the chora, a term ‘from the Greek
for enclosed space, womb’ which she takes from Plato’s *Timaeus*. Like Plato’s understanding of the wandering womb as the mother of hysteria, the chora exists as a nebulous and unquantifiable space, ‘a wholly provisional articulation that is essentially mobile and constituted of movements and their ephemeral stases’ and which resists external, paternal, scrutiny and delineation: ‘Neither model nor copy, the *chora* precedes and underlies figuration and thus specularisation, and is analogous only to vocal or kinetic rhythm’ (Kristeva 1984: 94).

Once the child has split from the chora – the womb - its semiotic experience must be repressed to accept the Law-of-the-Father, but as Moi explains the chora can erupt into Symbolic language as untranslatable ‘pulsional *pressure* [...] as contradictions, meaninglessness, disruption, silences and absence in the symbolic language’ (161). Like the ghosts the womb cannot be seen but is evoked through hysterical language, which speaks the semiotics of the maternal body, the ‘acoustic fingers’ with which the mother marks the infant as a future hysteric, leaving another maternal impression (Christopher Bollas: 43). Echoing the undulations of suspense and relief which pattern the Gothic narrative structure, the pulsions of the hysteric’s semiotic speech perform a textual orgasm, a *jouissance* created by desire for the mother’s body, not the phallus. The very act of reading the Gothic becomes a hysterical one.

The governess’ semiotic narrative articulates both her own maternal gaze and the desire to be consumed by her mother’s, and there is a marked absence of the governess’ mother in the text. While mentioning her parson father periodically, alluding to ‘disturbing letters from home, where things were not going well’ (194), and detailing her family history for the children - brothers, sisters, even the cat and dog and ‘the old women of our village’
(227) - her mother is non-existent, yet her descriptions of matronly Mrs Grose and her ‘motherly breast’ into which the governess ‘sobbed in despair’ (209) lament for the lost mother. The governess’ hysteric language speaks both her own remembrance of the maternal body and the expression of her own body as maternal, and the gaze of her empty womb mimics that of her mother in search of the child it desires. Haunted Bly embodies the panoptic chora-as-womb in search of the child, which has travelled with the governess and infected the household upon her arrival, and reading The Turn of the Screw becomes an act of participation and complicity with the semiotic, a departure back into the maternal space which renders the reader who has endured her textual labyrinth addled and confused on re-entry into the Symbolic once the book is closed.

This idea of reconnecting with the semiotic chora through reading echoes Hurley’s concept of the ‘sickening vortex’ experienced when reading a Gothic text which, like The Turn of the Screw, refuses to be cathartic (1996: 51). Hurley argues that some fin de siècle texts ‘provide only partial closure or none at all’, a denial of narrative integrity which means that the threat within the text’s content is not safely curtailed, and compels a bodily reaction more powerful than catharsis, an abject, nauseous one which reveals the reader’s own body as ‘phantasmic and changeful’, and ‘throws the subject back into the immediate and unmistakable experience of [their] own body’ (ibid.). Reading these texts reminds us of the abject maternal dyad, as they ‘console the reader with bodily sensation’ and offer ‘terrible and thrilling reconfigurations of identity and meaning’ (ibid.). Thus the abject Gothic narrative resists the linguistic and structural models of the Law-of-the-Father and returns us back to the semiotic chora, the dizzying maternal abyss.

The governess’ disturbance of language becomes the imperfect translation of the
semiotics of the womb, the mother tongue which cannot be represented to the acculturated subject; consequently that which is impossible to translate is represented by lack, and her narrative is punctured with fractures, fissures and gaps. This rupturing is the governess echoing the breakage of the pre-Oedipal dyad violently performed through the cutting of the umbilical cord which roots us to our mothers; her hysteria voices the trauma and severance of birth, a voicing which becomes an act of mockery as she exploits this notion of fracturing and absence to keep knowledge back and deny it at the crucial moment. Her narrative corresponds to Armstrong’s concept of caesura, which draws on the psychoanalyst Wilf Bion’s work to show how the severance of being born is a breakage which is translated textually into caesurae which obstructs Symbolic understanding of a text’s pre-Oedipal echoes. For Armstrong this is based on an infinite spatiality – the abyss – of the womb, rather than Symbolic linear temporality. Caesurae are ‘the breaks which are both barriers and disjunctions and which enable thought’, as logic ‘is not temporal, even though statements have to follow one another. It is spatial’ (253). In The Turn of the Screw the most acute articulation of the caesura is the glyph of the dash ‘—’, a textual navel which writes the break from the mother’s body and which repeatedly interrupts the governess’ narrative, creating ambiguity and (mis)understanding through which her spectral visions thrive and which reconnects her back to the maternal body of Mrs Grose:

She gave with her apron a great wipe to her mouth. ‘Then I’ll stand by you. We’ll see it out.’

‘We’ll see it out!’ I ardently echoed, giving her my hand to make it a vow.
Chapter Two – Subverting Hysteria and Surveillance

She held me there a moment, then whisked up her apron again with her detached hand. ‘Would you mind, miss, if I used the freedom—’

‘To kiss me? No!’ I took the good creature in my arms.

(188-189)

Like her visions her fractured hysterical language is an ‘echo from the womb’ (255) but an echo which must be decoded out of its Symbolic mistranslation in order to be understood. Consequently, her hysterical narrative is not the echo of Symbolic language which the female subject cannot fully grasp as Irigaray understands it, but the authentic echo of the mother: ‘Empty vessel, hollowness, hollow caves reverberating [...] unseen and chthonic, the echo’s element is space [...] the wound of echo is the womb, empty until it receives something’ (Armstrong: 249-250). Punctuated with caesurae the governess’ narrative leaves ‘semiotic traces – slips, parapraxes, puns, formal disruption, distortion, deformations and disfigurations’ (112) which mimic the break between mother and child and transform it into a way to keep knowledge, the ‘truth’ of the text and the womb to herself, resisting patriarchal interference which demands that ‘the mother’s body must be endlessly epistemologically penetrable’ (243).

The hysterical caesurae which punctuate and puncture the body of the text are wounds of the maternal, evoking Bronfen’s understanding of the navel as the site of the hysteric’s trauma and the origin of anxiety concerning lack which exposes ‘the vulnerability of the symbolic [...] the vulnerability of identity’ (1998: xiii). The navel supersedes the phallus as the linchpin of anxiety, and David Sigler shows how Freud and Lacan struggled with the navel as the point of origin, as it signifies ‘an irreducible mystery, one that cannot
be unravelled by psychoanalysis', and embodies the point ‘beyond which analysis can never go’ (23), and quotes Lacan’s confession that the navel is ‘ultimately the unknown centre – which is simply ... that gap’ where ‘something happens’ (in Sigler: 34). The navel is the body’s caesura, a mark which connotes a disruption and disconnection, a scar from enmeshment with the now-absent maternal body, a scar which signifies the womb and the maternal gaze it issues. The navel threatens the dissolution of Symbolic narrative through ‘indefinite endings’, ‘an unravelling in frayed ends, an unwinding beyond teleology and historical direction that simultaneously ties matters in further knots, a grand narrative (dis)entangling’ (Botting 1999: 104). Echoing Chion’s contention that the mother’s voice is an invisible umbilical cord which binds the child back to the womb, Bronfen defines hysterical episodes as ‘navel moments’, when the trauma of maternal separation and the reality of Symbolic fragility break our consciousness.

Here the aetiology of hysteria is re-located in the pre-Oedipal maternal body, which for the acculturated subject can only mean annihilation as the navel is essentially a hole which although it ‘perfectly simulates an opening with a designated aim [...] actually serves no purpose and leads nowhere’ (Bronfen: 4). Furthermore, while phallocentrism dictates that only female anatomy can bear the lack, the wound of the navel is universal; it is what Mieke Bal terms the democratic ‘scar of dependence on the mother’ (86). This scar becomes the fault line in the phallic economy, the emblem of a maternal wound(ing) which threatens to reopen, and through his clinical practice Juan-David Nasio has identified a womb fantasy where the male hysteric embodies the womb, ‘the fundamental fantasy in hysteria’ that ‘serves as a leitmotif pervading his existence’ (55-56).
Caesura in the governess’ hysterical narrative - her grammatical, structural and phenomenological navel moments - refer back to the womb and the gaze that it issues, and language as the foundation of paternal Law is manipulated and muted by the presence of the maternal gaze which produces the unreadability of the text. Received linguistic logic of grammar and syntax is sabotaged by the governess as her conversations – those she has with others and herself – weave an umbilical web of ambiguity and misunderstanding which mimics the hysteric’s script and exposes the impotency of paternal language to effectively express desire which is rooted to the maternal body. Whereas in the Symbolic contract words-as-signifiers attempt to fill the void between desire and meaning, the governess’ command of language, or more aptly lack thereof, implicitly demonstrates the true lack of language to articulate and circumscribe desire, and in turn regresses Bly back to the semiotic chora of the womb.

This is demonstrated through the governess’ perversion of received paternal language, to create tensions of meaning which allow the murderous maternal gaze to break into the narrative space. Reflecting that after learning about Miles’ mysterious expulsion from school she confided in Mrs Grose ‘more intimately than ever on the ground of my stupefaction, my general emotion: so monstrous was I so ready to pronounce it that such a child as had now been revealed to me should be under an interdict’ (188, my emphasis), the governess’ skewed syntax reveals the true monstrous nature of her maternal gaze which she masks with motherly concern. This semantic confusion occurs again when the women
euphemistically discuss Miss Jessel's departure:

[Mrs Grose] [....] She couldn't have stayed. Fancy it here – for a governess! And afterwards I imagined – and I still imagine. And what I imagine is dreadful'

[Governess] 'Not so dreadful as what I do'. (208–209)

Here the verb 'do' refers to the governess' own imagining of Miss Jessel's downfall, but the awkward pulsional rhythm of the sentence implies that the governess' own doings are far more destructive than those of her predecessor.

In the light of the text's infanticidal ending, these episodes of linguistic ambiguity are clues to the presence of the murderous maternal gaze which is spectral and inscrutable, as the governess repeatedly attests to the inability of language to translate what she sees: 'I scarce know how to put my story into words'; 'for a reason that I couldn't then have phrased'; 'I can say now neither what determined me nor what guided me', 'I can't express what followed' (204, 193, 216, 217). Having infected Mrs Grose with her 'infernal imagination' and 'made her a receptacle for lurid things' (227, 222), the illiterate housekeeper's command of language is equally problematic as she is reliant on others for communication with the outside world, which the governess wilfully denies:

'Do you mean you'll write-?' Remembering she couldn't, I caught myself up. 'How do you communicate?'
‘I tell the bailiff. He writes’
‘And should you like him to write our story?’ (238)

The governess similarly denies the children authority over their story, keeping back letters they wrote to their uncle to meditate on them: ‘They were too beautiful to be posted; I kept them myself; I have them all to this hour’ (230). Bly is transformed into a maternal textual body which resists male transcription, as ‘our story’ denies access to patriarchal intervention. ‘Cut off really together [...] united in our danger’, indulging in a ‘secret flurry [...] a discussion of mysteries’ ‘while the house slept’ (203, 221, 209), the governess initiates the housekeeper in her regime of maternal panopticm as the latter begins to privilege the visual register: ‘What she and I had virtually said to each other was that pretexts were useless now [...] the singular reticence of our communication was even more marked in the frank look she addressed me. “I’ll be hanged”, it said, “if I’ll speak!”’ (247; see Helen Killoran (1993) for an ambivalent reading of Mrs Grose, and Eric Solomon (1964) who argues the housekeeper encourages the governess’ hysteria to drive her from Bly and gain control over Flora).

The women communicate with ‘prodigious and gratified looks, obscure and roundabout allusions’ (183), a clandestine, visual dialogue of the Gothic unspeakable which the governess describes in terms of obscurity and blindness:

The element of the unnamed and untouched became, between us, greater than any other, and that so much avoidance couldn’t have been made successful without a great deal of tacit arrangement. It was as if, at moments, we
were perpetually coming into sight of subjects before which we must stop short, turning suddenly out of alleys that we perceived to be blind [....] there were times when it might have struck us that almost every branch of study or subject of conversation skirted forbidden ground. (227)

The forbidden nature of their unspoken understanding teases the reader as it is suspended in the paradox of being momentarily yet perpetually coming into sight, and so never being seen. Here the dominance of sight over language as a mode of signification resembles the sublime economy, characterised by the failure of language to express the magnitude of the spectacle. Like Tera, the governess’ maternal gaze subverts the gendered paternal sublime as it is the mother’s visions, the projections of her gaze, which petrify the household, and her voice which voices the visions is a ‘vocal medusa, both fascinating and fearsome’, which implicitly warns of the destructive power of her gaze (Kahane 1995: x).

In the case of the governess, her threat is doubly potent, as the inhabitants at Bly cannot see the spectres which terrorise them and so the maternal sublime is galvanised by the blindness she compels in others. In the frantic desire to understand the ghosts, language echoes and ricochets around Bly but never fully manifests to signify the speaker’s meaning, and Roger Luckhurst discusses how H.G. Wells suffered from this tension between language and vision after reading the governess’ story: ‘He complained that he had had to take “one or two walks and several hours by the fire, and a night [...] pursuing the obvious remedy into blind alleys”’; ‘he sent exasperated requests for clarification of the somehow ungraspable governess’ (242). In reading the governess’ narrative Wells was compelled to perpetuate the
hysterical model, as his anxiety regarding her inscrutability is exhibited through his physicality and movement, his fitfulness.

The governess’ spectral maternal gaze ‘evokes a time prior to language’ which reminds the reader of ‘his own ineffectuality as a human being in the face of one who remembers his inarticulate primitivism’ (Luna: 18). Exploiting the notion of the unspeakable, her determined inarticulation collapses language as the barrier between the subject and the maternal body, relocating its power into her gaze. That others do not see the ghosts attests to the potency of the maternal gaze which does, and invokes a muteness in the children regarding the spectres which is broken only at the climactic scene of Miles’ death where he utters cryptically ‘Peter Quint – you devil!’ (266). The reader does not know if ‘you devil’ is acknowledging the presence of Quint or reacting to the governess’ violent smothering, and so the ambiguity occasioned by the failure of language endures. Indeed, having been exposed to the maternal gaze and the chaos of the chora it is the signifying act of naming which kills Miles. However, while Miles is fatally enmeshed in the governess’ web, it is the hysteria she invokes in Flora which attests to the endurance of the maternal gaze.

**The Daughter’s Disease**

At the beginning of her narrative the governess confesses that ‘to watch, teach, “form” little Flora would too evidently be the making of a happy and useful life’ (182), and it is this hysterical ‘forming’ she subjects the girl to through her scrutiny. Following their confrontation at Lake Azof when she sees Miss Jessel and demands a confession from Flora,
the child becomes excessively emotional, heralding the onset of her own hysteria:

She was literally, she was hideously hard; she had turned common and almost ugly. 'I don't know what you mean. I see nobody. I see nothing. I never have. I think you're cruel. I don't like you!' Then, after this deliverance, which might have been that of a vulgarly pert little girl in the street, she hugged Mrs Grose more closely and buried in her skirts the dreadful little face. In this position she launched in her most furious wail. 'Take me away, take me away — oh, take me away from her!'

'From me?' I panted.

'From you — from you!' she cried. (250)

After this outburst Flora's psychological and physical condition begins to deteriorate, 'so markedly feverish that an illness was perhaps at hand', and what follows is her own perversion of language, as 'the wretched child had spoken as if she had got from some outside source each of her stabbing little words':

She shook her head with dignity. 'I've HEARD—!'  

'Heard?'

'From that child—horrors! There!' she sighed with tragic relief. 'On my honour, miss, she says things—!'  

[...]  

'She's so horrible?'  

I saw my colleague scarce knew how to put it. 'Really shocking.'
‘And about me?’
‘About you, miss—since you must have it. It’s beyond everything, for a young lady; and I can’t think wherever she must have picked up.’

‘The appalling language she applied to me? I can, then!’ I broke in with a laugh that was doubtless significant enough. (254)

Another of Anna O.’s symptoms, the acquisition of a previously unknown language is typical of hysteria and here Flora’s profanities become manifestations of the violent mother tongue which is inadmissible in the Symbolic linguistic economy governed by ‘the logic of the same’ (Moi: 134). Flora’s behaviour only confirms for the governess her own righteousness – ‘it so justifies me!’ (254) - and galvanises the maternal gaze which drives Flora to madness. For Flora the sight of the governess is too much to bear, and she wants ‘never again to so much as look’ at her (252).

Although Freud argued that the daughter’s copying of hysterical symptoms conformed to the Oedipal model as it ‘signifies a hostile desire on the girl’s part to take the mother’s place, and [...] expresses her object-love towards her father’ (1921: 106), this cannot be the case with Flora and the governess, as the dynamic at Bly in which the uncle-as-father-figure is absent does not follow the Oedipal dynamic. Instead the orphan Flora’s outbursts are symptomatic of the trauma of being subjected to the maternal gaze which reminds her of the lost maternal body, and so she ventriloquises the mother tongue as the governess has ‘formed’ her into a hysteric by exposing her to her own performance of the condition. This exposure and infection mimic the heredity aspect of the disease, as Victorian psychiatric
discourse theorised that it was passed down the maternal line. Flora’s language, her safety valve against the maternal body, is destroyed by the governess and she is returned to the ‘inarticulate primitivism’ which characterises the pre-Oedipal infant in the thrall of the maternal gaze, cementing her captivity in a verbal loop whereby she is a receptacle doomed to repeat the mother’s words (Luna: 18).

Whereas feminist scholarship has rewritten the feminisation of hysteria in pseudo-positive terms as the ‘daughter’s disease’, a revolt against the social-sexual and intellectual limitations of Victorian bourgeois patriarchal culture (Mitchell 1984: 308), Flora is coerced into hysteria as a regime of rebellion by the maternal gaze. Like Miles Flora is dispossessed, not of her body but of the paternal order, as whereas the governess’ hysteria is a performance, the child’s is real, and her bad language confines her within the trap of hysteria which disenfranchises her from patriarchy.

**The Look of Love: Hysteria, Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy and the Unimpeachable Gaze of Maternal Benevolence**

In *The Turn of the Screw* the maternal gaze brazenly mimics the symptomatology of the Oedipal model of hysteria. Co-opting hysterical signifiers which medical men pursued in the desire to diagnose and control female bodies, the governess exploits the disease to her own advantage. For Charcot and Freud hysterical narratives were proof of their diagnostic prowess, and the talking cure was not so much that as the patient talking herself into a corner, as fractured narratives and hysterical babblings were tailored to corroborate Charcot’s diagnoses, and confirmed for Freudian psychoanalysis the Oedipus complex as the organising factor of the unconscious. In response, the governess’ wilful (dis)possession of
language galvanises her unspeakable spectral regime of the maternal gaze and mimics hysterical visions to reclaim hysteria as manifestation of the empty womb’s desire for the absent child.

Understood as the spectral panopticon of the maternal gaze, the governess’ visions recast hysteria as a maternal anxiety, experienced by the governess-as-mother and reproduced through the maternal line through Flora. Hysteria as a maternal anxiety is also written in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ (1892), where the narrator, confined in a nursery to undergo the ‘rest cure’ after the birth of her baby, hallucinates ‘creeping women’ with ‘strangled heads and bulbous eyes’ trapped in the pattern of the wallpaper which ‘strangles them off and turns them upside down, and makes their eyes white’ (34, 35, 30). While ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ is regarded as a feminist masterpiece which expresses maternal ambivalence (Fleenor: 227), Carol Davison argues this ‘den[ies] the narrator’s concern for the child from whom she is separated’ (68), the ‘dear baby’ (14) whom her husband prevents her from seeing. Thus, while nineteenth-century hysteria narratives have typically been viewed through the Oedipal lens, ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ writes a post-natal depression narrative which, like The Turn of the Screw, suggests that hysteria is caused by maternal separation.

The governess’ performance of hysteria also mimics and exposes the fetishisation of symptomatology which characterised late nineteenth-century medical discourses (and more recently those of feminist reappropriation), enabling her to consume the child through symptoms psychiatrists so obsessively stalked through the female psyche. Like Lucy Audley, a former governess and the anti-heroine of Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s Sensational Lady Audley’s Secret (1862), who readily pronounces herself to suffer from hereditary insanity to
avoid being tried for her crimes of bigamy and attempted murder, the governess’ behaviour in *The Turn of the Screw* exploits the exoneration which attends hysteria (Showalter 1985: 72). There is also Douglas’ beatification of the since deceased governess and her own moral righteousness to consider, as his impotent frame narrative betrays a romantic infatuation that refuses to acknowledge her crimes and instead implicates the uncle as preying on the ‘fluttered, anxious girl out of a Hampshire vicarage’, citing ‘the moral’ of the story ‘which was of course the seduction exercised by the splendid young man’ (178, 180).

This absolution echoes the governess’ own reflections in which she fashions herself as protectress, viewing Bly as ‘being almost as lost as a handful of passengers in a great drifting ship’ in which she places herself as ‘strangely at the helm’, bestowing upon herself the role of saviour and martyr, as she proclaims ‘they had nothing but me’, the ‘expiatory victim’ (184, 203, 201). This masquerade of maternal benevolence creates a blindness to her true intent and the maternal gaze slips by undetected, as readers are encouraged to meditate on the terrible nature of Quint and Jessel’s relationships with the children, diverting attention from her own abuse. Similarly, episodes of physical contact with Miles couched in the language of adult romantic love, as she likens them to ‘some young couple’ ‘on their wedding journey’ (259, 223), are ignored in favour of ‘things terrible and unguessable and that sprang from dreadful passages of intercourse in the past’ (230) shared by Miles and Flora with the dead servants, and Elton Smith emphasises the sexual subtext of this ‘too free’ relationship which has corrupted the children, yet does not explore the governess’ own inappropriate behaviour towards Miles, himself distracted by her ‘heroic self-image’ (127). The governess’ acts of inducing Flora’s hysterical response and her fatal/foetal embrace of
Miles are overshadowed by her spectres and the impossibility of interpretation that they present.

This masquerade of benevolence manifests most disturbingly in the governess’ fantasy where Miles is a patient in a children’s hospital whom she watches over: ‘I would have given [...] all I possessed on earth really to be the nurse or the sister of the charity who might have helped to cure him’ (240). The vulnerable or sick child gratifies the maternal gaze in that not only is possessing the child made easier through its own weakness and the heightened surveillance the child’s vulnerability demands, in doing so the bearer of the gaze is perceived by others like Douglas as the loving, compassionate and sacrificing mother-figure. For the nineteenth-century criminal anthropologist Cesare Lombroso and his co-author Guglielmo Ferrero, maternal altruism was linked to hysteria, as compassion and the ‘spirit of abnegation, a desire for sacrifice’ could be ‘a by-product of hysterical excitement’ (70). Maternity as ‘the characteristic function of the female and of the woman’ is ‘an eminently altruistic function’ from which she ‘derives nearly all of her organic and psychic variability’ (ibid.). This altruistic drive was a female, and for Lombroso and Ferrero maternal, preserve:

An excitement of the psychic centres of the cortex, provoked by hysteria, expresses itself in a spirit of abnegation and sacrifice [...] Hysteria, the twin of epilepsy, sometimes gives birth to crime in woman, but never to genius. One might say that altruism in women is the equivalent of genius in men. (ibid.)
Altruism is seen as the highest achievement for women, and although Lombroso and Ferrero associate maternity with compassion there is the implication that the maternal function, like the maternal gaze, thrives on the weakness of the vulnerable child, as a woman’s altruistic impulse is stimulated by witnessing suffering: ‘For woman, each sight of weakness revives those tender sentiments aroused by [her] infant; this makes compassion a descendent of the maternal impulse [.... in which] compassion and cruelty coexist’ (69, 71).

With the maternal gaze altruism is an act which perpetuates the smokescreen of selflessness and sacrifice by which patriarchy continues to be hoodwinked, and so in The Turn of the Screw the governess’ visions as a performance of hysteria enable her to create an atmosphere of vulnerability in which she can act altruistically and so ‘cleave the victim status’ (Luna: 80), a self-appointed position of masochism which affords her both power and sympathy.

This dynamic resembles that of Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy (MSBP), where the subject causes illness or injury to another in order to gain attention for him- or herself from the medical community and loved ones. Although since the late twentieth century clinical diagnosis has largely rejected the term ‘hysteria’ in favour of terms like ‘borderline personality disorder’ (Borossa: 63), recent scholarship identifies a link between hysteria as a psychosomatic disorder and MSBP, as Christine Klebes and Susan Fey confirm that ‘mothers with MSBP have been diagnosed as persons with hysteria, sociopathy, and narcissistic or borderline personality disorders’ (94). Anna Motz also discusses how MSBP often manifests as abuse perpetrated by mothers and mother-figures against children, and like the governess women use ‘symbolic maternal roles’ as they are ‘idealised in such a way as to mask the opportunity for cruelty and perversion that they afford’ (59). As well as mimicking the hysteric’s case study, the governess also displays symptoms of MSBP and under the guise of
the concerned and selfless caregiver - perpetuated by Douglas - she kills Miles and induces psychological trauma in Flora.

In particular, her belief that the ghosts want to harm the children displays symptoms of the ‘doctor addict’ sufferer, where ‘mothers seem genuinely convinced that the child is ill, to the extent that this belief approaches delusional intensity. Such mothers may also hold paranoid, suspicious beliefs and may have personality disorders’ (Motz: 62). Thus, MSBP can be viewed as the hystericisation of the child as the mother manifests the symptoms of illness through their body, as opposed to her own. This is seen with the governess, as believing the children are possessed allows her to project to others that they are endangered and attempt to save them, thus garnering admiration from Douglas. Through this process of abuse masked by delusional altruism she has succeeded in hystericising Flora, whose feral behaviour and bad language only confirm for the governess the ghosts’ malevolent influence, and it peaks with her smothering of Miles, as she believes she has triumphed in dispossessing the child’s body of the ghostly Quint.

MSBP as an apparatus of the maternal gaze is discussed below in relation to the filmic adaptation The Orphanage, where we see Laura privileging and collecting ill and dying children, and it is also pertinent to the The Turn of the Screw, because diagnosing this (relatively) rare and troubling maternal abuse is as problematic as detecting the murderous maternal gaze. Both modes of domination and perversion operate within, and because of, what Motz aptly terms ‘professionals’ blindspots in recognising female violence, particularly when it involves maternal abuse’, as ‘the emotional and intellectual difficulty in recognising MSBP [...] reflects the strength of idealisations of motherhood and the denial of its potential danger’ (ibid.). As Douglas’ sympathetic blindness shows, the cultural perception of
maternal instinct persistently inscribes it as a selfless and protective one, and to see it as otherwise is, for the most part, an impossibility that very few are willing to consider and which in the Gothic becomes the unspeakable.

Understanding the governess' behaviour as symptomatic of these two disorders attests to her belief - and Douglas' - that she was acting out of love; understanding her behaviour through the maternal gaze exposes that it is indeed just that, an act. Not necessarily consciously, the governess performs hysteria as a mode of abuse against the children, hysteria which is misinterpreted by others and herself as the distress of the benevolent and sacrificing mother. In the case of the governess, we see that maternity masks a perversion even from itself, as the maternal gaze navigates and controls her body without her knowledge, making it even more insidious and undetectable, allowing it to replicate itself in subsequent film adaptations, and resurface through Laura Sánchez in *The Orphanage* and Grace Stewart in *The Others*.

‘Your pain gives you strength’: Maternal Sacrifice and Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy in *The Orphanage*

Like its inspiration *The Turn of the Screw*, the Spanish horror film *The Orphanage* (*El Orfanato*, 2007) articulates a fatal maternal gaze which manifests through the uncertainty created by tensions between conflicting supernatural and psychological narratives. Scriptwriter Sergio Sanchez cites James’ novella as a ‘model’ for his own story, explaining ‘you could think of it as a ghost story where there’s this evil presence trying to threaten the lives of these children or you could think of it as being about this woman who’s very sexually repressed and seeing ghosts where there aren’t any ghosts to be seen’ (interview with Brian
Tellerico; online), while director J.A. Bayona cites the filmic influences of *The Innocents*, Jack Clayton’s atmospheric adaptation of the novella (1961) and *The Haunting* (1963), Robert Wise’s adaptation of Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959), another intertext which stages female hysteria through the supernatural (see George Haggerty). As *The Orphanage* was a relatively recent and limited release, a brief synopsis will benefit the analysis which follows.

Laura Sánchez and her husband Carlos, a doctor, have bought the seafront Good Shepherd orphanage where Laura lived as a child before she was adopted, and which she plans to re-establish as a home for ‘special children’ who are not orphans but need additional care. Their only child Simón is adopted and is HIV positive, although he is unaware of both of these things, spending his days with his imaginary friends Watson and Pepe. New imaginary friends with whom he plays in the cave near the orphanage make Laura and Carlos temporarily concerned, but they are soon forgotten in the excitement of preparing their home for the new children.

An unexpected call from an old lady social worker Benigna who enquires about Simón’s progress threatens to reveal the secret of his illness and adoption, so Laura sends her away, and in a subversion of the Bluebeard trope locks the file Benigna had brought in a drawer, a traumatic and dangerous document like the governess’ manuscript. Laura later sees Benigna loitering with a spade near the outhouse, but fails to catch her and the old woman runs away. The orphanage is reopened with a masquerade welcome party, during which Laura and Simón have an argument and she slaps him; he had wanted to show her his new friend Tomás’ ‘little house’ but Laura insisted she must greet the new children. Shortly afterwards a child in a ragdoll sackcloth costume which she assumes is Simón attacks her
and locks her in the bathroom, and when she is released Simón is nowhere to be found.

Several months pass but Laura is convinced that Simón is still alive, despite not having his HIV medication, and one day she and Carlos see Benigna pushing a pram across the road. Thinking Benigna has Tomás in the pram, Laura calls to her and the distraction causes the old lady to be killed by a speeding truck. In the pram Laura finds a ragdoll, identical to the costume worn by the child who locked her in the bathroom. Through police investigation they learn that Benigna was an imposter who had worked briefly at the orphanage before Laura was adopted, and whose disfigured son Tomás, whom she kept hidden in the cellar, was accidentally killed during a trick played on him by the other orphans when they stole his sackcloth mask and he hid in the cave where he drowned in the high tide. A vengeful Benigna killed the children by feeding them poisoned food and then buried them in the outhouse (echoing the aggressive maternal orality of ‘Snow White’ and ‘Hansel and Gretel’ also found in Flowers in the Attic), and Laura believes their ghosts haunt the orphanage and hold the key to Simón’s return.

Convinced that the ghost children captured Simón, Laura invites a medium, Aurora, to the house, who sees the spirits of the poisoned and dying children and who encourages Laura to pursue her conviction: ‘You’re a good mother. Your pain gives you strength, it will guide you [....] seeing is not believing, it’s the other way round. Believe and you will see’. With clues from the séance Laura searches the grounds and finds the remains of her childhood friends in cloth sacks buried in a mass grave in the outhouse, and shortly after a troubled Carlos moves out leaving Laura, who has promised to follow him, alone. She restores the orphanage to how it was when she was a child, and wearing a dress identical to Benigna’s she summons the ghosts of the children by recreating the poisoned supper with
porcelain dolls and playing their childhood game ‘knock on the wall’. A child fleetingly appears which Laura chases through the house, and she is led to the door of the cellar which she had previously obstructed with construction joists. On entering the cellar for the first time, she finds it decorated with child’s drawings, and realises this is Tomás’ house which Simón wanted to show her, and finds her son’s decaying body at the bottom of the stairs where he had fallen through the rotten banister.

Like the forbidden knowledge about Simón’s illness which Laura locks away, his incarceration in the womb of the cellar is the maternal subversion of the tyrannical paternal Bluebeard trope. However, unlike the child-bride in the fairytale, Simón does not survive. Laura returns to the bedroom where she slept with her friends as a child and, echoing the final image of the governess holding the dead Miles, she clutches Simón’s dead body to her breast and takes an overdose. As she dies she imagines Simón has woken up and envisions her friends sitting at her feet while she tells them all a story about ‘the house, the beach, and the lost children’. Like Wendy in Peter Pan, a story which fascinated Simón and portended his own fate as a lost, dead, child and which ‘celebrates, demands’ and makes childhood death ‘desirable’ (Kimberley Reynolds: 171), Laura mothers the children in a space other grownups can never access. The last scene sees Carlos returning to the orphanage alone, and a gravestone inscribed with the epitaph ‘in memory of Laura, Simón and the orphans’. Nameless to the end, the only signification the orphans have in the Symbolic order is this shared gravestone, a marker of their death and their spectral eternity under the maternal gaze.
Believe and You Will See

*The Orphanage* repeats the tensions between the spectral and the hysterical established by *The Turn of the Screw*, where the maternal figure becomes infanticidal in her desire to prove the existence of the ghosts in the house, an existence which provides a smokescreen for her own abuse of that child. The creaks and groans of the orphanage which Laura translates as the sounds of the ghosts are revealed at the dénouement to be Simón’s attempts to attract attention, and then the sound of his death as he falls through the banister. For Laura Simón’s existence is predicated on, and galvanised by, her own visual perception of him which she believes, having been told by Aurora ‘believe and you will see’, will be gratified when she sees the ghosts. However, privileging the visual register of the spectral as the governess does means Laura neglects to thoroughly search her material surroundings, and looks everywhere for Simón but the cellar, the architectural womb which swallows him, and from where he can only be released in death, reborn into the maternal gaze exactly nine months after he has gone missing.

Laura’s visual possession of Simón works on two levels; while her physical field of vision fails to search for him thoroughly, this creates a blindspot which enables the maternal gaze rooted in the spectral to capture and consume Simón in the cellar. The more she insists her son is still alive, the more time elapses when he is not looked for in the cellar, the more the blindspot expands and the longer Simón is left for dead. This visual tension which characterises her denial of his death is symbolised in the film by the games played by the child Laura and her orphan friends and by Simón and his spectral playmates. While the orphans played ‘knock on the wall’, a tag game where Laura faces away from her friends who must creep up on her without being seen, Simón and his friends create an elaborate treasure
hunt, a palimpsest Laura must unravel to claim her prize, her child. Both games are characterised by Laura’s desire to see, and it is through this visual tenacity that her search for Simón becomes a fatal game of hide and seek, in which the maternal gaze wilfully refuses to play by the rules.

Games like hide and seek and peek-a-boo are visual modes of Freud’s fort/da idea (forth/her), where the child play-acts their separation from the pre-Oedipal mother in order to come to terms with and disavow the trauma of maternal loss and successfully accept the father’s authority (Stern: 27). For Freud the child’s rejection and reclamation of his toys ‘relate[s] to [his] great cultural achievement – the instinctual renunciation [...] which he had made in allowing his mother to go away without protesting’, and turns the traumatic and distressing experience into a pleasurable one through the mastery of performing and controlling the scenario: ‘At the outset he was in a passive situation – he was overpowered by the experience; but by repeating it, unpleasurable though it was, as a game, he took an active part’ (Freud 1920: 600). Through this game the child articulates to itself that it can function without the pre-Oedipal mother – ‘All right, then, go away! I don’t need you. I’m sending you away myself’ – and it becomes a rite of passage into the paternal contract (ibid.). The treasure hunts Simón constructs follow this pattern of mastery as he uses objects belonging to his parents to control Laura’s actions, while hiding in the cellar becomes the rejection of the mother whom he assumes will return in her search for him.

However, Simón’s manipulation and mastery of Laura is an illusion, as his illness means that he is dependent on her for his medication, to ‘look after’ him. Rather than the mother-as-toy being controlled, Simón remains the object of desire, the hidden treasure she pursues through her fatal gaze. In re-visioning these childhood games, Simón becomes the
object which Laura dismisses and denies in order that she can ultimately repossess him, losing sight of her child long enough in the material world so that she can reunite and exist with him forever in the spectral one. Thus *The Orphanage* inverts the Oedipal logic of Freud’s understanding of acculturation; whereas the fort/da and Oedipal matrices ultimately insist upon rejection of the pre-Oedipal mother and her absence as a vital developmental experience, in the film maternal loss is a trauma which is never disavowed, one which energises the house’s transformation into the devouring maternal body. The innocent childhood games played by the orphans are mutated by the visual tenacity of Laura’s maternal gaze and her persistence in searching for Simón in all the wrong places which, unlike fort/da, refuses to give the child up, a refusal which becomes infanticidal.

Laura’s unwavering belief that Simón has been spirited away by the orphans enables her maternal gaze to keep the child back for itself, for a dead child is the most fulfilling as, like the foetus in the womb, it is suspended beyond the grasp of the paternal order. As in *The Turn of the Screw*, the ghosts become a diversionary tactic which seduces paternal regimes of logic and science into trying to disprove their existence, all the while allowing the undetected maternal gaze to recapture the child. Like the governess, Laura’s belief in the ghosts causes her sanity to be questioned, and after Aurora’s séance the tension between Laura’s belief and the scientific contingent, represented by Carlos and the female police psychologist Pilar, is heightened. Carlos pleads with his wife ‘this is a farce, a sideshow trick’, compelling Laura to mock Pilar and ‘her rational theory’. The maternal gaze which envisions these ghosts succeeds, as Carlos leaves the orphanage with Laura inside it: ‘I can’t just leave, there are too many memories, I have to say goodbye’. As we see, Laura never escapes the
orphanage and the maternal trauma it represents, both that she experienced and that which she causes.

Laura’s desire to halt the children’s development, represented by her fetishistic collection of Simón’s milk teeth (echoing Peter Pan, who always ‘had all his first teeth’ (16)), is expressed explicitly in her preference for ill children, which she selects precisely because although they may grow up, they can never grow out of their need for her. Simón is HIV Positive, a disease caught in the womb from his biological mother, and the ‘special children’ who are due to come and live with Laura and Carlos all have developmental disabilities, and so all the children in her care are beholden to her for their survival. The scenes of the masquerade party, a carnivalesque visual confusion which portends the breakdown of the paternal order, are reminiscent of Diane Arbus’ uncanny ‘Untitled’ sequence (1970-1971), seven photographs of children and young adults with Down’s Syndrome wearing masks and costumes in various states of masquerade, parade and carnivalesque which pose questions about the vulnerable child subject as spectacle, the exploitation of illness and vulnerability and the pleasure and complicity of the spectator. While Carol Armstrong argues that this sequence addresses ‘the difficulty of facing such faces and allowing oneself to scrutinise them’, problematising ‘the taboo against staring’ (1993: 44, 45), the maternal gaze has no compunction about fetishising such genetic abnormality. For the maternal gaze this difference is irresistible. It is something to treasure and dote on as the more vulnerable a child is, the more they are dependent on the mother to look after them, and it is precisely the discomfort of other spectators which allows the maternal spectator to gaze so indulgently, as the child’s vulnerability is emphasised by others’ rejection of it through looking away.
Despite – or because of – her own biological childlessness, Laura positions herself as the benevolent and sacrificing mother whose love supersedes that of the children’s biological parents, explaining to Simón when he asks why they can’t stay at home that ‘they’re special children, they need special care’. Laura conforms to Helene Deutsch’s analysis of the motives of adoptive mothers with no biological children of their own, ‘women – I might call them female Pied Pipers – who use the bait of a cosy home and motherly care to lure children’ in an attempt to gratify ‘their narcissistic wish for a child as the product of one’s own body’ (1945a: 422, 424). Laura’s self-fashioning of martyrdom – from the Greek for witness - is portended by her name, as in Roman Catholic hagiography St. Laura was one of the martyrs of Córdoba who were executed for violations of Muslim law (David Farmer: 356). Like James’ governess, Laura’s mask of martyrdom conceals a maternal gaze which thrives on the vulnerability of children that galvanises her own worth, and the orphanage becomes a collection of children whose illness sustains the privileged position of martyr which both conceals and energises her fatal maternal gaze. Like the governess’ fantasising about Miles being sick, Laura’s preference for ill children resembles the symptoms of MSBP, but rather than actively inducing the illness or falsifying the symptoms in the child herself she selects children who are already physically and mentally impaired. This enables her maternal gaze to hoodwink others into seeing her as the saintly suffering mother, without the risk of being caught of perpetrated the abuse.

As Motz shows, instances of MSBP are suspected to be more common than statistics suggest but remain elusive because of the patriarchal socio-medical blindness to the notion of maternal abuse (60), and it is this blindness which enables the maternal gaze to recapture the child unnoticed. The true nature of Laura’s selflessness is fleetingly revealed after Simón
goes missing, when she laments ‘how can they trust me with their kids after this?’; her concern is not for her own child, who will die without his medication, but for maintaining the veneer of her selfless martyrdom. It is telling that Laura returns to the orphanage to transform it into a space for children who still have parents but need extra help, so positioning herself as more vital and needed than the child’s biological mother, superseding the maternal gaze of others. Laura exhibits the symptoms of an addiction to adoption and the need to be the most valuable mother which Deutsch discusses, ‘a masked kidnaperism’ which needs ‘to hear the name “Mother” uttered by as many mouth[s] as possible’: ‘They [may] have both their own and other women’s children: what is important to them is the number and the results’ (422).

Laura’s predilection for ill and vulnerable children is symptomatic of not only MSBP but more fundamentally of maternal sadomasochism, which Estella Welldon identifies is often predicated on a cycle of abuse. Mothers who suffered childhood abuse perpetuate this abuse against their own children which they perceive as an extension of themselves: ‘motherhood provides an excellent vehicle [...] to exercise perverse and perverting attitudes towards their offspring, and also retaliation against their own mothers, through sadomasochistic practices’ (2002: 59). Covert abuse, which Laura enacts against Simón through a neglect to thoroughly search for him, becomes the weapon to resist patriarchy and the mother’s own childhood experiences of the maternal gaze. Laura, herself an orphan, is compelled to return to the site/sight of her originary trauma so that she can disavow both the absence and failure of her biological mother and the rival maternal gaze of Benigna, described as having ‘pale eyes, very thick glasses’ and whose name also conceals a murderous intent. However, because Laura favours adoptive children she counteracts the
assumption that maternal abuse is enacted against the self through the biological
connection of the child as metonym of the mother. Although Laura considers Simón to be
her own child, the absence of a physiological connection through pregnancy and birth
means that while she retains the emotional attachment that compels her maternal gaze, the
abuse she performs against him is not a rejection of her own body-by-extension. Thus, while
the maternal gaze succeeds in damaging the child through this unbreakable emotional
connection, it supersedes the biological essentialism that maternal abuse is a reaction
against the self.

Laura’s gaze compels a blindspot which wilfully ignores Simón in the cellar and
embeds him in the womb of the house, the place of maternal absence and trauma which she
tries to placate by offering it the body of the child. The Gothic orphanage and its locale
embodies the womb which reproduces this cycle of maternal infanticide, as the cellar births
the death of Simón, and the dark and treacherous cave with its fang-like stalactites and
amniotic seascape where the children played and Tomás died invokes the jaws of the *vagina
dentata* and the grottoesque maternal body. Echoing patriarchal medical discourses which
desire to penetrate and colonise the womb, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar see the cave as
maternal bodily metaphor as ‘the *umbilicus mundi*, one of the great antechambers of the
mysteries of transformation’ with the ‘metaphorical power of annihilation’ (95). The
orphanage and the cave are the two corresponding sites of childhood trauma, female
forbidden knowledge and maternal infanticide, and their hold over their victims is
symbolised by the trail of shells Simón drops between the two places, a symbolic umbilical
cord recalling the breadcrumb trail in ‘Hansel and Gretel’, the archetypal fairytale of the
devouring mother.
Viewed through the supernatural lens, the shell trail also guides the spectral Tomás from the cave back to the orphanage where he had lived with Benigna, his biological mother. Tomás is the only child in the film who is never orphaned, and his difference is not signified just through his disfigurement, but also his lack of motherlessness. Because the orphanage is a womb wherein maternal abuse is predicated on the absence of a biological connection, Tomás’ continued existence is impossible, as it would mean that the abuse becomes retaliation against the maternal body as represented through him by proxy. Instead, he is banished to the cellar and becomes the child in the womb who does not have the promise of escape through birth. When he is tricked by the other children into leaving the house, he is permanently interred back into the womb, devouring by the amniotic cave from where his spectral form is lured back to the orphanage through Simón’s shell trail.

Biologically rooted to Benigna, Tomás cannot continue a material existence in the orphanage as this would render the maternal institution a fallacy and expose the maternal benevolence as a masquerade. Instead his materiality must be extinguished, and it is his spectral return to the womb which fuels the orphanage’s need to devour its residents, and through his spectral presence, Tomás lures Laura away from the trapped body of Simón and the possibility of finding him alive. Through rejecting the material and pursuing the supernatural and psychical, Laura offers the orphanage the opportunity to incarcerate and kill Simón in the womb of the cellar, Tomás’ old bedroom.

Laura’s belief that the ghosts of her childhood have spirited Simón away is galvanised by Aurora’s séance, the ‘psychic summoning’ where she sees the spirits of the poisoned children trapped and dying in their bedroom. While the séance is scrutinised through a CCTV surveillance network by Carlos and Pilar, the scientific and psychological
authorities who desire to debunk the medium as a charlatan, the video stream fails at the crucial moment, enabling Aurora’s unfettered psychic gaze to envision the suffering children without intrusion of external observation. Aurora confirms the orphanage as the womb which indelibly marks its inhabitants: ‘When something terrible happens, sometimes it leaves a trace, a wound that acts as a knot between two timelines [....] it’s like an echo, repeated over and over, waiting to be heard’. The traumas experienced in the orphanage are maternal imprints which ‘like a scar or a pinch’ mark the child and fracture their Symbolic subjectivity. Another method of maternal impressions, this knot of psychic energy symbolises the umbilical cord which had once rooted the child to the mother’s body, the absence of which now leaves a permanent wound, and the ‘wound that acts as a knot’ echoes Chion’s umbilical web and Bronfen’s notion of the ‘navel moment’, in which the subject is reminded of, and re-wounded by, the moment of maternal separation. Paradoxically the orphanage and the maternal gaze it issues can only exist because of the most final maternal separation, that of the mother’s death, and as such it is energised by the trauma of children who suffer this separation.

Even orphans like Laura who manage to escape and grow up are called back to the orphanage by its traumatic echo ‘repeated over and over, waiting to be heard’. Like Bly which echoes the governess’ infanticidal hysteria, the orphanage is the semiotic womb reverberating with the sounds of its own past, that of being filled with the child which needs the mother. The house is the umbilical web and its echo is a seduction, a call to Laura to return to the pre-Symbolic space that speaks to her through creaks and groans she decodes as communication from the ghost children, sounds which entangle her in the pursuit of the mother/child dyad. Yet, while Laura is convinced by the orphanage’s echoes that she can
solve its mystery and transform it from a space of maternal trauma into one of love, on finally finding Simón in the cellar it becomes clear that the sounds were his attempts to attract the attention of his mother. Fatally trapping the child in the womb, the orphanage is the semiotic chora, the pulsions, sounds and rhythms of which are untranslatable to Laura’s acculturated ear. Scarred by her own childhood, Laura repeats this trauma against the body of her own adopted child, shrivelled and desiccated, bled dry by the devouring womb. Laura as victim and perpetrator of the cyclical maternal gaze is explicitly figured by the cave and the shots from inside looking out which position her in its mouth; she is both prey and gatekeeper, and even in death - hers, Simón’s and her childhood friends - her maternal gaze endures.

The *vagina dentata* is also invoked at Benigna’s death, when Carlos who attempted to resuscitate her draws back to reveal her severely dislocated jaw and her mouth a gaping, bloody hole. His own chin is covered in her blood, as though she has tried to swallow him. Witness to Benigna’s abuse of Tomás during her childhood, Laura develops her own rival maternal gaze, which unconsciously seeks to return to the orphanage and reunite with the children’s remains. However, while Laura’s gaze orchestrates Simón’s death through a neglect to look, Benigna’s has failed as the nature of Tomás’ death was due to his exposure to the other children and their awareness of his existence. Whereas Laura snatches Simón and the other children from the paternal order, Benigna’s infanticidal desires were discovered, and so it is Laura’s maternal gaze which sees Tomás in the orphanage, while Benigna must settle for the fetish-object ragdoll. Thus, Laura supersedes Benigna as bearer of the maternal gaze in the orphanage – indeed, it is her distracting call which causes Benigna’s death, who was not looking where she was going.
In *The Orphanage* the maternal gaze is not controlled by, but controls, mothers. As Laura stands in the mouth of the cave she is devoured by her own childhood trauma of the absent biological mother, and her return to the orphanage as site of this trauma forces her to repeat it through the murder of her own adopted child. In purposely not looking for Simón in the cellar the maternal gaze precipitates his death, allowing the spectral Laura to spirit him away back into the chora of the nursery where Laura weaves fairytales for her rapt audience, and like Wendy in *Peter Pan* occupies a privileged maternal position in a place and time inaccessible to other adults. Sanchez commented that along with *The Turn of the Screw* Barrie’s novella influenced his script, especially ‘that picture of Wendy's mother sitting by the window waiting for her child’: ‘That’s the spark that ignited everything. I was thinking, it would be really interesting to tell the story of *Peter Pan* from the point of view of the mother’. Through Laura *The Orphanage* rewrites Mrs Darling, ‘a very sad-eyed woman’ who ‘has lost her babes’ and the adult Wendy who is forbidden from returning to Neverland as she has grown up and is ‘only a woman’ (*Peter Pan*: 159, 174), to reinvigorate the maternal gaze, as Laura’s own suicide aborts her aging and perpetuates her gaze in the spectral realm.

*The Orphanage* rewrites the folklore *Peter Pan* and Le Fanu’s ‘Laura Silver Bell’ draw on of fairies spiriting a human mother away to care for their children, as it is Laura who pursues the spectral space and the dead children, and the son she has killed. This corresponds with Mary Hallab’s folkloric reading of *The Turn of the Screw* which contends that ‘the children and the ghosts can be seen as already inhabiting the fairy or “other” world, into which the governess enters’ (106, see also Steve Jones). Like James’ novel, in *The Orphanage* the power of the maternal gaze lies not with the ability to prove a supernatural presence which undermines the scientific logic of the Symbolic, but precisely in the
uncertainty created by the inability to disprove it. As Aurora explains, seeing is not necessarily believing, but you can believe without seeing, and belief is just as potent as visual, empirical evidence. Like the ambiguity which shrouds the governess, we are never sure if Laura sees or hallucinates the ghosts of the children, yet either way the story ends the same as the governess’, with the death of a child in her care, while in her own death she can consume the dead child, recreating the dyad where the maternal gaze is supreme.

Consequently, if we understand *The Orphanage* to be a narrative of hysterical visions, the maternal gaze triumphs because, as in *The Turn of the Screw*, the paternal linguistic realm governed by logic and reason is revealed to be impotent. Carlos and Pilar’s scientific discourse cannot explain away the events at the orphanage, nor can they disprove Aurora’s psychic ability. As the language of logic is revealed to be fallible, so too will be the psychoanalytic discourses which seek to decode these hysterical visions as manifested through the maternal body.

While the governess’ and Laura’s (and as we see with *The Others*, Grace’s) narratives lend themselves to the hysteria reading, the maternal gaze’s privileging of vision over language enables it to exploit psychoanalytic assumptions while resisting their decoding. Discussing the difficulty in accessing and articulating the origin and meaning behind symptoms, Motz suggests that ‘a woman’s unconscious use of her body in pregnancy [...] and its engagement in acts of violence against children [are] analogous to psychosomatic illnesses’ (6). As hysterical hallucinations Laura births these ghostly children; they are the somatic manifestations of the maternal gaze’s desire to capture Simón and the distraction that leads to the neglect which causes his death. Consequently, the maternal gaze is obscured from the scientific and psychoanalytic scrutiny which is fatally preoccupied with
trying to explain away the potential supernatural element, that which threatens to expose the fallibility of paternal empiricist regimes of proof and logic.

The orphanage as an illusion of Laura’s maternal sacrifice and charity is predicated on the original instance of maternal loss. Although the original mother is dead she is not escapable, as others are ready to take on the mantle of the benevolent maternal gaze which masks its true intent, its honest instinct. This mask of benevolence is so convincing that it can fool the mother herself, and Laura must kill Simón to repossess him, and she does so precisely because, as with the governess, her insistence on the supernatural path to find him leads her astray and blinds her to his proximity in reality. While both Laura and the governess fatally pursue the supernatural sphere, it is the mother’s blindness to hers and her children’s spectrality which characterises the maternal gaze and its masquerade of benevolence in *The Others*.

**There but for the Grace of God go I: The Others**

*The Orphanage* expresses an anxiety about murderous mothers which resonates with Spanish cultural concerns about children, including the drop in birth rates in recent decades and historically the national trauma of the Civil War and the ‘lost children’ of Francoism (Omar Encarnación: 139). As Marsha Kinder discusses, Spanish cinema in the decades after the censorship of Franco’s fascist regime was particularly concerned with exploring the Oedipal narrative as a metaphor for internal conflict and the breakdown of the patriarchy (1993: 9). *The Orphanage* draws on these cultural concerns to subvert the Oedipal narrative, as Freud’s fort/da dynamic, where the child repeatedly pursues then rejects the mother, is inverted as Laura obsessively chases her lost child through the supernatural realm, and
Laura’s lethal maternal instinct finds a precursor in Grace, the murderous mother in *The Others* (2001), Alejandro Amenábar’s reimagining of James’ novel.

In *The Turn of the Screw* Miles’ cryptic comment to the governess ‘of course, we’ve the others’, referring to either the ghosts or the servants (259), is invoked by Amenábar’s adaptation, as Grace must negotiate tensions between the psychological and supernatural to reveal the truth about her children and herself. The film repeats the maternal commandeering of the paternal household we see in *The Turn of the Screw*, and develops the text’s tensions between the spectral, the hysterical and maternal. Paul Smith remarks how *The Others* ‘is reminiscent of Spanish child-centred chillers haunted by war’ (54), and the film subverts the Oedipal narrative in the same way as *The Orphanage*, as both mothers compel an extreme dependency from their children who all have chronic illnesses (factitious and otherwise) which renders them at the mercy of her (in)attention, prolonging the dyadic bond which would normally be severed through the Oedipal dynamic.

By the end of both films the ill children are revealed to be dead, inverting the Oedipal narrative. As with *The Orphanage*, in *The Others* the Gothic house-as-womb bars entry into the Symbolic and this maternal dominion is beset by illness and death, as the children are confined by their poor health which their mother exploits. Adopting the maternal *mise-en-scène* the narrative itself ‘in still in utero’ as Briefel explains, a state of neonatality which simultaneously threatens death, as ‘a film whose principal characters die before the opening credits [...] is in danger of never beginning [...] a failed plot whose origin and conclusion collapse into each other’ (2009: 103). Denied access to the world outside, these children are trapped in the pre-Oedipal stage of their development which is aborted by their deaths to which both mother and children are oblivious, and which is only revealed
to the family and the viewer at the end of the film. Hovering between the living and the dead, these children are ensconced in the maternal space which embodies a dyad outside of which they cease to exist.

In the immediate aftermath of World War Two Grace Stewart, a highly-strung Catholic and her two children Ann and Nicholas live alone in an old mansion on Jersey, which was occupied by the Nazis until its liberation in May 1945. Grace’s husband Charles is away ‘at the front’ and the fatherless family have recently been abandoned by their servants in the middle of the night following an episode of madness from Grace, which she and Nicholas deny but which Ann remembers. The children suffer from xeroderma pigmentosuman, an extreme photosensitivity to UV which means they cannot be exposed to sunlight, which Grace ensures does not happen by locking the children into darkened rooms. Grace advertises for new servants and matronly Bertha, elderly Mr Tuttle and the mute and illiterate Lydia are employed, and Bertha explains that they had worked at the house for the previous owners and that she knows it ‘like the back of my hand’, but Grace warns that ‘you’ll soon find out that this house is not exactly an ideal home’. She explains the routine of keeping the sunlight out, that ‘in this house no door must be opened without the previous one being closed first’, establishing the film as a double inversion of the Bluebeard narrative, as it is the tyrannical mother who locks both herself and her children inside the deadly space of the house.

Like Laura in The Orphanage, Grace starts to hear footsteps and children’s crying, which Ann says is a young boy Victor who lives in the house with his parents and a strange old woman who she describes ‘as if she’s not looking at you, but she can see you’. Grace also hears a piano being played from inside an empty locked room, and the doors she obsessively
keeps locked open and close by themselves. Grace discovers a ‘Book of the Dead’, an album of Victorian memorial portraiture which Bertha describes as showing ‘the hope that their souls would go on living through the portraits’, and as the spectral activity increases Grace becomes hysterical about banishing the ‘intruders’ who interfere with the curtains and let the deadly sunlight in. En route to the village to ask the priest to bless the house, she discovers Charles wandering aimlessly in the fog. She takes him home but he stays in bed apparently suffering from shellshock, and leaves when Grace attacks Ann after she hallucinates that her daughter is the ghostly crone. Grace becomes increasingly fearful, and confides in Bertha who portends ‘sometimes the world of the dead gets mixed up with the world of the living’. The servants begin to act suspiciously, and when all the curtains in the mansion vanish Grace assumes they are responsible and dismisses them.

When the children go to look for their father in the woods in the middle of the night they discover three gravestones, revealed to be Bertha’s, Tuttle’s and Lydia’s, and simultaneously Grace finds a memorial portrait of the servants. The children are chased back to the house by the servants who are apprehended by Grace wielding a shotgun, and Bertha responds to this with the revelation that she, Tuttle and Lydia are already dead, having been killed by a tuberculosis epidemic at the beginning of the century, and that Grace and the children must learn to live with them, as they too are dead. Having run into the house to hide, Ann and Nicholas are discovered by the blind old woman who tries to communicate with them. Victor’s parents are present too, and it becomes clear that it is this living family who are being haunted by the Stewarts, and that the blind old woman is a medium conducting a séance to discover why the spirits are trapped in the house. As the séance plays out the truth is revealed: in a fit of psychosis Grace smothered her children and
then killed herself, to which she responds by attacking the medium and the living family, who leave the following day.

Grace, the children and the servants are left to their house, as Bertha explains that 'the intruders are leaving, but others will come. Sometimes we’ll sense them, but others we won’t. But that’s the way it’s always been’, condemning the material paternal realm as liminal and inconsequential. The ghosts torment the household and its various inhabitants with their intangibility, as the séance reveals the truth of Grace’s past, a trauma which she must relive through remembering, and which indelibly marks the fabric of the house as a womb-space. The séance did not free Grace and the children from her repressed violence, but confirmed the mansion as a maternal space which they will never be able to leave.

Like Laura in *The Orphanage*, Grace exploits a façade of maternal concern to mask her true murderous intentions towards her children from both others and herself, and like Laura her name deceptively suggests selflessness, a divine grace and mercy which she bestows upon her children as their suffering mother. Exploiting and subverting the Bluebeard archetype, *The Others* articulates the interstices of spectral and material Gothic spaces inhabited by trauma, secrets, lies, a desire to reveal the truth and an equally potent desire to disavow it. Grace’s act of locking each door behind her before opening the next ‘re-enacts her smothering’ and ‘repeats the traumatic moment’ (Scott Brewster: 115), transforming the mansion into a maze with the revelation of her infanticide at its centre. Both Grace and the viewer pursue the truth which Bertha, whose rival matronly gaze knows and sees everything, chooses to be revealed in a tense dénouement where the fatal power of Grace’s own maternal gaze is revealed to her.

The memorial portrait of the servants is prefigured by the Book of the Dead, the
album of post-mortem portraits taken of previous tenants in which their dead bodies have been manipulated into poses to deceptively suggest life. While Bertha, Tuttle and Lydia have accepted their deadness, Grace is still in denial about hers and her children's and how it happened, evidenced through her initial naïveté towards the album and then her fierce rejection of it as 'macabre' and 'superstitious': 'Get rid of it, I don't want it in the house'. Grace disavows her part in the deaths of her children and herself, enabling her maternal gaze to continue the performance of benevolent concern for their factitious illness, allowing her to maintain a dark and cloistered existence free from patriarchal interference, expressed most intensely by the return and departure of Grace's ghost husband. Once 'master' of the house, his spirit wanders the woods in search of his home and his own hysteria in the form of shellshock renders him weak and unable to challenge the maternal gaze. As Kinder comments, the mother's replacement of the patriarch is a common Spanish narrative, where 'the "maternal" is frequently represented as a force that obsesses both mother and child – as a woman's ardent desire to have a child or dominate the one she possesses', and this patriarchal mother becomes 'an object of desire and the instrument of its repression' (199-200).

Like the delusional psychoses displayed by the governess and Laura, characterised by the obsession with ghosts they believe have harmed the children in their care, Grace's belief in ghostly 'intruders' and the blindness to her own spectrality allows her to keep the children firmly in her sight, while the factitious illness of photosensitivity, another example of MSBP, prevents the children from knowing the truth about their deaths at the hands of their own mother. Through Grace’s 'spectral incognisance' (Briefel 2009: 95), the children are denied access to their trauma and the opportunity to work through it. Like Flora and
Miles, they are trapped in the vortex of maternal hysteria which can never be directly challenged, as Grace’s murders, like the governess’ awareness of the ghosts, pervade the household as an incident of the Gothic unspeakable which is implicitly acknowledged but never explicitly discussed.

As a challenge to the maternal gaze and a threat to the charade of life which it encourages, Ann (like Flora) is the most vocal about her mother’s hysteria, explaining to Bertha how ‘Mummy went mad’. After Grace sees the face of the old woman medium transposed onto her daughter’s body and attacks her, Ann tells her father ‘everything’ about her mother’s psychosis and ‘what happened that day’. So as not to expose the workings of her maternal gaze, Grace denies Ann’s allegations, insisting ‘I don’t know what you’re talking about’. Seduced by the mask of maternal beatitude, her husband pleads ‘tell me it’s not true, tell me what happened’, to which Grace responds blankly, ‘happened?’. While Ann has a trace of the memory of her mother’s violence, explaining ‘she went mad like she did that day’, Grace’s performance of motherly love and selflessness convinces herself and others of the sacrifice she has made for her children’s illness, as Nicholas vehemently defends her – ‘nothing happened!’ – and she and Charles have sex despite Ann’s allegations. Charles leaves shortly after to ‘go back to the front’; even as a ghost he cannot occupy the maternal spectral realm as it is governed by Grace’s gaze, and like Carlos in The Orphanage he must leave.

Grace’s refusal to acknowledge her murders is bound up in the fatal logic of her maternal instinct, as she declares ‘they know that I love them. They know I’d never hurt them, I’d die first’. It is because she intended to die once she had killed the children that Grace can continue to convince herself of her innocence and maternal sacrifice. Ann, Nicholas, Grace and the audience are all caught up in this logic until the truth erupts at the
séance and exposes the family’s spectrality. Captured by the maternal gaze, the children become moving memorial photographs which are only fully exposed at the end of the film with the realisation that they are dead. As Susan Bruce suggests, in *The Others* ‘photophobia not only qualifies Grace’s fear of the sunlight but also resonates as a pun: *photo* phobia, that is, fear of the photograph’, and that this rejection of photographic evidence of death mirrors and conceals Grace’s ‘desire to preserve them: both actions alike fetishise the object and bespeak deep down the same convictions about it’ (28, 29). While Grace outwardly disavows death, it is her murder of her children which serves to immortalise them within her maternal gaze.

**Seeing in the Dark**

Inside Grace’s house the darkness of the womb is evoked, as the external material influences of UV and electricity, light used by the paternal order for seeing, are forbidden to touch and taint the skin of the children. She tells Bertha that ‘during the war the Germans kept cutting [the electricity] off so we learned to live without it’, and then warns her that ‘most of the time you can hardly see your way’. The maternal gaze born of the womb is at home in dark spaces, and Grace’s acclimatised gaze assumes that the servants will be operating in the paternal field of material vision, for which light is essential. The children’s existence within the mansion, wherein ‘silence is something we prize very highly’, is characterised by the adage that ‘children should be seen and not heard’, ‘the principle that relegates children to the realm of visual exposure’ (Luna: 17). This is represented acutely by Lydia, the child in Bertha and Tuttle’s makeshift family, whose muteness is ‘the result of some sort of trauma’, a hysterical reaction to her own realisation that she is dead. Like Bertha and Tuttle, Lydia
knows the truth but in her role as silenced child, muted by the shock of her entrance into the spectral realm, she is helpless to speak it. The medium, whose vision in the material paternal realm has been blighted by severe cataracts, can see the family’s spectral presence in the house and becomes a rival gaze to Grace’s, threatening to expose and destroy the masquerade of life which she has hoodwinked both her children and herself into believing. As such, Grace banishes the medium and the living family from her domain so only the spectral inhabitants of the mansion remain.

By convincing them they suffer from extreme photosensitivity Grace manipulates her children so they occupy a liminal position in both realms, and they are neither living nor dead until she confirms it through her own remembering of her infanticide. Thus they are incarcerated by the maternal gaze on two discrete yet intersecting levels; in the illusory material world they believe they inhabit they are imprisoned as delicate bodies which will erupt if exposed to natural, external influences, yet once they are aware of the factitious nature of their illness their spectrality means they can step into the light, but can never participate in the paternal material realm. Convinced by a ghostly presence which serves to postpone the revelation of her own spectrality, Grace’s belief denies the children the opportunity to accept their deaths and suspends them in a limbo equivalent to that of Catholic theology, which she warns Ann and Nicholas is where unbaptised children are captured to endure ‘pain, forever’. Like Laura’s penchant for sick children, Grace’s prolonging of her children’s illness places them in the dyad where they are entirely dependent on the mother and her scopic regime, and her explanation to Bertha that ‘the doctors were never able to find a cure’ and that if exposed to sunlight ‘in a matter of minutes they will break out in sores and blisters and begin to suffocate’, that ‘it would eventually be
fatal’ is not so much a resignation to, but an affirmation of, Ann and Nicholas’ dependency on her maternal gaze, which must keep out the light at all times, as light’s capacity to illuminate and expose ‘changes everything’.

Consequently *The Others* develops and inverts the overlap between the spectral and the hysterical established by *The Turn of the Screw*, as Grace is simultaneously both; while she and her children are ghosts, through her performance of blocking out the light she hysterically manifests their illness, which no longer exists, in order to prolong the fallacy of life. As we perpetuate *The Turn of the Screw* by reading and analysing it in an attempt to gain closure in the wake of a narrative left so frustratingly open, through watching *The Others* we collude with the maternal gaze, as Ann Heilmann comments on the ‘compelling force of identifying even with a spectacularly unreliable narrative perspective’, how ‘it never occurs to us to question the living reality of the Stewart family because the camera makes us share their vision’ (125).

As the cellar in *The Orphanage* captures and kills Simón, the mansion in *The Others* is a labyrinthine womb which traps its inhabitants so they can never escape from the maternal body. This fate is sealed at the séance, and as a realisation rather than confession, Grace explains ‘I killed my children’, declaring to them ‘I do know that I love you, and I’ll always love you. And this house is ours, say it with me’, and their chant of ‘this house is ours’ echoes around the room/womb/tomb, confirming the house as a semiotic space from which Victor’s family in the paternal material realm are banished. By the logic of her maternal instinct it is exactly this love which allows Grace to kill the children and keep them entombed in the mansion with her, as she asserts that she loves them so much she would die before hurting them, that is, she would die to hurt them.
Like Laura’s predilection for sick children perceived as an act of selfless motherly love, Grace’s pretence of the children’s photosensitivity accords her with an elevated position as the devoted and sacrificing mother. The factitious nature of their illness in the spectral realm matches the symptomatology of the ‘active inducer’ category of MSBP perpetrators, ‘women who commit dramatic and often highly complex and secretive physical assaults on their children and also who demonstrate extreme denial, projection and affective dissociation in their presentation’ (Motz: 62). Grace’s denial of hers and her children’s deaths and the vehement belief in their illness, symbolised by the locked doors and curtains which shut out the sun and render the household impenetrable, is a performance which prohibits external Symbolic spectatorship as the children are beholden to her gaze. The children’s illness is a masquerade, a decoy which distracts the audience from the disturbing truth of infanticide, and behind the smokescreen of maternal sacrifice which their illness provides, Grace’s gaze, like Laura’s, immolates the children.

Suspending them at the interstices between the material and the spectral, Grace’s gaze denies her children the opportunity to realise either a living or dead subjectivity. The servants’ spectrality evidences there is sentience after death, but Grace will not afford this to her children or herself, as this would mean that she would lose her power over them, as they would no longer be hostage to their illness and the maternal gaze through which it was fabricated. Instead, she persists in her denial to perpetuate her hold over them. Grace is the supreme smothering mother; having killed her children by suffocating them with a pillow she refuses to let them go even after they have entered the spectral realm. As Brewster comments, ‘the light that eventually floods the sombre interior does not provide restitution, but rather enables the subjects of trauma to live with [...] that trauma’; ‘trauma underwrites
the possibility of survival in *The Others* (113). The curtains are opened at the end of the film enlightening the children physically and symbolically, but while they are relieved of their imaginary illness, as ghosts they remain trapped within the maternal domain, unable to either interact with the Symbolic or pass over. ‘Taken’ into the land of the dead by their own mother, the children are captured forever, and their exposure to light seals their fate as dead objects to be subjected to the maternal gaze. They are moving photographs, which through ‘anachrony’, the ‘bringing back, or returning, of the material traces of the past to the present’ interrupt the paternal logic of birth, life and death, to be kept sentient forever for the mother’s pleasure (Bruce: 32).

**Picture This: The Photographic Maternal Gaze**

As I discuss in more detail in Part Two, memorial portraiture, the photographs Grace finds in the Book of the Dead, are feints which hoodwink the spectator into believing that the subject is still alive. They create an emotional bond between the spectator and photographic subject which is brutally severed with the revelation that the latter has been posed and framed in such a way as to manipulate the perception of the former. These deceitful photographs viscerally embody Roland Barthes’ notion of the punctum which he discusses in *Camera Lucida* (written in response to his own mother’s death), something present in the photograph which disturbs and wounds the viewer: ‘A photograph’s *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is also poignant to me)’ (26-7). The punctum is a shock which once acknowledged and accepted becomes the part of the composition which is most compelling, most meditated on and which forbids the subject from ever escaping the viewer’s gaze.
Memorial portraiture functioned in this way; dead subjects were often made up with painted-on eyes and held up by metal braces to appear as though they were still alive, and the moment that this is understood as a façade is the moment the punctum is born and assaults us. The dead subject is acknowledged, but they are trapped by the photograph, unable to escape the viewer's gaze. As I discuss in Part Two, when the photographic subject/object is a dead child the punctum in that split-second of realisation is so unbearable to the viewer that the photograph becomes compelling and seductive in its poignancy, in the attempt to disavow death through repeatedly meditating on it, to the extent that the child is never freed from the trap of being observed in its dead state. As Carol Mavor elaborates, in beholding the photograph and the pull of the subject's punctum the viewer is reminded of their own originary umbilical pull:

Like a photograph the child is always connected to its referent: its mother. A photograph carries its referent with it, just as mother carries her child with her body, even after birth [...]. Perhaps this is why Barthes speaks of the relationship between the photograph and its referent as being like an umbilical cord. Likewise, our mother's body is that to which we are physically tied and from which we are externally severed. It is birth that guarantees our death. The womb is never far from the tomb. Birth is the greatest catastrophe of our lives. (53-4)
The punctum of *The Others* is the séance, the moment of awful realisation – for characters and audiences - that Grace killed herself and her children. This moment is so visceral because it performs a psychic pull towards our own maternal origins.

Continuing the governess' spectral visions in *The Turn of the Screw*, both *The Others* and *The Orphanage* stage séances, a means of communicating with the deceased which were immensely popular in Spiritualist communities in the States and Britain towards the end of the nineteenth century. Martha Banta writes that ‘the James family were both fascinated and disturbed by supernatural phenomena’ (171), and James’ fascination with ‘the others’ was influenced by the thinking of his father Henry Snr. and brother William, the first president of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), founded in 1882 to investigate ‘that large body of debatable phenomena designated by such terms as mesmeric, psychical and “Spiritualistic”’ (Alan Gauld: 137). James was also friends with founding members Edmund Gurney and F.W.H. Myers, and Francis Roellinger argues that he would have been influenced by the Society’s reports (404), while Dorothy Scarborough contended that the findings of the SPR provided the basis for many Victorian ghost stories, and that James based his tale ‘on an incident reported to the [SPR], of a spectral old woman corrupting the mind of a child’ (204, see also Hazel Hutchison (2006)). Exposed culturally and personally to intersecting discourses of the supernatural, the psychological and the hysterical, James writes the governess as a medium for anxieties which culminate in her murder of Miles and corruption of Flora. In the context of Spiritualism the governess can be read as a (charlatan) psychic medium who is seen to manifest – birth - the ghosts through her body and her vision, and her own narrative as a ghost speaking from beyond the grave. Yet, mediumship did not discount hysteria, as both shared a close pathological link through the female body, a link
which could be mimicked by the owner of that body. As the case of the O'Key sisters showed, the question of fakery plagued discourses of both the supernatural and the hysterical in the nineteenth century.

Developing the practice of memorial portraiture which horrifies Grace in *The Others*, Spiritualism exploited the medium of photography to offer empirical ‘proof’ of the supernatural, and as I demonstrate in Part Two, it was the Spiritualist act of psychic photography which enabled the living maternal gaze of the female spirit photographer to revive the dead child.
Part Two
The Maternal Gaze’s Gothic Practices

As Kate Flint discusses, throughout the nineteenth century tensions existed ‘between the different valuations given to outward and inward seeing; to observation, on the one hand, and the life of the imagination on the other’, and these tensions are articulated by *The Turn of the Screw* and its adaptations, which prompt questions of veracity and an empirical universal visual ‘truth’, articulating ‘the slipperiness of the borderline between the visible and the invisible’ (2). A desire to resolve these tensions between the seen and unseen fuelled the popularity of memorial and spirit photography with both believers and sceptics in the last half of the century, practices which in different ways desired to expose the dead.

Continuing with the Victorian practices of Spiritualism and memorial portraiture touched upon in *The Others*, Part Two reveals how the maternal gaze manipulates photography to capture and enthral both the child subject/object and the spectator. Returning to the notion of intra-uterine imprinting which troubled Victorian patriarchal medical discourses I explored in relation to Gothic folklore in Part One, I demonstrate how photography enabled the maternal gaze to imprint itself onto the photographic plate and sear the child-object with its brand of ownership. Considering the Spiritualist writings of the novelist Florence Marryat, the psychic spirit photography of Ada Deane and Georgiana Houghton and Victorian memorial portraiture and the work of Julia Margaret Cameron, I show how the nineteenth-century development of photography as a scientific and technological advance was Gothicised in the domestic space by the maternal operator, who commandeered the camera to arrest and mortify the child in a perpetual stasis of portraiture which denied the possibility of escape and galvanised the maternal gaze.
Beginning with spirit photography in Chapter Three, I argue that there are two distinct practices, that of ectoplasmic photography which documented material mediumship, and psychic photography which, like the womb searing its mark onto the child's body, imprinted directly onto the plate. I show how feminist scholarship which emphasises the metaphors and symbols of birth that abound in Spiritualism neglects to explore the difference of meaning and effect created by spirit photographs, which changes radically depending on the genre of the piece and the genders of the subject/object, photographer and spectator. Drawing on the Spiritualist writings of Marryat, who attended séances and purported to be able to feel the face of her own spirit baby as if it were Braille, I show how alternative modes of documentation to ectoplasmic photography, specifically Spiritualist tracts and psychic spirit photography, gave the mother the chance to seize the dead child and return it to her gaze in less overt and more insidious ways than ectoplasmic mediumship, which sexualised the maternal body to nullify its threat.

I argue that, while ectoplasmic mediumship is firmly rooted in the material Symbolic realm which fetishises the female reproductive body and sexualises it for a voyeuristic male gaze, the imprinting of psychic photography produced by Deane and Houghton is not material but exists beyond the grasp of the Symbolic spectator and enables the maternal gaze, that of both the medium and photographer, to imprint upon and infect the plate.

In Chapter Four I continue with the notion of bringing the dead back to photographic life, and discuss the phenomenon of Victorian memorial portraiture and the desire to manipulate and photograph the dead child so it appears alive. Exploring ways in which the photograph of the dead child deceptively implied a lingering sentience, including makeup, positioning and post-development tinting, I contend that the memorial portrait allowed the grieving mother to meditate on the image of her child and so forbid it to pass
on. Finally, having shown how memorial portraiture, like psychic spirit photography, suspends the dead child as a living image, I consider the work of the Victorian photographer Julia Margaret Cameron, whose subversive working-class representations of the Virgin Mary and fetishistic compositions mould the living child subject’s body into a performance of lifelessness which imitates and subverts the aesthetics of memorial portraiture to capture the child through the maternal photographic gaze. Challenging feminist analyses of Cameron’s work which celebrate the maternal sensuality of her pieces (often in juxtaposition to the quasi-paedophilic photography of her contemporary Charles Dodgson), I show how her reimaginings of the sorrowful Virgin Mary fix the image of the dead child as the centre of the maternal gaze’s desire.

By considering different modes of photography, Part Two shows how the living maternal gaze usurps Symbolic ways of seeing to energise itself on a spectral level through the uncanny image of the dead child, which denies access to the Symbolic spectator through the threat of death it represents.
Chapter Three

Seeing is Believing: Spiritualism, Psychic Photography and the Maternal Gaze

Spiritualism, a religious movement combining Christianity with the belief that the souls of the deceased can be communicated with through séances, thrived in the latter half of the nineteenth and first part of the twentieth centuries and capitalised on the consistently high rate of infant mortalities, as well as death in warfare, during the period (Pat Jalland: 120). Mediums channelled the presence of spirits with children being common manifestations, and Alex Owen explains how for believers it was clear ‘from the outset that women were favoured by the spirits’ (18). Women were seen to birth spirits without the need of men, and it is this notion of Spiritualism as an exclusively female reproductive act which simultaneously seduced and troubled male investigators, and while its popularity has muted in recent decades, Spiritualism in its original form is still practised as a legally-recognised religion in Britain.

The movement was born on 31st March 1848 through the adolescent Fox sisters Kate and Margaret, who heard rappings in their house in Hydesville, New York, and established a simplified Morse code to communicate with the ghost they believed haunted their house. The sisters were Spiritualism’s first and most famous mediums, and held séances in the States and internationally, and despite Margaret’s confession in 1888 that the rappings were a hoax (followed by a retraction the following year), the movement thrived (Ronald Pearsall: 29; also Barbara Weisberg). Conceived by two adolescent girls, Spiritualism was ripe for
proliferating symbols and metaphors of birth and reproduction, and this was explicitly articulated through female mediums’ manifestations of full-body entities and umbilical ectoplasm. Although there were male mediums, Spiritualism regarded women as the ideal conduit between the material world and the spectral one, a passive receptacle through which the spirit could travel and reveal itself to the séance.

Women controlled the spirit through their bodies, and many famous mediums including Florence Cook, Mary Rosina Showers and Elizabeth d'Espérance claimed that they had experienced spirit visitations during their childhood (Marlene Tromp: 195), establishing a historical reciprocity between spirit and medium which occluded external, patriarchal, mediation. This ability to manifest the spirit accorded the medium complete control over her transfixed audience, as she used tricks to hoodwink séance members into believing she made the spirit tangible through the process of birthing it through her body, and so the female body was overtly maternalised, reproducing without the need of male participation. Implicit in these parthenogenetic manifestations was the threat to render masculinity obsolete, and in response men attempted to commandeer the maternal spectacle of spirit manifestations through visual regimes which reasserted the primacy of the voyeuristic male gaze, including scientific, medical and journalistic investigations, and male-produced spirit photography.

**The Perfect Medium for the Grieving Gaze**

The Fox sisters’ discovery of their ability to communicate with spirits occurred just under a decade after Louis Daguerre's invention of the Daguerreotype photographic process, where the latent image on the exposed sliver-coated copper plate was ‘developed’ with mercury
fumes, in Paris in January 1839. A decade after the sisters’ first communications, William Mumler, a jewel engraver and amateur photographer from Boston, claimed to discover the science of spirit photography, when one day in October 1861 he noticed that during experimenting with self-portraits the transparent form of his dead cousin appeared beside him on one of the photographic plates. His revelation was published in the Spiritualist press by a friend, sealing his fame in the community (Louis Kaplan: 35). The advent of Mumler’s discovery coincided with the outbreak of the American Civil War (1861-1865), the human loss of which promised countless spirit subjects to photograph, and the tragedy of war proved a seductive pull for Spiritualist converts, with World War One offering ample grief for the medium and spirit photographer to capitalise on, as spirit photographs were becoming ‘visual propaganda’ for the movement (John Harvey: 30).

Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of the arch rationalist Sherlock Holmes, converted to Spiritualism after the deaths of his son, brother and brother-in-law during World War One, and wrote a number of defences of Spiritualism and spirit photography, as well as an infamous endorsement of the Cottingley Fairies incident (Wynne 2002: 144; J.M. Winter: 58), while Ada Deane, whose photography I discuss below, purported to capture the spirits of hundreds of dead soldiers in her Armistice Day series (1922-25). Mumler was brought to trial for fakery in May 1869 but was acquitted due to lack of evidence, despite the judge's belief that the photographer was a charlatan. It is this concept of evidence which underpins the entire Spiritualist movement, as amateurish photographs simultaneously functioned as indisputable proof for grieving families that their loved ones were deceased in this material world only, and confirmed for sceptics the slapdash fakery of domestic practitioners.

While the process of spirit photography had been invented by a man the majority of
Chapter Three – Spiritualism, Psychic Photography and the Maternal Gaze

both the subjects/objects and viewers of the photographs were female, and hordes of ‘staid matrons and elderly maidens with pale faces and eyes lacklustre from constant study and meditation’ attended Mumler’s trial daily (Martyn Jolly: 15). Sceptics rooted in Symbolic discourses of objectivity, empiricism and logic saw spirit photography as feeding on the grief of others, playing on the knowledge that the grieving sitter/viewer of the portrait would invest in the most tenuous and nebulous of connections to identify their loved one in the portrait, and this sense of desperation was acutely expressed by grieving mothers:

It is enough for the poor mother, whose eyes are blinded with tears, that she sees a print of drapery like an infant’s dress, and a rounded something, like a foggy dumpling, which will stand for a face: she accepts the spirit portrait as a revelation from the world of shadows. (Oliver Holmes: 14)

Yet, this idea of blinding grief is erroneous; while Symbolic spectators only see death, the mother finds succour and enlightenment through the spirit photograph, and for her it is proof that the child exists beyond the Symbolic realm of material signification. Spiritualism edified the maternal gaze born of the womb because it presented the act of seeing not as an empirical, physiological given but as wholly subjective, ‘distinguishing between outer (material) and inner (spiritual) eyes’ (Sarah Willburn: 51).

Like memorial portraiture, spirit photography resurrects the dead in the image and arrests them in a state of undeadness which disavows their passing and renders them forever in a state of flux between the material and spirit realms. Raising the dead in this way stalls
the mourning process during which, according to Freud in ‘Mourning and Melancholia’, the subject comes to terms with death through reality-testing which shows ‘that the loved one no longer exists’, and ‘proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to that object’. Because the ego does not want to abandon this libidinal position a ‘turning away from reality takes place and a clinging to the object through the medium of a hallucinatory wishful psychosis’. Although ‘normally, respect for reality gains the day’, it is a protracted process as ‘each single one of the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to an object is brought up and hyper-cathected, and detachment of the libido is accomplished in respect of it’ (244-245). In a similar manner to diagnosing and curing hysteria, memories associated with the mourning condition must be unearthed and expressed so the ego can come to terms with its loss and move on to the next love-object. Consequently the spirit photograph, not an existing memory but a newly-born image, keeps the dead object alive and disallows the final stages of mourning where the subject has come to terms with their loss, as it sustains the pretence of life through the invocation of the spirit realm from where the love-object wishes to communicate.

The spirit photograph of the child, cathected with the desires of the maternal gaze, denies the reality of death and instead provides an image of the dead love-object upon which to meditate indefinitely. The maternal gaze will not let the child out of its sight and demands that it be visible at all times, even in death, and looking at the spirit photograph of the dead child, like memorial portraiture, exhibits the ‘hallucinatory wishful psychosis’ which refuses death and galvanises the maternal gaze’s libidinal desires for the child. Those who cannot extend their vision beyond the strictures of the Symbolic can only encounter the spirit photograph as a threat to existence, as Luna explains that ‘confrontation with death’
provokes an ontological crisis and exacerbates ‘our feelings of insignificance and absence [...] and compromise[s] the supposed security that accompanies one’s self or subjectivity’ (54). Similarly, Lindsay Smith writes that the adult viewing the photograph of a living child is forced to recall their maternal loss through identification with the child, who represents the child they once were, who is ‘fervently caught up in the manipulation of absence to ward off as long as possible the mother’s absence as death’ (1998: 6).

Thus, while the maternal gaze is galvanised by the image of the dead child with which it reunites through the act of viewing, the Symbolic spectator is affronted by this visual shock which reminds them of their own maternal lack, their incompleteness:

> If one’s subjectivity is largely constituted by visual perception which itself can be illusory, then the self, rather than resting on a firm foundation, is actually situated upon a lack, a lurking emphasis that one seeks to deny. (Luna: 54)

This sense of lack echoes Lacan’s contention that the gaze of the photographic subject, in this case that of the dead spirit extra, is an objet a which has a castrating effect on the viewer who not so much ‘sees’ the photograph as is caught unawares and is astonished by it. Whereas the maternal readily absorbs the spirit extra into her uncanny gaze, the Symbolic spectator is arrested by the image of the spirit, the Lacanian fascinum which, like the evil eye, apprehends life and, like Medusa, mortifies it as the subject is enthralled by the remembrance of their own pre-Symbolic existence when subjectivity was constellated around the mother’s body, not the phallus (Lacan 1964: 105-119). Consequently, as the
Symbolic gaze rejects the spirit photograph as fakery because it cannot cope with its implications, so the maternal gaze is exponentially energised as it meditates on the image of the dead child.

As Tom Gunning discusses, spirit photography is so unnerving because it embodies this ontological crisis via a ‘spiral of exchanges and production of images founded in a process of reproduction for which no original may ever be produced’ (68). The spirit extra made tangible through the photograph paradoxically signals towards its uncanny spectral origins which are untouchable to the spectator. Even before Spiritualism photography was always uncanny because it created a double, a ghost, of the subject and undermined ‘the unique identity of objects and people, endlessly reproducing the appearances of objects, creating a parallel world of phantasmatic doubles alongside the concrete world of the senses verified by positivism’ (42), reminding the viewer that they are only a part of, a referent to, their mother. Thus, the photograph always depicts death as the subject has been captured and petrified by the lens, and the spectator meditating upon the photograph performs a Freudian repetition-compulsion of the death drive which fragments Symbolic concepts of temporality, linearity and narrative and betrays a desire to fall back into the deathly abyss, the womb (Mulvey 2006: 157).

The photograph is a mortifying experience of beholding death, both that of the subject/object and one’s inevitable own. Spirit photography embodies the desire of the maternal gaze, both that of the camera operator and the photograph viewer, to capture and kill the child subject, and it is through psychic spirit photography, when the image of the dead child is imprinted onto the photographic plate by the female psychic/photographer, that the maternal gaze is most potent as both receiver and transmitter of the image of the
dead. While portraits depicting spirit extras of dead children fuelled the grieving gaze of the mother, the work of female psychics and photographers, most notably Georgiana Houghton and Ada Deane, became the perfect medium for the maternal gaze to exert its control over spirit photography and an audience which longed to believe in its ability to ‘birth’ these spirits psychically onto the photographic plate.

As such I see that there is a marked difference of the meaning and effect generated by the spirit photograph, depending on the material content of the composition, the sex of the subject/object and that of the camera’s operator and the photograph’s viewer. While feminist scholarship emphasises how metaphors of parthenogenetic birth which pervaded Spiritualist mediumship like the darkened room of the séance, the medium’s box and the photographic dark room, transformed the Victorian and Edwardian passive and domesticated female body into a subversive one, this approach essentialises the complex gender tensions at play in the spirit photograph. Seen through the lens of the male gaze, which seeks to disavow the threat of castration implied by the maternal body by fetishising and sexualising it through the simulacrum of the image, spirit photographs taken by male photographers are pitched at a voyeuristic level which encourages sadistic participation in the sexualisation of the medium’s vulnerable body.

**Ectoplasmic Mediumship: The Birth of the Spectacle**

As Owen argues, women were figured as central to Spiritualist processes of mediumship due to the passive and yielding qualities perceived as innate to their femininity by Victorian culture. Women were “natural” mediums, accorded with a gendered exclusivity and ‘trapped [...] within a limiting self-definition’ (ii). While female material mediums like Kate
Goligher, Eva C., and ‘Margery’ who I discuss below were perceived to transfix the séance audience with their manifestations, the maternal power of their spectacle of birth is undercut by the fetishising gaze of the male photographer which reduces it from a maternal performance to a sexual one for the pleasure/disgust of the male spectator. The tangible distress of these women’s manifestations is mutated from evidence of the pain of labour into that of the abused female body, as séances were characterised by invasive and rigorous physical examinations by male psychic investigators. Consequently, while material mediumship abjected notions of the clean and proper feminine body, this disturbance was allayed by the fixity of the photographic male gaze which fetishised ectoplasmic birthing, reconfiguring it as a sexual image which invited the viewer to meditate upon the objectified female body.

This voyeurism was underpinned by a desire to control the autonomous maternal body, and spirit manifestations were regularly presided over by male doctors and psychic investigators who wanted to (dis)prove the medium’s ability to birth the spirit parthenogenetically, exposing an anxiety about the unknown womb which beleaguered the Victorian gynaecological gaze, and Florence Theobald, the spinster aunt of the Spiritualist Theobald family, expanded on the possibility of parthenogenesis to contend that the Virgin Birth was an example of spirit mediumship where the spirit is birthed without phallic participation: ‘No; there was no human father […] He had but the mother-mediumship’ (in Owen: 93). The womb could only be penetrated in so many ways, and spirit manifestations absented the phallus literally and symbolically, as the medium is entered not by a physical male body but a nebulous, ambiguous spirit control (in the Virgin Mary’s case the Holy Spirit), and these manifestations of the spirit from the sitter’s sexual orifices performed an
emasculating function, transforming the female body into the maternal one which represents an innate threat of castration to the male gaze that beholds it, and doubly so because its maternal aspect has been activated without phallic interference.

Mediumship was a problematic phenomenon which gave agency to the maternal body which was not dependent on men, and so had to be controlled by men in other ways. Consequently spirit photography enabled the male gaze to assert its visual prowess and control such maternal mediumship; like the cinematic apparatus where the castrating female body is disavowed and converted into a harmless sexual one, the spirit photograph takes ownership of the maternal act of birthing the spirit by capturing it as a photograph to be fetishised, and then analysed and dismissed as fraudulent by patriarchal discourses of science and logic. Furthermore, as Christian Metz argues, the fixity of photography allows the (male) spectator to more easily objectify and fetishise the (female) body than film, which has numerous visual and auditory modes of perception to assimilate (81-83), and so spirit photography which took place in the darkened room, the maternal hinterland of séances and manifestations, enabled the male photographer/viewer to invade and disavow the womb-space by sexualising it through the phallic aperture of the camera. In this sense male spirit photography had an abortive effect on the mediums’ manifestations and the materialisation of bodies; as such it is not the original manifestation which confirms the medium as passive and prone, but the act of fetishising and fixing it as sexual through the mediating male photographic gaze.

With ectoplasmic mediumship the proof of the spirit was provided on two intersecting levels, the immediate materialisation from the female medium, and the photographic evidence of the event, as captured by the usually male spirit photographer.
Thus the female medium as passive receptacle for the spirit is beholden to the male gaze of the camera and its operator, as well as male doctors, journalists and sceptics who investigated the phenomena. Scholars including Alex Owen and Janet Oppenheim have reread the history of Spiritualism through a feminist lens to assert that female mediums had power in the darkened room of the séance; in counter-response I want to show how the medium’s chaotic maternal body is tempered through this photographic dynamic of surveillance, and its ability to manifest a sentient material being parthenogenetically is aborted by the male gaze which disavows the threat of castration presented by the female body by fetishising and dematerialising it.

**Eva C., Margery and Kate**

The medium’s body was the site/sight on which not only her authenticity but her sexuality and maternity were contested, and in extreme cases destroyed. Marthé Beraud, later known as Eva C. (Eva Carrier), was the first medium to perform ectoplasmic materialisations which were meticulously documented by the SPR (1922). These full-form entities were birthed between the cabinet curtains, an event Martyn Jolly describes in terms of labour, ‘the slow painful extrusion of wet organic matter from the visible body of the medium, which gradually formed itself into an entity’ (64), while the psychical researcher Dr Gustave Geley defined Marthé’s ectoplasms as ‘a metaphysical embryology’, which produced ‘doll-like heads’ ‘suspended from umbilical cords’ from her orifices, organic matter which like the embryo’s development into the foetus would independently organise itself into ‘complete body organs – fingers, faces and the heads of various sizes’ (60). Similarly the doctor and
psychic researcher Baron Schrenck-Notzing, who published detailed photographic ‘evidence’ in *Phenomena of Materialisation* (1920), remarked that the ‘violent muscular action, combined with pains, groans and gasps reminds one of the labour of childbirth’ (15; *Birth of an Ectoplasm* especially resembles a baby’s head crowning). Schrenck-Notzing subjected Marthé to numerous pseudo-abusive vaginal and oral investigations, with the oral checks especially having an undertone of sexual abuse as she was fed bilberries to colour anything she had swallowed and planned to regurgitate, and after some séances was given emetics to determine if she had done so. This subtext of sexual violence which pervaded doctors’ investigations and the voyeuristic pleasure/disgust taken in witnessing the vulnerable and wounded body of the medium transforms the material manifestation from a subversive maternal act of parthenogenesis into a fetishistic one which ultimately gratifies the male gaze’s desire to penetrate the female body.

1. *Birth of an Ectoplasm*, 1920  
2. Detail from *Birth of an Ectoplasm*
A similarly disturbing example is ‘Margery’, investigated by Eric Dingwall for the SPR in 1925 for her alleged ability to manifest spirit matter from her womb (see Dingwall: 1926). Any sense of maternal agency was counteracted by the distinct sexual undercurrent of Dingwall’s probing investigations:

An excited Dingwall felt his hand touched by a tongue-like substance [...] hearing a rustling sound coming from her lap, he ran his hand up Margery’s stocking until he felt a cold mass like uncooked liver on her thigh. This was flicked onto a luminous plaque on the table, and, in silhouette, was seen to grow out finger-like tuberosities which still connected umbilically to Margery’s abdomen. (Jolly: 75)

These ectoplasmic growths were interpreted as a baby’s hand, a disembodied spirit child manifested through Margery which in another séance is photographed ‘holding the little finger of one of the sitters’ (74). In these photographs the eye is drawn to Margery’s barely-concealed mons pubis and the growth protruding from it. Her legs are spread, and Dingwall and her husband each hold down an arm, while her husband holds her legs open with a hand locked around one calf. Almost pornographic, her enforced open pose compels the gaze of the viewer to behold the ectoplasm at the centre of the composition, nestling on the exposed flesh of her stomach, while descriptions of Margery’s ectoplasm as ‘cord’ evokes the umbilical cord (Dingwall: 146, 147). Dingwall showed these photographs to William McDougall, Harvard professor of psychology and chair of the Scientific American magazine committee, who said that the manifestation looked more like animal matter than ectoplasm.
The photographs were then shown to a gynaecologist who confirmed that whatever the matter may be, it could be inserted into Margery’s vagina and then expelled (78).

Shortly after this debunking, Margery suffered a uterine haemorrhage and the séances ended, solving for the men who investigated her what Hudson Hoagland had termed ‘the “Margery” problem’ (in Dingwall: 159). This case demonstrates the tensions between female maternal agency and male scientific anxiety with which mediumship was characterised. Not only does Margery’s haemorrhage symbolise the violation and violencing of her maternal, materialising self, it was precipitated by the probing interference of a masculine scientific and empirical desire for proof, and then recorded by the voyeuristic male gaze of spirit photography. That her husband, L.R.G. Crandon, was a surgeon who would have known of the dangers of such an invasive performance confirmed material mediumship as a maternal practice hostage to the mediating and distorting influences of the male gaze in its various medical, journalistic and photographic modes.

3. Margery séance, 19th January 1925. Eric Dingwall (r) and L.R.G. Crandon (l)
The Belfast medium Kate Goligher is another example of how the bodily metaphor of birth represented by ectoplasm was subjected to patriarchal surveillance which mutated it into a fetish object. Eighteen-year old Kate and her sisters and father were known in the British Spiritualist community as the Goligher Circle, and between 1916 and 1920 the self-appointed psychic investigator W.J. Crawford subjected the teenager to numerous experiments. Kate painfully birthed ectoplasmic rods from her womb, yet this viscous "mise-en-scène of birth was forestalled by the subtext of sexual submission which permeated the investigations, during which '[Kate's] head was often covered with a black cloth, and her dress often flipped up above her knees' while Crawford 'put his hand on her thigh and felt the flesh seemingly become soft' and 'felt her breasts become very hard and full' (Jolly: 82). The birthed ectoplasm becomes a stillbirth as it is fixed by the camera and reduced to sexual symbolism, expressed most insidiously by Crawford's impression that during some séances he saw the ectoplasm wriggling back up Kate's leg 'like a snake' (81). So while ectoplasmic mediumship performed by Kate Goligher, Margery and Marthé was redolent with images of birthing, the male photographic gaze of these manifestations concentrated on the pain displayed by the medium, fetishising the wounded maternal body and rendering it a sexual object for the male spectator. Ectoplasm is transformed from the foetus being birthed from the maternal body into the phallus entering the female body, and material mediumship became a performance for the male gaze which desired to dominate this body, with photographs capturing this domination.
While ectoplasmic mediumship evidenced the subversive prowess of the maternal body the method of capturing this evidence in the spirit photograph objectified, commandeered and mediated this body through the penetrating male gaze. What destroys this phallocentric dynamic is the act of the maternal gaze’s imprinting onto the photographic plate, as performed by Georgiana Houghton and Ada Deane, while alternative modes of representing the spectacle like Florence Marryat’s Spiritualist tracts undercut the fetishising gaze of the male photographer. Marryat’s own experiences of infant mortality and the accusations of maternal imprinting waged against her impregnate her writing, and I
show how she subverted the assumption of maternal guilt by writing maternal imprinting as a unique bond between the living mother and the spirit baby which traversed the separate spheres of the living and the dead.

### Florence Marryat’s Textual Spiritualism

Although photography (dis)proved Spiritualist practices by accessing the spectral realm through a material mode of seeing, not all mediumship was subjected to the surveillance of the camera, and some female mediums operated inside the womb of the cabinet which forbade entrance to the male photographic gaze. Manifesting the spirit inside the cabinet and only allowing access to a privileged, credulous and usually female few, the medium controlled the gazes of her spectators and rejected any which sought to objectify or denounce her. Florence Marryat, daughter of the novelist and naval officer Frederick Marryat and herself a prolific novelist, playwright, actress and passionate Spiritualist, published a number of defences of Spiritualism at the Victorian fin de siècle, including *There is no Death, The Clairvoyance of Bessie James* and *The Spirit World* (1891, 1893, 1894), as well as the novels *The Risen Dead* and *The Dead Man’s Message* (1891, 1894), which provided an alternative mode of documenting ectoplasmic mediumship that eschewed the voyeurism of male spirit photography.

By writing about what she saw at séances and inside cabinets, Marryat rejected the mediating male gaze of the camera as the dominant mode of representation and confirmed the maternal power of the medium and that of her own spectatorship, without sacrificing the medium’s maternal body to the scrutiny of others. This symbiotic dynamic of maternal gazes, that of the medium and the spectator which occluded the vision of others, is
documented by Marryat in her writing about the young medium Mary Rosina Showers, who along with her close friend Florence Cook was one of the ‘princesses of the Spiritualist world in the 1870s’ (Owen: 51). In *There is no Death* Marryat describes how during one séance Showers manifested the spirit of a small child ‘Lenore’:

The first sight of [Showers] terrified me [...] She now appeared to be shrunk to half her usual size, and the dress hung loosely on her figure. Her arms had disappeared, but putting my hands up her dress sleeves I found them diminished to the size of those of a little child – the fingers reached only where the elbows had been [...] She looked in fact like the mummy of a girl of four or six years old. (110)

Showers plays up to Marryat’s gaze and her spirit guide, also named ‘Florence’, explains ‘I wanted you to see her, because I know you are brave enough to tell people what you have seen’ (ibid.). In contrast to the sexualised full-form child materialisations who playfully fondled male séance sitters (Tromp: 103-5; Owen: 231-2), Showers’ manifestations presented the dead child in a state of decay. Too shocking to be captured on the photographic plate, only the maternal gaze which desires the child in any state can witness something so harrowing, confirming Agnes’ contention in the classic Gothic novel *The Monk*, when she describes her baby’s death during their incarceration: ‘It soon became a mass of putridity, and to every eye was a loathsome and disgusting object; to every eye, but a Mother’s [...] Hour after hour I passed upon my sorry couch, contemplating what had once been my child: I endeavoured to retrace its features through the livid corruption’ (425).
Marryat attests to the simultaneously embryonic and corpse-like manifestations of Lenore in which ‘she was seldom completely formed’ and ‘would hold up a foot which felt like wet clay, and had no toes on it, or not the proper quantity’, the ‘uncanny’ and ‘unpleasant feeling’ she created and the ‘charnel-house smell about her, as if she had been buried a few weeks and then dug up again, an odour which I have never smelt from any materialised spirit before or after [...] it resembled nothing but that of a putrid corpse’ (111).

As the tomb/womb which occludes the mummified spirit child from the probing male gaze, Showers’ cabinet rejected the ‘evidence’ of photography, instead privileging the written account of the eye-witness, and through Lenore the medium articulated the interplay between birth, maternity and death which so troubled the Victorians, manifesting a spirit child which denied access to everyone but the most hardened of maternal spectators.

Marryat’s gaze was primed for Lenore through her own bereavements and her desire to communicate with her spirit children. Marryat believed the spirit realm was inhabited by her daughters Ethel and Eva (who died from puerperal fever after she had given birth to them), and her malformed newborn Florence, ‘my dear lost child’ who died when she was ten days old in 1861 (ibid., 21). Her writing reveals a fixation with dead children and a maternal gaze desperate for communication with infants in the spirit realm, and her novel The Blood of the Vampire (1897) depicts Harriet Brandt, an unfortunate psychic vampire ‘very fond of children’ (70), who drains the life from those she loves. Symbolising fin de siècle anxieties about racial hybridity and miscegenation, Harriet, the daughter of a scientist and ‘a fat, flabby half-caste’, inherits her affliction through the maternal line from her mother who was bitten by a vampire bat while pregnant and ‘thirsted for blood’ and ‘loved the sight and smell of it’ (83; see Octavia Davis, Howard Malchow). While cursed Harriet is a sympathetic
character, her condition is explicitly traced through the bloodline back to the actions of her mother and grandmother, and Marryat had previously engaged with the notion of heredity influence and maternal imprinting in ‘The Box With the Iron Clamps’ (1868), which tells the story of Blanche Damer, who carries ‘an iron-clamped black trunk’ around with her which is opened after her death to reveal ‘the tiny skeleton of a new-born creature whose angel was even then beholding the face of his Father in heaven’ (176). Blanche was ‘killed by her remorse’, and Brenda Hammack suggests that ‘the nineteenth-century reader would likely recognise the presumption of maternal guilt originated from the child’s conception during an adulterous relationship’ (ix).

Drawing on the Victorian medical anxieties about the womb’s ability to harm the foetus through maternal imprinting, ‘The Box with the Iron Clamps’ also reflects Marryat’s own suffering over her daughters and the multiple miscarriages she reported, later revisited in *There is no Death* which ‘attests repeatedly to Marryat’s chronic need for consolation, or absolution, as she recounts séances with her almost children’ (ibid., ix-x). In the treatise Marryat describes how baby Florence was manifested on numerous occasions by full-form mediums including Cook and Showers, and the chapter ‘My Spirit Child’ reveals why the author was held accountable for her daughter’s death, as the newborn is described as having an extreme deformity of the mouth and jaw: ‘I was closely catechised as to whether I had suffered any physical or mental shock, that should account for the injury to my child, and it was decided that the trouble I had experienced was sufficient to produce it’ (73). Identified as the cause of her child’s intra-uterine deformity, Marryat’s case was so singular in its extremity that ‘under feigned names, [it] was fully reported in the *Lancet* as something quite out of the common way’ (ibid.).
In the eyes of Victorian medical men Marryat’s womb was responsible for baby Florence’s death as it fatally imprinted a trauma directly onto her body in utero. Yet, while this deformity contributed to her death, Marryat defines the imprinting as ‘a very important factor in my narrative’ as it was ‘incontrovertible proof of identity’ which enabled her to identify the presence of her daughter during séances (73, 85). For Marryat her womb’s imprinting enabled her to recognise Florence and reunite with her, who speaks about it from the spirit realm in terms of a bonding experience which she privileges over all others:

‘Did the trouble I have before your birth affect your spirit, Florence?’

‘Only as things cause each other, I was with you, mother, all through that trouble, I should be nearer to you, than any child you have, if I could only get close to you’

[...]

‘Do you know your sisters, Eva and Ethel?’

‘No! No! [...] The link of sisterhood is only through the mother. That kind of sisterhood does not last, because there is a higher’. (78)

Marryat’s moving account of her spirit child confirms the potency of the maternal gaze which has marked the living child in the womb so that it can identify it even in death. Through Spiritualism the maternal gaze suspends the child between two realms, and Marryat describes how she was told by another spirit friend ‘your child’s want of power to communicate with you is not because she is too pure, but because she is too weak. She will speak to you some day. She is not in heaven’ (76). Symbolised by her deformity, the
maternal gaze travels with the dead child and refuses to let her pass over into ‘the Beatific Presence’, because ‘once received into Heaven no spirit could return to earth’ (ibid.).

During one séance with Cook ‘Florence’ manifests and explains to her mother ‘don’t fancy I am like this in the spirit land. The blemish left me long ago. But I put it on to-night to make you certain’, so galvanising the pull of the maternal gaze through the womb’s deforming act of imprinting: ‘Don’t fret, dear mother. Remember I am always near you. No one can take me away. Your earthly children may grow up and go out into the world and leave you, but you will always have your spirit child close to you’ (85). Consequently, not only did Spiritualist practices allow the grieving mother to allay her guilt about her child’s death, it also afforded her the opportunity to hold onto a child whose living siblings escape the maternal gaze. Spiritualism confirmed for mothers that their child still needed them even after passing, that unlike other relationships the dyadic bond cannot be severed through death, and the Theobalds also communicated with their stillborn children through the mediumship of the childless aunt Florence (Owen: 75-106).

As Tatiana Kontou indicates, through her Spiritualist works Marryat fashioned herself as an ‘author-medium’, whose writing was ‘the product of her “sensitivity” – a dialogue between her “subliminal self” and the “discarnate spirits” who will become her characters’ (34). Marryat’s writing demonstrated a sense of maternal intuition and ‘feeling’ which superseded visual proof; in There is No Death she describes touching and kissing spirit children, and this sensuality tips over into a morbid, devouring orality when Marryat recalls about her spirit daughter ‘I have known her come in the dark and sit on my lap and kiss my face and hands, and let me feel the defect in her mouth with my own’ (82). While Marryat had lost Florence to an intra-uterine trauma for which she was held accountable,
her Spiritualist writings reconnected her to her child in a way which circumvented male scientific scrutiny and blame, as her ability to communicate with spirits was imprinted directly onto the page as opposed to the photographic plate, implicitly challenging photography as the primary mode of documentation and privileging her mind’s eye with the ability to eidetically birth ‘sentient beings’. Similarly, Marryat also described her fiction writing in terms of eidetic spirit manifestation: ‘I never feel at home with a plot till I have settled the names of the characters to my satisfaction. As soon as I have done that they become sentient beings in my eyes, and seem to dictate what I shall write’ (Marryat in Helen Black: 88).

By birthing the spirits onto the page Marryat’s Spiritualist output takes the notion of female agency and strips it of the sexual subtext produced by the voyeurism of the photograph. While the act of writing expresses her maternal gaze through the birthing of characters and spirits through her mind’s eye, it simultaneously occludes the fetishising male gaze predicated on the stimulus of the visual image, as opposed to the written one. The notion of maternal imprinting Marryat explored through her writing is echoed in the work of female spirit photographers like Georgiana Houghton and Ada Deane, who demonstrated maternal agency not through a physical birthing but a psychical one, as they manifested the spirit directly on the photograph by impregnating the plate with their energy.

While ectoplasmic photography has captured much critical attention, its fame during the early twentieth century was both preceded and followed by psychic spirit photography generated by female practitioners. Psychic spirit photography, which commandeered the photographic gaze and challenged the voyeurism of ectoplasmic photography, finds a matrilineage in the work of the Georgiana Houghton in the 1870s, whose methods of imprinting onto the plate were re-established by Ada Deane in the 1920s.

Feminist scholarship on Spiritualism has over-determined material ectoplasmic mediumship as a subversive act of birthing, simplifying the problematic connections between Spiritualism, female/maternal agency and the fetishising function of photography. While Owen argues that mediumship ‘validated the female authoritative voice and permitted women an active professional and spiritual role largely denied to them elsewhere’ (6), she neglects to address how this authority is undermined through the voyeurism of the spirit photograph captured through the lens of the male gaze, which takes the medium in a painful state of manifestation/birthing and reduces her to a fetish object. The masculinisation of ectoplasmic spirit photography during the later decades of the nineteenth century forestalled the power of the female/maternal body which it objectifies, but where this male fetishistic gaze is contended is through spirit photography which depicts spirit extras that appear once the plate has been exposed, the phenomenon which led Mumler to originally develop the practice and which was performed in the nineteenth century by Georgiana Houghton and the twentieth century by Ada Deane.

As Jennifer Tucker discusses, the Victorians believed women had an affinity with
death and its afterlife, as ‘more than most men, women sat with the sick and dying, prepared their bodies for burial, and wrote condolence letters to the grieving’, and it was this ‘intimate and practical relationship to death that grounded their interest in spirit photography’ (87). Through the domestication of photograph women became producers and consumers of the spirit photograph, and female practitioners who transformed their hobby into a profession, like the Birmingham amateur ‘Sarah Power’ and Georgiana Houghton, set a precedent for female spirit photography which endured into the twentieth century through the work of Ada Deane, whose photographs challenged the emergence of the sexually-energised ectoplasmic mediumship and refocused spirit photography as a conduit for the maternal gaze. Consequently, while visceral ectoplasmic photography provoked viewers, it was surrounded by a maternal heritage of psychic spirit photographers, who imitated on a supernatural level the sensitivity and passivity which Victorian society believed made women so adept at operating emerging communication technologies (see Jill Galvan: 1-22). But while woman’s body-as-vessel was viewed as the perfect medium, the maternal gaze exploited this assumed feminine passivity to infiltrate the paternal home, using the budding technology of photography to do so.

Ada Deane

Deane, a single mother and charwoman, bought an old quarter-plate camera which she used to photograph her children and friends and hoodwink the Spiritualist community (Jolly: 112). Her photographing of a friend led to a bizarre result where the head on the shoulders of the sitter was not that of the sitter herself, and after attending a séance where the medium predicted Deane would become a psychic photographer, she sat with the medium for six
months to develop her skills and obtained her first psychic photograph in June 1920 (ibid.). An amateur who would capture the grieving gazes of a nation, Deane’s first darkroom was a kitchen table covered by a cloth under which she would crouch with her plates (John Harvey: 111), Gothicising the domestic space - her own and others - through her production of images of the dead.

John Harvey writes how photographic emulsion was ‘imaginatively linked to ectoplasm, and activated as a soft, wet, labile membrane between two worlds’, how ‘the photograph’s emulsion was sensitised chemically by the application of developers, and psychically by the meeting of hands and the melding of mutual memories’ (111). Emulsion imbued the photographic plate with the ability to create embryonic, organic matter but without the pain of physical birthing which was objectified during ectoplasmic mediumship, and Deane magnetised the photographic plates by keeping them close to her body, through which her spirit control would imprint itself onto the plate and birth itself through it. Evoking connections between Spiritualism, the ‘mother-mediumship’ Florence Theobald attributed to the Virgin Mary and religious healing, Harvey explains how Deane ‘impressed spirit portraits upon the photographic plate by placing her palms directly onto its surface in a manner akin to the religious practice of “the laying on of the hands”’ (43), simultaneously allying herself with the Marian ability to create life without sexual intercourse, evoking associations with Jesus and beguiling her victims with the quasi-religious act of healing their grief by manifesting the spirit world through her photography. Such photographs painlessly produced through the process of imprinting, unlike those of the labouring ectoplasmic mediums, were from the maternal body but not of them. Like the womb searing the child
with the birthmark, the maternal gaze imprinted psychically onto the plate in such an intangible manner as to elude the voyeurism of the male gaze which portraits of ectoplasmic mediums gratified.

Instead, the maternal gaze of the psychic photographer manipulates the grief of others to hoodwink both the sitters and viewers of the portrait into believing that she is the link between their material world and that of the spirit which their deceased loved ones inhabit. This is epitomised by Deane’s Armistice Day series (1922-25), photographs capturing the Cenotaph at Whitehall during the commemorative two minutes’ silence, accompanied by spirits of countless British soldiers killed in the First World War hanging in a hazy ectoplasmic fog. Despite obvious fakery, confirmed by a Daily Sketch exposé in which a number of the spirits were identified as ‘popular sporting identities’ ‘still very much alive’ (15th November 1924, in Jolly: 128), these photographs were still passed around the Spiritualist community in the hope of identifying loved ones, and Doyle claimed to have seen his nephew in the 1924 piece. More nebulous and insidious than the visceral manifestations of ectoplasmic mediums, the painless imprinting of psychic photography thrived on the trauma and loss of others and the proliferation of Deane’s photographic maternal gaze was nourished by the death it ostensibly disavowed.
While material mediums took their work to the most literal level, using muslin for the birthed ectoplasm, imprinting onto the photographic plate has the obverse effect as spirit extras are still created by the medium, but manifested psychically onto the plate as birthmarks are seared onto the flesh of the foetus by the womb’s gaze. The medium births the spirit through her mind’s eye, and so her psychic gaze is maternalised. The result is an image not uncomfortable to view, like the voyeuristic portrayals of Margery, Marthé or Kate Goligher, but uncanny, otherworldly, not material and so untouchable. Deane’s extras symbolise the maternal gaze’s ability to reproduce itself parthenogenetically and were described by Fred Barlow, a member of the SPR who invited Deane and her family into his
home to investigate her (and who would eventually denounce her as a fraud in his ‘Report of an Investigation into Spirit Photography’ (1932)), as ‘though the plates in some peculiar way became impregnated with the sensitive’s aural or psychic emanations’ (1920: 1). Bound up in metaphors of pregnancy and birth, psychic photography, in contradistinction to male-dominated ectoplasmic spirit photography, enabled women to autonomously birth a sentient being and capture it forever photographically through the lens of their maternal gaze.

While Deane’s crude photographs of veiled spirit extras hovering behind sitters are clearly fakes, they remain imprints of the maternal gaze as she tampered with plates during the process of double exposure to expose them first to the image of the extra, and then to the sitters. Thus Deane’s photographs are doubly uncanny, as they represent the image of the image of the deceased. Exposing an old portrait of the ‘spirit’ onto the photographic plate, she reproduces the image once again and this uncanniness is heightened by the foggy quality of the simulacrum. Deane’s maternal photographic gaze simultaneously doubles the deceased object/subject and cleaves it from itself, splintering its subjectivity and dislocating it further from the Symbolic while creating multiple copies upon which the spectatorial maternal gaze can meditate.

The potency of Deane’s maternal gaze was further transmitted through her psychic daughter Violet, who accompanied her mother to experiments and séances arranged by curious men seduced by the photographer’s matriarchal family. As well as invading Barlow’s house and also the estate of Sir Oliver Lodge, author of the popular Spiritualist book _Raymond: Or Life and Death_ (1916), Ada, Violet and the other Deane children were moved into the home of F.W. Warrick, a wealthy chairman who was intrigued by the ‘freakmarks’,
‘chemical smudges and smears, and bursts of light’ on Deane’s photographs, imprints attesting to her maternal gaze which saw things others could not, and Warrick ‘became progressively obsessed by Deane and her predominantly female household’ (Jolly: 120, 119). With the democratisation of photography in the female domestic sphere (Marina Warner 2006: 225) Deane the charwoman commandeered and controlled the Edwardian parlour to become a prime exponent of the psychic photograph, and her maternal gaze with its progeny in the form of ‘psychic’ Violet and the other children, like the governess with her spectral visions in The Turn of the Screw, infiltrated and infected the patriarchal domain, commandeering and Gothicising the domestic space for herself with the image of the dead child.

One room was reserved for séances, where a darkroom was built as well as a cabinet for transference experiments in which Deane sealed herself while Warrick ‘crouched outside’, attempting to transmit his thoughts to her (120). This darkroom and cabinet are the wombs from which the devious maternal gaze births ‘evidence’ of the spirit realm, spaces in his own home from which Warrick was denied entry, outside of which he must bow down and supplicate. In stark contrast to the obscene portraits of the objectified material medium whose violenced body is forever captured as pained in the trauma of birthing the ectoplasm, Deane’s psychic photography mobilises the maternal gaze through the spirit extras imprinted insidiously onto the plate, and her duplicitous photography exposes others to her objectifying eye, and Deane’s predecessor Georgiana Houghton similarly commandeered and maternalised the paternal space with her psychic imprinting.
6. Ada Deane, self-portrait with spirit extra, c.1922

Georgiana Houghton

Prefiguring Deane’s photographs which manifested the spirit psychically onto the plate through her body, Georgiana Houghton manipulated the photographic processes of England’s first spirit photographer Frederick Hudson to imprint the image of the dead child onto the plate, and Houghton’s photographs, accompanied by her autobiographical eyewitness accounts, were instrumental in the birth of spirit photography in England. ‘A
middle-aged spinster who lived a sequestered life with her parents’ (Owen: 67), Houghton was an eccentric Spiritualist who believed she had spirit guidance from seventeen archangels ‘who constantly attended her, giving her advice which she received as intimations felt within her “in breaths”’ and who had had visions of the spirit world which manifested as automatic (also automastic) drawings (Jolly: 24, Harvey: 107-8). While many of her drawings such as ‘The Eye of God’ (1862) and ‘Glory Be to God’ (1864), were ostensibly ‘didactic objects’ which depicted the Holy Trinity in abstract symbolic forms and promoted the idea of an omniscient all-seeing God, as Rachel Oberter notes Houghton’s accompanying explanations, which state that the eye of the Holy Ghost is “understood rather than expressed”, are consistently ‘opaque and frustrating’, as ‘the texts associate a shape with a particular idea, yet the verbal description of the shape may be insufficient to locate that shape in the image’ (225, quoting Houghton). The monolithic gaze of God fails through this disconnect between image and text, while Houghton’s gaze continues to observe both the material and spirit realms, and her work undermines modes of patriarchal surveillance through her commandeering of Hudson’s photography.

In 1859 Houghton received a message from her angels portending that ‘the time was approaching when they would be able to impress their portraits on the photographic plate’ (Houghton 1882: 11), and in 1864, having read reports of Mumler’s work, she unsuccessfully tried to produce her own spirit photographs. On 7th March 1872 Houghton was introduced by London’s famous Spiritualist couple Samuel and Elizabeth Guppy to the ‘elderly and apparently doddery’ Hudson, whose photographic gaze would be commandeered and imprinted by Houghton’s own psychic eye (Jolly: 24). Hudson’s method of double exposure, coating and exposing the plate firstly with the spirit and then again with the sitter to create
a superimposition which deceptively implied a concurrent manifestation, enabled Houghton to manipulate the plate and she spent the next four years experimenting with Hudson and the Guppys. She and Elizabeth would cast one another into a mesmeric trance in a ‘cabinet’ in Hudson’s studio, a curtained-off area which collected the psychic energy of the mediums which the spirits would draw on to manifest themselves (Jolly: 25), and the results were photographed by Hudson, whose workshop had been overwhelmed by the women mediums and whose skills would be made redundant by Houghton’s invasion: ‘Mr Hudson’s only duty [...] was to uncap the lens for exposure, and re-cap it when finished’ (Houghton 1882: 109).

Like Marryat, Houghton documented her sittings through written narratives, contributing monthly letters to the *Spiritual Magazine* which were reproduced alongside Hudson’s photographs of her psychic manifestations in *Chronicles of Photographs of Spiritual Beings and Phenomena Invisible to the Material Eye: Interblended with Personal Narrative* (1882), published a year after her first work *Evenings at Home in Spiritual Séance: Welded Together by a Species of Autobiography* (1881; Houghton had earlier published a catalogue to accompany her ill-fated exhibition ‘Spirit Drawings in Water Colours’, which ran for four months at the New British Gallery, Old Bond Street, in 1871). As Sarah Willburn comments, Houghton’s works, which recounted interactions with dead children along with her own ancestors and historical personages including St John the Evangelist and Joan of Arc, reframed Hudson’s photographs in an intimate atmosphere of the familial uncanny reminiscent of ‘the informal style one might expect if one were ushered through someone’s family picture album’ (59). Like Marryat’s later highly subjective and emotive spirit writing, Houghton’s use of her ambiguous ‘personal narratives’ and ‘species of autobiography’ creates a sense of intimacy, and this roots the photograph back to the control and ownership of her
gaze, despite its having been taken by Hudson. Although not the camera’s operator, Houghton had a place behind the lens as well as in front of it, being in control of both the photographic space and the results it birthed, and like Deane ‘perform[ed] mesmeric hand-passes over different parts of the studio, as well as the plates and jars of collodion emulsion’ and ‘assist[ed] the flurried and out-of-sorts Hudson with applying, sensitising and varnishing the wet-collodion plates’ (Jolly: 25). Having already produced automatic spirit drawings which circumvented the need for the camera, including ‘a lovely little face, just like a photograph’ (1881: 68), Houghton took the photographic process into her own hands through her plate preparation and hand-passes, seizing control from Hudson’s struggling command and constellating her parthenogenetic procreative body as the centre of both the process and the resultant composition. This act of bypassing the male photographer, of rendering redundant the lens of the male gaze, was most intensely embodied by the contention that some female mediums could manifest the child spirit extra directly onto the plate and produce a photograph completely without the camera, by ‘holding the sensitive plate in [their] hand’ (Gunning: 53).

Unlike later sexualised ectoplasmic photography, as one of the first spirit mediums to be photographed Houghton presented her body, in both the photographs and her writing, as one which autonomously birthed the spirit. Not a passive receptacle for the material spirit but an active agent imprinting directly onto the plate, the studio and lens, under her masquerade of harmless eccentric spinster Houghton deftly infected Hudson’s compositions by forcing her body onto the photograph whilst maintaining a pretence of modesty - unlike her ectoplasmic counterparts Houghton was always photographed fully-clothed. While later ectoplasmic photography demonstrated a violent and voyeuristic male gaze, the first spirit
photographs in England were produced by a man whose vision was controlled by female mediums who used the womb of the cabinet to conceal their power from prying eyes. Like Marryat's reunion with Florence, Houghton's narratives figure herself as a maternal figure desired by spirit children, despite having no children of her own, and she describes how Elizabeth had seen 'a number of little boys stroking and caressing me, all striving to reach me by pushing between one another' (1882: 107).

Children were both sitters and spirits in Houghton's (and Hudson's) compositions, exposing them to the maternal gaze in different ways. In one photograph (plate 1.8 from *Spiritual Beings*) Houghton peers into the veil of a shrouded child spirit she identifies as 'my dear nephew Charlie' who drowned along with his parents, Houghton's sister and brother-in-law, in the sinking of the SS Carnatic in 1869: 'My face is pressed against the spirit, whose veil falls partly over me, so that I am within it, and we seem locked in mutual embrace' (1882: 93; spirit children were often obscured by a veil in Houghton's photographs, either their own or that of an accompanying spectral mother, see also 93-4, 252). Obscured by both Houghton and the veil into which she stares, Charlie is accessible only to her maternal gaze and that of viewers who choose to fix the dead child as the spirit despite his obscurity, as she describes how her second cousin exclaimed on seeing the photograph 'that spirit is exactly like Charlie Warren' (158). Charlie is both victim and abettor of Houghton's gaze, as she describes him as 'one of the most indefatigable workers on that side in collecting power and the other needful requisites for the growth and perfection of this most interesting phase of spirit manifestation' (93).
While the appearance of child spirits imprinted onto the plate by Houghton encouraged the grieving mother to meditate on its image and draw it back into her body through her vision, Tommy Guppy, who sat for photographs with both his mother and Houghton, was subjected to multiple maternal gazes. In these portraits the toddler is held fast by the mother-figure so that the female spirit can gaze upon him. While in the photograph with his mother Elizabeth it was (erroneously) thought to be Spiritualism’s sweetheart Katie King who peers down on the child, in the portrait with Houghton Tommy is apprehended by the ghost of his ‘grandmamma’ (14) looming over him, archly spectral in
white sheet with outstretched arms, while Houghton arrests the camera with her own direct gaze. Held in place by the mother-figure, the child-as-conduit is implicated as an agent for the spirit, set in direct opposition to Symbolic ways of seeing predicated on spatial and temporal logic. Manipulated against the paternal realm, Tommy is caught in a web of maternal gazes which seizes control of the camera at all angles, that of the spectre, the mother(figure) who holds him down and that of the maternal spectator, and because the female spectre is imprinted onto the plate during development, the vulnerable child cannot behold that which gazes upon him. Consequently Tommy is exposed both to and through an omnipotent maternal gaze to which he himself is blinded.


10. Mrs Guppy, Child and Katy, 1872
These conspiring voyeurisms become visual abuse enacted against the child as his body is forced to become a conduit between the spectral and the material, as like Charlie on the other side Tommy must work for multiple maternal gazes. This sense of the child being exploited by the maternal gaze is evidenced by a sitting Houghton describes in which she tried to capture the manifestation of a box of ‘TREASURES’ Elizabeth had seen being held above the medium’s head by two ‘beautiful little angels’ (1882: 108). Houghton explains how on the day of the photograph ‘when I reached Mr Hudson’s [...] I found Mrs Guppy there with her infant, for she had had a message rapped out to her on the previous day by a spirit who desired her to “Take the baby to Mr Hudson’s to-morrow, to be photographed on Miss Houghton’s own plate, because I want his portrait for my son”’ (ibid.):

*I took my seat with the baby on my lap, Mrs Guppy standing behind me; but the infant did not approve of so sudden an arrangement, and cried frantically during the process. Mrs Guppy said I was to look straight into the lens, for it was by the light emanating from my face that the manifestation should be shewn. (109-110)*

Houghton’s photographic gaze is privileged by both spectral and material sitters as the only one which can unite the two realms, while the child Tommy is designated her accomplice, despite his visible distress. Tommy is fused to Houghton both physically as he is held in her lap and through the process of being photographed with her. Impregnated with ‘the spiritual atmosphere of my home’, the plates were further imprinted with Houghton’s essence as she scratched her initials in one corner, having been instructed by the spirits to monogram them
and ‘not to let them be for a moment out of my possession’ (109). Becoming extensions of her body, Houghton’s plates echo the processes of Julia Margaret Cameron who physically marked the plate with scratches and hairs, and her imprinting enabled her to not only claim ownership of that which her photographs capture, but to imply that her photographic and bodily gaze created them. Tommy is caught in the plate-as-body, while Hudson’s intervention is prohibited, as ‘the mingling of all kinds of influences is so injurious to the success of the manifestation’ that ‘Mrs Guppy and I [had] the dark room to ourselves, as Mr Hudson was not to be admitted’ (109).

Although Hudson was the camera’s operator, through her psychic mediumship Houghton controlled the lens, plate and composition to create the first Spiritualist photographs in Europe, portraits which established the potency of her spirit vision. Gothicising the Hudsons’ household and fulfilling her spirit guides’ prophecy, she imprinted onto the plate to capture the dead and living child and arrest them in her gaze, and that of Elizabeth Guppy and the maternal spectres. In both Deane’s and Houghton’s photographs the dead child is forced onto the plate both by and through the maternal body, and despite her eccentric exterior Houghton, like Deane, capitalised on this and charged for her services, as Tucker describes her as ‘a prime example of a medium, interpreter, entrepreneur and publicist’ (85).

While the laying on of hands energised the plate with the maternal gaze (as Tera’s hand carries her gaze), the child spirit was also birthed directly through the maternal gaze as the medium’s meditation on the sensitised plate indelibly imprinted the image of the dead child, while keeping the original spirit captured in her mind’s eye. The maternal gaze of the spirit medium fractured the dead child by forbidding it to pass over completely by
summoning it repeatedly through the spirit photograph, itself only a simulacrum of the spirit who remains trapped in the body of the medium-as-vessel. Gothicising both the infant technology of photography and the domestic space with their images of the dead child, while resisting the specularisation of their maternal bodies by the photographic male gaze, Houghton’s and Deane’s practices reject the notion that the female domestic setting of Spiritualism was ultimately a conservative, patriarchal one (Robert Cox: 99).

Unlike the material fakery of ectoplasmic and full-form mediumship which expelled the spirit from the maternal body and so in essence de-maternalised it, psychic imprinting enabled the medium to keep the original spirit of the dead child inside her, a literal phantom pregnancy. It is this act of imprinting which impregnates the work of Julia Margaret Cameron.
Chapter Four

‘Taken From Life’: Memorial Portraiture, Divine Death and the Virgin Mary in the Photography of Julia Margaret Cameron

As the popularity of spirit photography demonstrated, the emergence of genre photography in the nineteenth century provided a mode of visual production for the maternal gaze to both consume and (re)produce images of dead children which Gothicised and maternalised the photographic process and the paternal household. Gothic practices of spirit photography and memorial portraiture infiltrated the home and influenced the domestic amateur photographer, an influence apparent in the work of Julia Margaret Cameron. This section discusses how Cameron’s series *Fruits of the Spirit* (1864) and other compositions which portray her housemaid Mary Hillier as the Virgin Mary evoke the aesthetics of memorial portraiture and spirit photography of capturing the dead child to subvert them and produce compositions which pose the living child, often her own grandson, in a performance of death which echoes the Marian iconography of the pietà. I show how Cameron’s work, interpreted by feminist approaches as a sensual expression of the pre-Oedipal maternal dyad, evokes these Gothic photographic practices and exploits the veil of Mary’s holy benevolence to represent and license a vengeful and abusive maternal gaze.

Memorial Portraiture: The Living Dead

Memorial portraiture was a popular practice in North America and Britain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and foreshadowed spirit photography as it
provided an enduring image of the deceased upon which the grieving could meditate. As Stanley Burns discusses, while in the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries only the wealthy could afford to remember their loved ones through painted portraits, through the democratisation of photography, which ‘made a visual iconography available to everyone’, families could afford to memorialise their dead and ‘preserve the images of those who died prematurely and unphotographed’ (‘Preface’). Because these photographs were often the only ones that existed of the deceased, ‘surviving families were proud of these images and hung them in their homes, gave copies to friends and relatives [carte-de-visites], wore them as lockets or carried them as pocket mirrors’ (ibid.), and because adults had more opportunity to be photographed in their lifetime, the subjects of memorial portraiture were often dead children. Photography became an aspect of the grieving process, and the image of the deceased endured long after its original had passed on.

However, as with spirit photography memorial portraiture did not always allow the grieving viewer to fully work through their mourning, and instead often presented the dead subject in uncanny and deceptive poses which implied life. While cultural practice did vary, with the British tradition more often depicting the dead child as sleeping, this method of mimicking life was commonplace in North American memorial portraiture, and the deception was further exaggerated by applying cosmetics to the deceased’s face, painting eyes onto eyelids, plumping out cheeks with cotton wool, and post-development photographs were tinted to give colour to skin and cheeks. Sometimes the deceased would be preserved on ice until the time came to be photographed, with one carte-de-visite of a dead girl holding her book inscribed ‘Taken 9 days after Death’, ‘Mother could not part with only daughter’ (Burns: fig. 56). As Burns’ extensive collection of memorial portraiture
Sleeping Beauty (1990) shows, memorial portraits of babies and children are especially uncanny because they appear to be sleeping, not dead, as the plump fleshiness of their bodies disguises the rigor mortis which is more detectable in photographs of adults. While photographing the dead adult confirmed their death, capturing the dead child immortalised them, and disguising death was strived for by photographers through lighting and positioning, with Nathan Burgess offering this advice in 1855:

If the portrait of an infant is being taken, it may be placed in the mother's lap, and taken in the usual manner by a side light representing sleep. If it is an older child, it can be placed upon the table, with the head toward the light, slightly raised, and diagonally with the window with the feet brought more towards the middle of the window [...]. All likeness taken after death will of course only resemble the inanimate body [...] except indeed the sleeping infant, on whose face the playful smile of innocence sometimes steals in even after death. (80)

As Jay Ruby discusses, the suggestion of the child sleeping in their (death)bed, accompanied by a grieving parent, was a convention of earlier narrative memorial paintings, including the American artist Charles Peale's portrait of his wife Rachel with their dead daughter Margaret, victim in her infancy to smallpox, Rachel Weeping (1772/1776). Peale originally painted Margaret alone, but in 1776 he doubled the size of the portrait and added Rachel and some medicine bottles, symbolising the family's attempts to save the child. Foreshadowing Cameron's photographic narrativisation of the grieving Holy Mother,
Rachel’s upward-turned face and milky skin evoke the archetypal image of the sorrowful Virgin Mary, and Peale’s re-painting four years after the child’s death locates maternal grief as the focus of the composition; while ‘the infant is presented in bed in nightclothes as if asleep [....] it is the mother’s facial expression which clearly indicates that the child is dead’ (Ruby: 33). While the arms of the dead child bound to her body with ribbon betray her true dead state, the mother’s grieving gaze distracts and controls that of the viewer and tells us how to react; it is the mother’s gaze which confirms that the child is dead, which demands our attention and to which we must respond with sympathy.

The grieving mother sitting beside or holding the apparently sleeping child was a hugely popular pose for subjects of nineteenth-century memorial portraiture. Figures 5, 17 and 29 in Burns all manipulate the dead child to give the illusion of life while their mothers gaze
down upon them, while Figure 2 takes the illusion of sentience even further, as the child, eyes still open, is sitting on her mother's lap, 'in painterly convention of the “sick child”, as her mother looks on.

12. Allegorical Angelic Death Scene, c. 1854

13. One part of Mothers Holding Their Dead Children, c. 1845-1855

14. Mother Grieving Over her Dead Daughter, c. 1851

15. Mother With her Dead Daughter Posed in Painterly Convention of the “sick child”, c.1852
As in *Rachel Weeping*, it is not the image of the child itself but the mothers’ expressions which confirm that we are looking at the dead, and viewing these photographs has an unnerving effect which delays the recognition of their true nature and stalls the mourning process for the mother, both those inside and observing the photograph, who is forever fixated on the image of the ‘sleeping’ child. For Freud grief and mourning can potentially become a pathological melancholia if the subject does not fully engage with the process and follow it through:

Profound mourning, the reaction to the loss of someone who is loved, contains the same painful frame of mind, the same loss of interest in the outside world [...] the same loss of capacity to adopt any new object of love (which would mean replacing him) and the same turning away from any activity that is not connected with thoughts of him. It is easy to see that this inhibition and circumscription of the ego is the expression of an exclusive devotion to mourning which leaves nothing over for other purposes or other interests. It is really only because we know so well how to explain it that this attitude does not seem to us pathological. (1917: 244)

Like the child’s fort/da process of mastering maternal loss, the successful mourning process is dependent on ‘reality-testing’, realising that the love-object no longer exists and withdrawing one’s libidinal attachments back into oneself (ibid.). Dan Meinwald describes memorial portraiture as ‘like embalming, a preservation of the body for the gaze of the
observer’ (8), and so meditating on memorial portraiture aborted the process of reality-testing as it suggested that its subject was still alive, that there was no need to mourn them. For the bereft mother, the memorial portrait preserved her child and photographs which imply the dead child is still alive fulfilled the maternal gaze in different ways, as while death rendered it immobile within the gaze, the illusion of life allowed her to repeatedly meditate on them and reject the mourning process.

Corey Creekmur writes that the roots of the melancholia that attends the failure of mourning are located ‘in the late-oral, literally introjective, stage of libidinal development’, and so by meditating on the memorial photograph in which it has been captured the child is ‘emotionally consumed’, devoured by the maternal gaze (75). Memorial portraiture allows the mother to re-establish the dyad and forbids her ego from ‘becom[ing] free and uninhibited again’, the ultimate function of mourning (Freud 1917: 245). Like spirit photography, memorial portraiture fed the maternal gaze as it petrified and immortalised the dead child in a manner which simultaneously implied and denied it life. Consequently, portraits of living children posed in similar ways are tinged with death as the viewer pores over the photograph in an attempt to determine whether the subject is alive or dead, and this ambivalence saturates the work of Julia Margaret Cameron.

‘I longed to arrest all beauty that came before me’:

Julia Margaret Cameron

Cameron is well-known for her later portraiture of famous Victorians and her photographic illustrations of subjects from literature, history and scripture, and although her professional
career lasted little more than a decade, her work is instantly recognisable through its ‘uncompromising, unvarnished immediacy’ (Warner 1996: 33), achieved through the messiness of her prints caused by scratching and imprinting, a technique she discovered by accident when she rubbed her hands over the emulsioned glass of her first photograph (Cameron: 9). In 1863 when Cameron was forty-eight she was given a camera as a gift by her daughter and began practising photography in an outdoor glasshouse. Despite (or because of) the imperfect nature of Cameron’s work she soon became an acclaimed photographer, joining professional photography bodies and contracting with the dealer Colnaghi for the sale of individually-signed photographs, as well as exhibiting in London in 1866 and 1868. While achieving professional status Cameron still remained, like Deane and Houghton, a domestic practitioner, and her bohemian household at Freshwater on the Isle of Wight became her studio. Stylistically associated with the Pre-Raphaelite movement, Cameron is most famous for the later output which echoes these influences, but feminist and photography scholars have become increasingly interested in her early work, in which she photographed her housemaids, her grandson and other local children, especially her neighbours the Keown Siblings, as the Virgin Mary and Jesus. Markedly more amateurish and blurred than her later work, these pieces plot Cameron’s artistic development and capture a raw maternity and sexuality in her subjects, which I argue has been misinterpreted and romanticised as a cosy pre-Oedipal eroticism.

While Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray have reclaimed the figure of the Virgin Mary as a powerful force of the pre-Oedipal maternal-feminine (see Eluned Summers-Bremner, Amy Hollywood), in the Victorian Christian collective consciousness she occupied an ambivalent place. Through her photography Cameron narrativised this ambivalence and
critiqued the hagiographic idealisation of the sorrowful and sacrificing Virgin Mary, evoking the imagery of memorial portraiture and spirit photography to Gothicise the holy mother and produce portraits which exposed her infanticidal artistic vision. Locating Cameron’s morbid Marian photography as a continuation of medieval Catholic iconography which privileged Mary’s role as mother and marginalised the omnipotence of the (Holy) Father, I show how she articulates a matrilineal maternal gaze through her own photographic eye which captures and imprints onto the plate the gaze of Mary Hillier her maid and model, dubbed ‘the island Madonna’, and how this echoes the gaze passed down from St. Anne to her daughter Mary as depicted in Medieval holy kinships and maternal trinities. Considering Cameron’s photography within this context, I show how her radical reimagining of the Virgin Mary presents the most iconic suffering mother in Western collective consciousness as potentially deadly and wholly ambiguous.

Lindsay Smith describes the photograph as ‘first and foremost the technological embryo of the movie’ (1995: 3), and photography in the nineteenth century was also linked to the maternal body and birth through its practical processes, as the enormously popular carte-de-visites, small paper photographs mounted onto card exchanged between family, friends and visitors, were primarily albumen prints, a process which used the albumen from egg to bind the photographic chemicals to the paper to sensitise it and create a print from a negative. The albumen print was born from, and bound to and by, the female reproductive body, and in spirit photography female psychic practitioners like Houghton, and later Deane, would impregnate their vision back through the photograph by imprinting the image of the dead child onto the plate. Anticipating this act of imprinting the maternal gaze performs through the psychic spirit photograph, Cameron’s work explicitly frames the
photographic process as parthenogenetic as she physically impregnates herself onto the emulsified plate through smears, scratches, fingerprints and trapped hairs, the fibres of her self. As Marion Wynne-Davies has discussed, the combination of a hazy, amniotic quality and the pathological act of imprinting locates Cameron’s work as overtly Gothic:

It was precisely these revolutionary qualities which allowed [Cameron] to transform the ‘realist’ genre of Victorian photography into the Gothic images valued so highly today. The tonal shades, the blurred focus, the blood-like chromosomal effects all contribute to the haunting prints which combine reality and dream, truth and nightmare vision. (132)

As much as by the child she ‘takes’, her portraiture is also haunted by Cameron herself, as the photograph is infected by her at an atomic level and becomes an extension of her own body, and Carol Armstrong discusses how Cameron’s photographs of children self-reflexively and parthenogenetically express a maternalisation of the photographic process. Considering *Cupid’s Pencil of Light* (1870), in which a young naked Cupid (her neighbour Freddy Gould) draws with the titular pencil of light onto a photographic plate, Armstrong shows how Cameron rearticulates Oscar Rejlander’s earlier depiction of the subject in *Infant Photography* (c.1856), where ‘infant photography [is] handing his tool to (or receiving it from) Father Art, shown in the service and under the guidance as the artist as patriarch’ (1996: 116). While Rejlander’s photograph depicts artistry installed in a Symbolic contract of patrilineage and patronage (heralded by the mirror in the composition, evoking the
Lacanian mirror stage) as the infant Cupid takes the (phallic) paint brush offered to him by a male hand, Cameron’s piece shows the child as symbolic of the birth of photography as making his own art alone, without paternal interference:

Cameron imagines photography *en abyme*, the child within the photograph, aligned with its frame, reproducing in miniature, with his ‘pencil of light’ and on a photographic plate, the act of ‘natural drawing’ that produced the larger image in which he sits enframed: the act of ‘natural drawing’, in other words, that reproduced him reproducing it [....] this Cupid represents drawing under the aegis of photography – in the guise of light – rather than photography under the aegis of the mastered arts of painting and drawing; photography in the image of its own process, its own mode of production, rather than [....] ruled by the technical decrees of the established arts; Photography under the sway of the Mother, rather than the law of the Father. (116-117)

Cameron’s work rejects the notion of photography indebted to a patriarchal history of art, instead suggesting through composition, light and imprinting that the photograph has the agency to have birthed itself, ‘captured in the self-reflexive embrace of incestuous Mother Photography, (re)produced by her even as she reproduces herself’ (117). Refusing the inheritance of Symbolic representation which obeys paternal Law, Cameron’s Gothic photography depicts a dyadism in which child/mother, photograph(er)/subject, are indivisible and a comparison of Cameron’s and Rejlander’s scenes reveals this dyad is
potentially deadly; while Rejlander’s child is plump, Cameron’s Cupid is waxen, gaunt and ghostly.

I want to show that the ambiguous Gothic nature of Cameron’s photography has been underestimated by some critics who juxtapose her work with the more overtly sexually dubious and disturbing photographs taken by Lewis Carroll (Charles Dodgson’s alter-ego) of his little-girl friends, including Alice Liddell whom Cameron photographed as an adult. Both Carol Mavor and Lindsay Smith compare Cameron and Carroll’s photographs, with very different results. Smith’s measured reading of Cameron’s stylistic ‘drive towards a condition of “unfocus” or a less than absolute focus’, within the context of the nineteenth-century valorisation of ‘sharp’ focus and ‘the dominance of geometrical perspective in Western art’ (1998: 35), takes the etymological root of the Latin ‘focus’, meaning ‘hearth’, to reveal how Cameron’s work ‘embodies a particular spatial intervention in the representation of the
domestic’ (37). Cameron’s defocusing offers up the child subject in the domestic setting in a different way from Carroll, as ‘the opportunity for fetishisation is not presented to us ready-made; there is a much more subtle manipulation of the viewer’s identification’ (46). Cameron mediates and manipulates the domestic with her Gothic infanticidal vision, and here I understand Smith’s analysis to suggest that Cameron’s photographs do fetishise the child, but because they are not as determined, as obvious, in their fetishisation as Carroll’s, the viewer is hoodwinked into believing that their spectatorship is reciprocal and not voyeuristic, and I find that Mavor’s highly maternal-subjective approach to Cameron, while unquestionably a valuable critique, has been manipulated in this way.

While Mavor hints toward this discord between critical approaches, as Cameron is ‘saved by her maternal lifestyle’ (25) while Carroll fetishised the child’s body as the ‘flattened flower buds’ between his photographic plates and photo albums (25-6), she proceeds to read Cameron’s photographs through the lens of maternal sensuality, rather than outright sexualisation. Mavor pronounces ‘I love Cameron’s fallen Madonnas’ (44), and writes a communal erotics of synaesthesia in which she participates, explaining ‘I better understand what I see through the sense of touch’, celebrating how Cameron leaves ‘her own skin (her fingerprints) on a plate that gives way to touching the skin of infants and other women’ (68, 49). Similarly Mavor indentifies with Hillier-as-Mary-Mother, devouring the children synaesthetically via her maternal gaze: ‘Hillier audibly breathes in the young girl. I recognise this gesture. I always smell my children before and as I give them kisses’ (67). Like Mavor, Nicole Cooley sees Cameron’s photography in terms of female photographer/subject reciprocity which reclaims the feminine from the male gaze, but for Cooley this is achieved through an ‘appropriation of the male gaze’ (370), a performance which can only be an echo
of the original. For me Cameron does not bother herself with the male gaze; she has her own with which to capture these women and children, the narcissistic maternal gaze which exists before that of the male and its fixation with the phallus.

While Dodgson’s compositions present his girl-subjects in various coquettish poses which both fetishise and betray a fear of emergent female sexuality, most notoriously the slatternly *Alice Liddell as a Beggar Girl* (1859), so too does Cameron’s work desire to arrest the child in a perpetual state of deathly sexuality which exists outside and beyond the Symbolic contract. Death and emergent sexuality are overtly depicted in Cameron’s photographs, but the motherly persona of the photographer and her maternal imagery of the Virgin Mary deceive the viewer into believing her compositions are gentle, tender, consensual, in comparison to the output of Dodgson’s desperately voyeuristic lens. It seems the photograph of the naked and sexualised child is permissible if produced by a mother; while Cameron’s hands pass over the plate and the body of the child, it is clear that for Mavor the threat of paedophilia is absent:

The pictures are printed with eroticism, as if they have been touched all over. It is as if the messiness of their hair, the touch of their fingers caught unaware, the sensual feel and look of their child-bodies has been magically caught in the emulsion [...] as if the entity of childhood, a strange jelly, has been smeared into these pictures, which were developed without regard for the rules, producing photographs that were (and still are) distinctly fleshly, dreamy, blurry, delightfully sloppy, otherworldly – like the skin of children. (25)
While her photographs are emblems of the intense pre-Oedipal dyadic bond between mother and child, that bond is characterised not by cosy eroticism but by an explicitly sexual drive forgotten once the child enters into the paternal contract, which when resurrected as incestuous Oedipal desires exposes the instability of this contract. Cameron’s maternal gaze does not concede an erotic aesthetic, nor does it appropriate the phallic male gaze to produce a sexualised photograph. A critical blindness has diluted the implications of Cameron’s work, and as I show ‘erotic’ is a weak word which does not acknowledge how she overtly sexualises the child through and for the originary maternal gaze, as represented by the iconic mother Mary.

**Hail Mary, Full of Grace**

The sexual dyadic bond in Cameron’s work is expressed through a Gothicised iconography of the Virgin Mary, subversively played by Cameron’s maid Mary Hillier (and occasionally Mary Ryan), and Cameron’s Marian photography reflected a Victorian ambivalence towards Catholicism and Marian theology. In 1854, a decade before Cameron started producing her Madonnas, Pope Pius IX pronounced the dogma of the Immaculate Conception as infallible, ‘a special grace which preserved [the Virgin Mary] from the stain of original sin from the first instance of her conception’ (Sarah Boss 2003: 139), which radically reinvented her as simultaneously and paradoxically human and divine, virgin and mother. Consequently, ‘[Cameron’s] treatment of the Virgin roughly divided between images of Mary of this world and pictures of Mary divine’ (Sylvia Wolf: 60; see also Carol Herringer). While Cameron’s
divine Marys depict the Virgin alone in traditional poses of devotional prayer - *Mary Hillier as a Madonna Study* (1864/5) - or serene contemplation - *Mary Mother* (1867) - it is her photographs of Mary and child(ren) in the act of mothering which are most evocative of a ‘real’ and explicitly unholy Virgin Mary.

![Images of Mary Hillier and Mary Mother](image)

18. *Mary Hillier as a Madonna Study,* 1864/5  
19. *Mary Mother,* 1867

*Fruits of the Spirit* (1864), a series of nine photographs of Mary Hillier typically accompanied by one or two children, and playing the Virgin in poses inspired by the virtues of love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance taught by Paul in Galatians (5.22-3), express these paradoxical aspects of the Madonna. Hillier, who was also involved in the post-production (im)printing process (Mavor: 43), portrays the Virgin mother in a starkly unethereal manner. There is a density and broadness of body about her which grounds her and contests the delicacy and fragility of archetypal Marian iconography,
while her blemished skin and under-eye shadows suggest a working-class tiredness which contrasts sharply with the alabaster serenity of the Virgin Mary. The servant status of both Marys is evident in these photographs; while during the Annunciation the Virgin Mary offered herself as ‘the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word’ (Luke, 1:26-38), Hillier’s tired features indicate her position in the household. Often looking thoroughly miserable as though on the verge of tears of exhaustion rather than sorrow, especially in *Madonna and Two Children* (1864), Hillier’s depiction of the Virgin Mary is an ambiguous one which transposes the iconography of the *Mater Dolorosa* that invites the viewer’s spectatorship, with the reality of morose workaday weariness which resents objectification.

20. *Madonna and Two Children*, 1864

Holy serenity is absent from Cameron’s photographs of Mary-as-Mary. Instead she always looks exhausted, as one would expect a young, new mother to look. Hillier’s downcast gaze
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in *Love* and (aptly-named) *Long-Suffering* suggests a mother defeated, while her begrudging gaze in *Meekness* subverts the iconic pose of the rapt Virgin Mary reverently looking up to God in Heaven. Clutched by the two nymph Keown sisters Elizabeth and Alice, her tired eyes question the unseen object of her gaze, fixed on something beyond the top right-hand corner of the shot. Although neatly-plaited, her dark hair is exposed, a marker of hers (and Mary’s) femininity and sexuality.

The children fuse into Hillier to create one polymorphous central object; no space between them their difference – and vulnerability - is indicated through their nakedness. The small girl on the left is Elizabeth, pressing into Hillier’s back with urgency as her head, open-mouthed, sinks tiredly into her shoulder. While her bare front is obscured by Hillier’s robed arm, our gaze is drawn to the curve of her little bottom, its roundness accentuated by her semi-kneeling position and the small shadow of her groin. She is marked as Christ by the wooden cross she clutches. Mary’s left arm is wrapped around the plumper, partially-covered torso of Alice who stands next to her, leaning in with her hand pressing into her décolletage. Like her sister her face also sinks into Mary, while both children look down with unfocussed eyes. The piece is evocative of classical depictions of Mary with Jesus and John the Baptist as children, but subverts the viewer’s expectation through the use of female models and the unkempt sexuality which pervades the composition.

In *Goodness*, Alice sits on Hillier’s knee with chubby hands clutched into prayer, as Hillier apprehends the camera with tired yet demanding eyes, while her robe slips from her slumped shoulder, revealing an expanse of chest and the top of her right breast. Hillier’s pose and expression portray a reality of put-upon motherhood which is at odds with traditional representations of the sorrowful yet serene Virgin Mary, while Alice’s gaze, Jesus’
gaze, is similarly unexpected as she looks doleful and sullen, as though she is tired of being photographed and will at any moment become fractious.
This resistance is echoed in *Faith* as Elizabeth crosses her arms defensively and scowls down the camera, and again in *Peace; Repose*, in which a black-robed Mary tiredly holds plump, heavy, Alice who looks back over her shoulder with sulky eyes as she huddles into Mary’s breast. Here Cameron’s compositions suggest that the mother and child both resent centuries of idealised representation, and the lens is arrested by their begrudging gazes. Offering an alternative iconography, *Goodness* reconfigures the image of the Virgin Mary and Jesus from the beatific and stoical into the aggravated and exhausted. This photograph articulates how the pre-Oedipal maternal dyad reacts to being viewed by the Symbolic, and the composition has a blurred amniotic feel as though it is being exposed, birthed, as we view it. The space behind Mary is black, apart from a thin greying strip on the right-hand edge of the composition, with a stark black scratch spanning from left to right in the top right of the photograph. A trace of a broken halo, at once everything and nothing this scratch serves to humanise Cameron’s Madonna and child and assert their gazes, as it distracts the eye from them and so denies the viewers’ devotional meditation, while simultaneously mirroring Cameron’s imprinting in her other compositions like *Holy Family* (1864), where she has etched Mary’s halo onto the plate.

Later compositions *Blessing and Blessed* and *Grace thro’ Love, Grace With Love* (both 1865) depict Mary and Jesus as absolutely unaware of the camera. In *Blessing and Blessed* Hillier clutches the naked child (Freddy Gould) into her chest as her lips graze his forehead. While less exposed than in *Goodness*, her dress still hugs her breast, emphasised by the dark strip of material which borders the neckline and accentuates the shape of her breasts. Here the representation of Mary and Jesus, mother and child, is more blurred and shifting than in *Goodness*, as despite being compositionally still they move, as though Cameron desires to
prohibit any voyeurism veneered as religious devotion and meditation, and Mavor describes Cameron and Hillier’s vision of the Madonna as ‘more real than mythical’ as ‘the photographs become undecidable in their representation’: ‘They are a tribute to both the Virgin and Mary Hillier. They are just as much indebted to portraiture as religion. They verge on sacrilege’ (47).

25. Peace; Repose, 1864
26. Long-Suffering, 1864
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27. Blessing and Blessed, 1865

28. Grace Thro’ Love, Grace With Love, 1865

29. Holy Family, 1864
Cameron’s Madonna photographs do not deny the power of the Virgin Mary, but instead understand her maternal gaze outside the strictures of the Symbolic given-to-be-seen (Luna: 27), disseminated from the Renaissance onwards through Christian iconography of Mary which, through its very function, invites the devotional gaze of others. As Sarah Boss shows, medieval Marian iconography invested the Virgin Mary with a maternal authority rooted in her gaze which has been stripped away by modern representations which depict the Virgin alone, without her child. She discusses how high medieval art, particularly ‘the Virgin in Majesty’ iconography (also known as Maestà) which shows Mary on a throne as the Queen of Heaven, ‘mistress of the world and empress of the universe’ (2000: 1), invested Mary with a regal status which superseded the power and authority of both the (Holy) Father and the Christ child, and physically situated her above all other Biblical men:

Both mother and child have a bearing of majesty; but many observers comment that they are especially striking for the way in which they seem to look at the viewer. As you gaze on the image, the Virgin in particular might give the impression of looking into you [....] As the viewer of such an image, you might feel yourself to be the object of the statue’s gaze, and to be in some way subject to its uncanny authority. (1-2)
Freud’s Dora was subject to the scrutiny of Mary’s maternal gaze, as wandering through Dresden’s galleries she ‘stopped in front of the pictures that appealed to her [and] remained two hours in front of the Sistine Madonna, rapt in silent admiration’. When asked ‘what had pleased her so much about the picture [...] at last she said “The Madonna”’ (Freud 1905: 96). While Freud interpreted this Oedipally as a desire to become the mother and so obtain the father-figure of Herr K., before correcting himself to state that Dora’s rapture showed she was in love with Frau K., Bracha Ettinger understands the hysterical effect of Mary on Dora as a desire ‘to be caught in a move of fascination that belongs to femininity, a move composed of a fascination of a girl towards a woman-mother figure’ (2006: 62) which
recalls our pre-Oedipal desire ‘to be gazed at endlessly by the mother’, ‘a basic narcissistic demand’ (1995: 3). Madonna is a fascinatrix, and more powerful than her divine son, Mary’s penetrating and uncanny gaze enthrals the viewer. This is echoed in Middle English lyrics of the passion, where Sarah Stanbury notes that ‘the reader looks not only at Christ’s suffering and mutilated body, but also that of the Virgin gazing on that body’, a gaze which is both maternal and sadistic as ‘[Christ’s] body is laid out – naked – one might even say nude – limp, surrounded by women who not only grieve but stare and touch as well’ and ‘[Mary] gazes unencumbered […] on a male body that swoons in her arms and sags on the cross, nailed down in forced passivity’ (1086, 1087).

This concept of a holy maternal gaze is extrapolated by Tina Beattie who argues that Mary’s womb issues her gaze, evoking Luna’s understanding of ‘the womb’s constant gazing’ (5), which asserts her place in a matrilineal Trinity to challenge ‘the masculinisation of Trinitarian imagery’ (Beattie: 156). Although the Holy Trinity is theologically and culturally understood as male, with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit united as the Godhead, Beattie draws on medieval iconography of Mary as the Immaculate Conception to show how patriarchal Christian doctrine marginalised the matrilineal relationships between Jesus, Mary and her mother Anne through an increased emphasis on the Incarnation of Jesus in seventeenth-century Catholic art: ‘Instead of Mary being the one who bodies Christ in the flesh, there is a sense that Mary herself has become disembodied, transcendent’ (158). Mary is relegated to ‘a product of a masculine religious imaginary without relevance or significance for relationships between women’, as ‘the iconography of the Immaculate Conception that centred on Anne and Mary was eventually superseded by the Immaculate Conception represented as the idealised masculine fantasies of seventeenth-century Spanish
art’ (ibid.). This corresponds to Michael Carroll’s hypothesis that in Mediterranean countries where Catholicism is the dominant religion ‘fervent devotion to the Mary cult on the part of the males is a practice that allows males characterised by a strong but strongly repressed sexual desire for the mother to dissipate in an acceptable manner the excess sexual energy that is built up as a result of this desire’ (56).

Consequently, from the Renaissance onwards modern iconography objectified the Virgin Mary and meditating on her image allowed men to sublimate their Oedipal desires. As Boss notes modern portrayals strip Mary of her motherhood, typically depicting her without Jesus and subjecting her to a fetishising male gaze which seeks to disavow desire for the mother and the threat of castration her body represents. The image of a childless Mary is also characteristic of Marian visions, which Freud argued were a mechanism for discharging ‘a dammed-up libido [...] through the repressed unconscious’ (1923a: 105). As such, Cameron’s Mary reinvigorates the active Marian maternal gaze represented in earlier medieval iconography which was denied by much Renaissance art, where she is specularised as sorrowful or supplicating and rapt, beholden to both God and the viewer meditating on her image.

In compositions when she looks at the camera Hillier’s arresting gaze challenges the received archetype of the Virgin Mary as patient and gentle, as it demands something from the viewer of the photograph. As the iconography of a maternal Trinity shows how Mary inherits her gaze from Anne, Cameron’s photography exposes how Hillier learns how to look, in both senses, through her instruction. Channelling the gazes of Anne and Cameron, both Marys become mediators of spectatorship, apprehending and diverting attention from the child Christ. In Roman Catholic Mariology the Virgin Mary is understood as ‘the
mediatrix of the whole world’ who mediates the divine graces of Jesus through her role as mother and through her assumption into Heaven (St. Ephrem, see Boss 2000: 53, 58). The link between mankind and God the Father through Jesus is further disconnected through Mary’s intercession, a disconnect expressed through the smallness or complete absence of God in these representations and the blurred, obscured and inaccessible bodies of the children in Cameron’s photography. We cannot meditate upon Christ and be granted his grace and salvation as the Marys’ gazes intercede us, capture us. Hers is a deviating and deviant gaze which distracts the spectator, prohibiting an uninterrupted visual and emotional connection with Christ, and Hillier’s gaze becomes, in some compositions, a murderous one which inflicts upon the viewer the image of a dead Christ child, an image which implicitly forestalls the Passion of Christ.

Considering the Medieval iconography of ‘Anna Selbdritt’, ‘Anna third part’, which places Anne as the supreme matriarch, Beattie contends that these icons privileged ‘the maternal body as signifying presence’ through their matrilineal representation of Anne, Mary and Jesus and emphasised the physicality of shared flesh, as opposed to the incorporeal spirituality of the Holy Trinity (155). Analysing the sixteenth-century woodcut Saint Anne Trinitarian Beattie proposes that in both literature and art the female trinity is characterised by a maternal gaze which comes from both the eyes and the womb as a ‘visual space’ (ibid.); while the mothers gaze upon their children, the mandorla, the aureola surrounding the Virgin Mary (and in other icons Jesus), is symbolic of the vagina, ‘the dark hole of woman’s sex [which] becomes illuminated from within by the presence of the virgin and her child’, while Anne’s robes fall around her in a manner which evokes the lips of labia. The Latin inscription ‘O Lord, open my lips and I shall praise your name’, implies a vaginal
orality and ‘the site of birth and not of language that invites contemplation of the divine through a gaze that is drawn both inwards and upwards’ (156-7). Thus, shrouded by Anne:

Christ in his mother’s womb becomes a source of light who illuminates the dark hole, the symbolic absence of the mother, and makes visible the whole relationship between time, space, woman and God in a way that has been rendered invisible by the exclusive focus of the masculine gaze. (157)

In Saint Anne Trinitarian ‘the paternal image of God is diminished to the point of insignificance at the top of the picture’, and evidences the ‘extent to which Marian theology has undergone a transformation that makes Mary a product of a masculine religious imaginary without relevance or significance for relationships between women or for the incarnation as the reconciliation between word and flesh’ (156, 157). Like these medieval icons, Cameron’s Mary photographs challenge the dogmatic given of the Holy Father’s omnipotent gaze galvanised through language, that is, the Word of God, by presenting a supreme maternal (photographic) gaze which is reproduced through the maternal subject and confirms the child as extension of the mother’s flesh, not the father’s celestial body. As Pamela Sheingorn similarly discusses in her study of the Holy Kinship art of the early middle ages, Christ’s genealogy was deliberately plotted patrilineally as ‘choices were made that deemphasised the basic truth that, in order for Christ to have a divine father, his other, human parent must be a woman’ (1990: 171).
However, as Sheingorn notes during the later medieval period these family trees introduced representations of Anne the matriarch and her three daughters with their children (173, see also Sara Grieco: 161-2), encouraging devotion to Anne and reasserting the imperative of human motherhood in the birth of Christ. The Anna Selbdritt which depicts Anne, Mary and Christ continues this idea of a holy matrilineage with the implication ‘that the grouping of Anne, Virgin and child is equal to and as sanctified as the more traditional triumvirate of Father, Son and Holy ghost’ (John Hand: 49). This maternal trinity elevates Anne to ‘a position in the group equivalent to the position of God the Father in the Holy
Trinity’ (Sheingorn: 176), and God is rendered inconsequential in some examples of this iconography; for example in the Master of Frankfurt’s *Saint Anne with the Virgin and the Christ Child* (c.1511-1515) God is a small figure at the top of the composition dwarfed by the presence of Anne and Mary in the foreground with the child Jesus. During the Renaissance, da Vinci’s *The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne* (c.1510) also absented representation of the Father, as the pyramidal composition depicts a maternal hierarchy of gazes, with Anne’s at the apex. Anne’s, not God’s, presence is the dominant one as her supreme gaze observes a look exchanged between Mary the child Jesus she holds. While later medieval iconography depicts Anne as a positive pedagogical influence teaching Mary to read (Sheingorn: 1993, Kathryn Ready: 152), it is the Holy Kinships and Trinities which show Anne to be instructing Mary in the possessive maternal gaze she has inherited from her mother.

32. The Master of Frankfurt
*Saint Anne with the Virgin and the Christ Child*, c.1511/1515

33. Leonardo da Vinci
*The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne*, c.1510
Cameron would have been aware of the iconographic significance of this hierarchical mother-child relationship shared between Anne, Mary and Jesus through the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, an artistic movement which drew on medieval art and culture for inspiration and rejected the classicism of Renaissance artists in favour of realistic representation. Cameron, described by Pamela Gerrish Nun as ‘the most conspicuous case of the “second-wave” Pre-Raphaelite’ and ‘the most celebrated Pre-Raphaelite photographer’ (72), was one of the Brotherhood’s female associates and photographed a number of its members including the co-founders William Holman Hunt and John Everett Millais as well as Edward Burne-Jones and Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s brother William. Cameron’s artistic reputation was helped by her personal associations with elites of Victorian art and literature, and through photography Cameron ‘fashion[ed] her own entry into Pre-Raphaelitism and extended the movement into a new medium’ (Gerrish Nun and Jan Marsh: 87), and while her later work drew on similar medieval and literary influences, including Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King*, Cameron’s early Marian photography echoes Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s representations of the Virgin.

Rossetti’s *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (1848-49) depicts a domestic scene of Anne instructing a young Mary’s embroidery of a lily onto a red stole, while a child angel Gabriel holds another lily, representing her purity, Christ’s death and prefiguring the Annunciation as depicted in his later work *Ecce Ancilla Domini* (1850). Mary’s father Joachim is pictured in the background pruning a vine in the garden, which like Gabriel’s presence symbolises ‘the coming of Christ’ (Jan Marsh: 31), while the Holy Spirit is represented by a haloed dove. However, while the symbolism of the piece ostensibly serves a traditional function in binding Mary with the Annunciation, compositionally it represents her as separate from
Christ, God and her own father. Although the paternal presence of Joachim and God figure in the painting, they are divided from Anne and Mary who are set apart by the dark curtain behind them, a dislocation continued through the cloak Anne wears which emphasises their forms and draws the eye to them as they are brought into the foreground of the painting. Gabriel is an apprehensive child who seems unsure of the women before him, who are themselves apparently oblivious to his presence. Anne’s look is one of scrutiny as she inspects her daughter’s stitching, while Mary stares over, past, Gabriel, into middle distance. Separated from the lighter, pastoral landscape of the composition into which all the male figures are painted, Anne and Mary are designated as a separate unity unto themselves, echoing the medieval matrilineal art of Holy Kinships and Trinities.
As Kathryn Ready discusses, The Girlhood draws on the typology of Mary as reader instructed by Anne, but supplants the act of reading with needlework, which Rossetti considered a more realistic occupation for young women at the time (156). The finished embroidery is seen in the foreground of Ecce Ancilla Domini, as a fearful Mary is apprehended by a now-adult Gabriel, 'shrink[ing] back against the wall [...] as if trying to evade the violation of the archangel's lily stem, which points directly at her womb, on the end of which her gaze is locked' (Marsh: 32). Ready also reads the bedroom setting as having ‘potentially disturbing undertones, suggesting the expectation of sexual assault’ (159). In both these works Rossetti, who was agnostic, refigures the traditional typology and symbology of the Virgin Mary to present her as separated from, and wary of, God the Father and his commandeering of her body as a vessel for his Word made flesh. Rossetti’s separation of Anne and Mary from paternal influences foreshadows Cameron’s Marian photography, and the medieval emphasis on a matrilineal Trinity is found in the work of the Pre-Raphaelites.

Cameron’s domestication of Mary also finds a precedent in Millais’ Christ in the House of His Parents (‘The Carpenter’s Shop’) (1849-50), which scandalised critics and Protestants. Dickens was particularly disgusted by Millais’ Mary, writing in Household Words that ‘so horrible in her ugliness that (supposing it were possible for any human creature to exist for a moment with that dislocated throat) she would stand out from the rest of the company as a monster in the vilest cabaret in France or in the lowest gin-shop in England’ (265). For Dickens and many other viewers Millais had degraded the Holy Mother into a base creature, anachronistic, coarse, vulgar and sensual in her working-classness: ‘Far from inviting Mariolatry, the agony of prescience implied in her haggard expression was
interpreted as evidence of her degeneracy’ (Alison Smith: 46). Consequently, Cameron’s Marys with their tired, disgruntled maternal sexuality are pre-figured by those painted by her Pre-Raphaelite brothers.

35. J.E. Millais Christ in the House of His Parents (‘The Carpenter’s Shop’), 1849-50

**Blessed is the Fruit of thy Womb**

This matrilineage of Holy Kinships and Trinities emphasises the physicality of Christ born of human, female, flesh in contradistinction to the Holy Trinity which emphasised the divine, paternal, origins of his soul. Cameron’s Marys find antecedence in medieval maternal iconography which privileged generations of mothers as responsible for the creation of Christ, and the visceral quality of her work echoes the idea that Holy Kinships and *Anna*
*Selbdritt* represented the real, physical Jesus. As Mary Hillier plays Mary she is watched by Cameron, who mirrors the role of Anne with her instructive photographic gaze. This assertion of a parthenogenetic matrilineage and the absence of a human father is echoed by the Spiritualist idea that Mary was ‘the active medium for [Christ’s] material body’ as suggested by Florence Theobald (Owen: 93), and the blurred amniotic quality of Cameron’s compositions is reminiscent of spirit photography and memorial portraiture, as well as photographs of Marian visions, in which ‘the Virgin’s resplendence affects a defocused, underexposed and amorphous form, cocooned by a diffuse halation’ (Harvey: 34).

Echoing Cameron’s studies of her naked sleeping grandson Archie in which he is positioned in uncanny, deathly poses, in *Devotion* and *The Shadow of the Cross* (1865) Archie is transformed into the baby Jesus as a black-robed mournful Hillier watches over him. While Victoria Olsen points out ‘the uncanny resemblance’ of these studies to memorial portraiture, in some compositions of Archie and Hillier the sacred is also conflated with the spectral, as Cameron uses techniques of cutting and splicing negatives to create one combination print, a process which became standard practice for spirit photographers (186). In *My Grandchild aged 2 Years and Three Months* (1865) and *The Adoration* (1865) Cameron marries separate negatives of her subjects ‘so that the two bodies form rectangular and horizontal lines across the frame’ (ibid.), which fractures and interrupts our viewing experience of the portrait. Yet, rather than fracturing the maternal gaze, this process of combining reproduces Mary’s and Cameron’s watchfulness, as these negatives are taken from other portraits of Archie being watched by Mary, as we see in *My Grandchild* Archie holds the same cross as in *The Shadow of the Cross*, while Mary’s black robe provides the backdrop.
36. *My Grandchild aged 2 Years and 3 Months, 1865* (a)

My Grandchild aged 2 Years and 3 Months, 1865 (b)
In these pieces Cameron’s role as the matriarchal Anne is confirmed as she gazes, unseen, on both Mary and the grandchild through her lens. As Joanne Lukitsh comments: ‘The devotion between photographer and the child is the more intense relationship: Cameron reserves herself the full view of the baby’s face, hair and chubby hand’ (34). Hillier’s presence is gauzy and spectral, hovering ominously over the unconscious child in a mourning robe which portends the child Jesus’ death. By casting Archie as Jesus, Cameron performs the pictorial infanticide of her grandson, and through Hillier echoes the Virgin Mary’s ‘gaze of maternal pity [which] had impaled and infantilised [Christ’s] body, trapping him in immanence’ (Stanbury: 1088).

37. My grandchild aged 2 years and three months Archibald Cameron; Child Sleeping, 1865

38. My grandchild Eugene’s boy Archie aged 2 years & 3 months; Child Sleeping, 1865
This is confirmed by *The Shadow of the Cross*, in which the sleeping child’s full form is in the foreground, his left hand clutching a crucifix, the marker of his death and an object used in life which is now obsolete. Again dark Mary lingers over him with her gaze as a black shadow descends on the child from the top left-hand corner of the composition, and while her spectral presence resembles that of a spirit manifestation, the domestic setting, the curtains and picture frames in the background emphasise the figure of the Christ child as a living, physical human and infuse the composition with an residue of the (un)homely domestic settings of memorial portraiture. This is echoed in *Sister Spirits* (1865) in which baby Percy Keown, a limp finger resting on his lip, is laid on a black velvet bed surrounded by lilies which evoke both the Annunciation and Christ’s death, while behind the bed stand the angelic naked Keown sisters, looking uneasy as they are coerced into performing their little brother’s death by Hillier and the two women in dark mourning robes who loom over them. We are apprehended by Hillier’s direct gaze as she is the only woman looking at the
camera, and she demands our focus so the child is rendered an inaccessible blur by the territorial maternal gaze, while the sense of coercion echoes that of Cameron’s portrait of a pained Lizzie Keown watching over the sleeping/dead Archie (1864).

Here Cameron’s photographic gaze renders the living child dead through both his performance as Jesus and the memorial portraiture aesthetic, while her compositional gaze instructs Mary where and how to look upon the child, perpetuating her own maternal gaze through her iconographic subject, the hierarchical maternal gaze echoing that of the Anna Selbdritt.

While Cameron’s earlier work was aesthetically indebted to memorial portraiture, she would later produce a series of four post-mortem portraits, ‘From death’, of her orphaned
grand-niece Adeline Clogstoun, whom she adopted in 1870 and who died in 1872, aged ten (Olsen: 187-8). This series is markedly different from the compositions in which she stages a child’s death; Deathbed Study is stark and so overexposed that the child’s body and the sheet on which it lies are indivisible, while the unnatural parallel stiffness of her long, thin feet, for me the punctum of the photograph, suggests a reality of death absent from the plump flesh of Archie and the Keown siblings. Devoid of the soft-focus sensuality which characterises Cameron’s work for many critics, this series exposes the true intent of Cameron’s photographic maternal gaze.

While Mavor emphasises the sensuality of Cameron’s Marian pieces, there is a reluctance to assign any negative intent or abusive sexuality to her work. Similarly, although Wynne-Davies defines Cameron’s child sitters as explicitly Gothic, ‘exaggerated symbol[s] of morbid melancholy’ which explore the ‘grief ensuing upon infant mortality and the fate of
lost innocent souls', she denies any hint of sexuality which typically tinges death in the genre: ‘It is clear from her work that Cameron was not interested in the sexual aspects of childhood’ (144). Yet, although beautiful to behold, viewed through the lens of the maternal gaze these photographs are shown to be imbued with a subtle and insidious violence, in instances sexual, against the child subject’s body. Anticipating later compositions which explicitly portray the living child as dead and evoking the memorial portraiture pose of the mother holding her dead child, Temperance (1864) presents Mary and Jesus in a revisioning of the pietà, an archetypal subject of Christian art which depicts the Virgin Mary cradling the dead body of the crucified Christ. However, whereas representations such as Michelangelo’s Pietà (1498-99) typically have the adult Christ being held by his mother as she looks down on him sorrowfully, Cameron’s Christ is a toddler, offered up to Cameron’s photographic gaze by a weary-looking Mary who arrests the camera with a gaze that is not sorrowful as the viewer would expect but tired and morose; the original sacrificing mother, Mary presents the Christ child she has sacrificed to the viewer as their salvation, but now her look suggests she wants something in return.

The composition also echoes the Pre-Raphaelite Ford Madox Brown’s ‘Take Your Son, Sir’ (1851-92) in which a deathly-pale, exhausted young mother, haloed by the mirror behind her and stars on the wallpaper, offers up her illegitimate baby to its father, the artist. The subject matter and unfinished nature of the painting evoke that of Cameron’s photographs, while the sheet wrapped around the baby symbolises the funerary shroud and the uterus, conflating death with the maternal (Marcia Pointon: 16-20; later on Edvard Munch’s lithograph Madonna (1895) explicitly associated maternity with sexuality and
death, as a cadaverous, writhing Madonna is bordered by a malformed foetus; Elizabeth Menon: 233).

44. Temperance, 1864

45. Michelangelo, Pietà, 1498-99

Fixing Christ as a dead child, *Temperance* subverts not only the pietà but undoes the gospel truth of the crucifixion which it traditionally represents. Through her photograph gaze Cameron kills Christ before Pilate does.

This extreme infanticidal rendering of the Virgin Mary is not without theological precedent. Marian visions at La Salette in 1846, Lourdes in 1858, Pontmain in 1871 and Fatima in 1917 were all seen exclusively by children, despite the presence of devout adults, who were often given a prophecy or message from Mary, made vessels for her word which emphasised her own position as the archetypal suffering – and punishing – mother: ‘For a long time I have suffered for you; if I do not want my son to abandon you, I am forced to pray to him myself without ceasing. You pay no heed. However much you would do, you could never recompense the pain I have taken for you’ (to Melanie Mathieu and Pierre-Maxim Giraud, the La Salette children, see Nickell: 171-2). Such portents can be read as threatening, and Mary is reported to have prophesied at La Salette that ‘a great famine will come. Before the famine comes, the children under seven years of age will be seized by a trembling and they will die in the hands of those who hold them’ (172). Mary uses her son as a tool for manipulation, inspiring guilt and bolstering her victim position as the original unappreciated selfless and suffering mother. While Marian visions are associated with miraculous healing, ‘divine punishments were also reportedly administered’ and these involved infanticide. One man at La Salette who declared that the ‘Virgin was a woman like other women’ was punished for his blasphemy when his infant daughter died after falling into a pot of boiling water, after which he and his wife went to the site of the apparition to seek Mary’s pardon (Nickell: 173).
As Michael Cuneo discusses, Marian visions are a continuing source of Catholic apocalypticism (177), and throughout her apparitions in the last two centuries the Virgin Mary has 'warned of the horrible catastrophes that lie ahead' (176):

There is another side to Mary in the popular Catholic imagination [....] For Catholic apocalypticists [... she] is certainly maternal and certainly loving, but she’s also stern and reproachful and vengeful. Rather than simply offering words of comfort and condolence, she imparts messages of unspeakable catastrophe and punishment. (191; see also Patricia Harrington, E. Matter)

This aggressive and vengeful Mary appeared earlier in late medieval sources for the tale of Theophilus, in which Mary as mediatrix is ‘physically and verbally aggressive towards a devil who is, in turn, seemingly quite troubled about these most unusual powers of the Mother of God’ (Kate Koppelman: 70). Interceding and saving Theophilus’ soul, Mary becomes ‘emperis of Hell’ as well as the Queen of Heaven, ‘apparently capable of sovereignty over Satan himself’ (74, 71). Mary is figured as both a terrestrial and celestial ruler, but a tyrannical one with no regard for the law (of the Father). Having already been chastised by Mary, Theophilus dies the day after his soul is retrieved, a spiteful act of retribution on her part. Consequently, these representations of Mary evoked what Koppelman terms ‘devotional ambivalence’ in medieval Catholics towards ‘the at once gracious and vengeful Mary’ (67, 68), and she goes on to interpret this ambivalence as symptomatic of that felt towards the Other.
The intimacy created between the believer and the Virgin Mary through worshipping becomes an ambivalent space in which the latter reveals herself to be aggressive and volatile, and this is articulated through the Lacanian gaze of the Other:

The terror of the divine finds its source in the fact that one can never know – and thus can never predict – its actions, loyalties and desires [...]. For Lacan, the true horror of this gaze comes not from the fact that it is always watching us [...] but from the fact that the gaze may not be interested in us at all. In not being able to see the source of this gaze, it is difficult to judge its intentions, its reactions, its emotions (good, bad or otherwise) [...] The Other who was imagined as virginal, inviolate, immaculate, becomes unpredictable, tyrannical and angry. (Koppelman: 76)

Mary’s divine maternal gaze is an ambivalent one which disavows the authority of God the Father and induces a devotional anxiety regarding the intention of her gaze. While rarely acknowledged the image of a tyrannical and potentially murderous Mary is embedded in the Catholic collective memory of Marian visions and miracles, and it is this alternative representation of her maternal aspect which is echoed in Cameron’s articulation of Hillier’s gaze. Depicting Mary-as-Mary with the dead child that becomes symbolic of both Christ and the children she kills as vengeance, Cameron’s Mary reinvigorates the ambivalent portrayals of the Mother of God and her womb’s gaze found in medieval iconography, and attests to
Luna's contention that the virgin womb is an annihilating one which rejects procreation and symbolises death (36).

Cameron’s (compositionally) lighter Mary photographs are also tinged with death. While in La Madonna Riposata (Resting in Hope), La Madonna Esaltata (Fervent in Prayer) and La Madonna della Pace (Perfect in Peace) (all 1865), Hillier’s Mary wears a white robe and veil more in keeping with the typology of the Virgin, her clothing threatens to swallow the sleeping baby Percy Keown she holds. Echoing her earlier work Temperance, the sequence of the compositions narrates the child’s death; in Riposata Hillier’s head is turned to her left, looking down contemplatively as she cradles the child whose slightly open mouth and flared nostrils suggest a deep, breathy sleep, while in Esaltata and della Pace Percy’s mouth is shut, as though he has stopped breathing, and the compositions are almost identical apart from a change in Hillier’s expression, which in the first is illuminated as she looks up in prayer, while in the second her gaze arrests the camera directly. What is so uncomfortable about these pieces is the perfect stillness of the child despite Hillier’s movement, a stillness implying death which is magnified through the uncanny repetition of the child.
Chapter Four – Memorial Portraiture and Julia Margaret Cameron

47. *La Madonna Riposata*, 1865

48. *La Madonna Esaltata*, 1865

49. *La Madonna della Pace*, 1865
Baby Percy is explicitly manipulated into a death pose in *The Shunamite Woman and her Dead Son*, an unusual example of Mary Ryan as Mary (1865). Echoing Cameron’s Marian compositions, the title’s allusion to the ‘great woman’ of Shunem whose dead son is resurrected by the prophet Elisha evokes Mary and Christ (Kings, 4: 18-37), and the arrangement of the mother’s veil and the long hair escaping from beneath it suggest the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene (Mavor: 57). Laid supine across a bed of coffin-velvet cushions, the child’s head is turned towards the camera, his still-closed eyes and mouth frozen in time and almost obliterated by the phosphorescent ectoplasmic quality of his skin. His extended right arm is blurred, his hand an amorphous haze reminiscent of a spirit photograph.

Naked apart from a vest pushed up to the tops of his arms, his body glows with (over)exposure to the maternal gaze, that of his ‘mother’ and of Cameron’s lens; the child is rendered out-of-focus by its effects, and it is not clear whether he is ‘playing’ dead. This ambiguity, the most disturbing aspect of the photograph, is heightened by comparison to *The Day Spring* (1865) in which Hillier reprises her role as Mary, an almost identical composition apart from a shift in the sleeping child to a foetal position facing the camera, in which he turns his back to the gazing mother. While his right hand extends into a blur, his left rests on his thigh with a purpose suggesting life and his complete nakedness is somehow less disturbing than the rumpled t-shirt of *The Shunamite Woman*, although still tinged with morbidity by association. *Light and Love* (1865) evokes the same ambiguous pose, as Mary’s dolorous gaze implies she looks upon a dead child, despite the birth symbols of the nest and the foetal position and the notion of light in the composition.
50. The Shunamite Woman and Her Dead Son, 1865

51. The Day Spring, 1865

52. Light and Love, 1865
Like the spirit children summoned to the photograph by the grieving maternal gaze, Cameron’s Christ child is arrested in this flux between the living and the dead, and Percy returns as Christ in *Madonna and Child* (1866) a year older and a bit bigger, yet still playing dead.

While Mavor comments how ‘Cameron’s representation of maternality is further expanded by the reciprocity of sexuality between [the Shunamite woman] and her child’, as ‘the woman and baby share lines of sensual erasure where the mother’s arm sinks into the belly and thighs of her child’ (57), unlike Cameron’s other works such as *Blessing and Blessed, Goodness and Holy Family* where the children are clearly alive, I cannot view these photographs as evidence of a consensual pre-Oedipal dyadism, as Mavor implies. While we comfort ourselves by thinking so, in death there is no reciprocity. The image of the child’s naked and vulnerable flesh, his stomach and groin, exposed by the roughly pushed up t-shirt suggests the photographs have just missed an act of abuse as his mother looks away, as though she has finished with him. Mavor links *The Shunamite Woman* to *The Wet Bed* (1987) by Sally Mann, whose controversial portraits of her children have come under criticism for ‘the extraordinary care taken in rendering the flesh, including the attention paid to incipient sexual characteristics’ as she ‘crop[s] and “burn[s] in”’ detail onto the image (my emphasis, Richard Woodward in Kincaid: 106). Mann’s *The Terrible Picture* (1989) which stages the sexualised murder of her daughter Virginia, is a violent example of her work and emphasises the feeling created by viewing *The Shunamite Woman*, where we are exposed to an intimacy we should not see, which should never have happened. Again, it is all the more disturbing because the child is not dead but manipulated to seem so; for Mann’s and Cameron’s maternal gaze, the ‘self-conscious maternal subjectivity’ born of
these ‘maternal exposures’ as Marianne Hirsch names them, necessitates the image, the fantasy, of the dead child (1997: 162).

Interrogating Victorian concepts of the ‘erotic’ child, James Kincaid comments that the image of the sick or dying child held particular attraction for paedophiles, while photography serves to memorialise the child, ‘the action taken against transience on behalf of the desire to possess and hold the child in time’ (1992: 199). *The Shunamite Woman* is tinged not with erotic reciprocity but paedophilia and even necrophilia, and consequently questions Cameron’s other works by association. Elizabeth Keown’s exposed vagina in *Spring* (1865), which Mavor couches in terms of eroticism (22), becomes indicative of something more sinister, and this sense of sexual precociousness echoes *Turtle Doves* (1864), a study of the Keown siblings kissing which again is described timidly in terms of sensuality, as opposed to sexuality, by Lukitsh (28). While Mavor states that Cameron’s Marian photographs are ‘*altered* images of Mother, scratched with sexuality’, she will not extend this sexualisation to the children who accompany her, instead suggesting that the sexualised mother’s gaze ‘looks elsewhere, beyond her child’ (44, 57).

A totemic witness of abuse, the photograph itself, handled, imprinted and scratched by Cameron, is victim of the maternal desire to see the dead or exposed child, yet it is precisely this act of touching and marking her work, of molesting it, which disguises the implied reality of the subject matter, as Armstrong writes that Cameron ‘self-reflexively and automatically’ ‘*displayed* how her photographs were made’, which ‘carve[s] out their difference from the “bourgeois realism”’ of pictorial photography which ‘continues to preside over modern photographic fantasies, especially those that inhabit, or trespass into, the territory of pornography’ (126). While Armstrong and Mavor view Cameron’s maternal
imprinting through an erotic economy of sensuality and intimacy in contradistinction to (masculine) scopic practices of a sharp, phallic focus which explicitly sexualises and fetishises the child’s body, such gendered critical vocabulary blurs the reality that Cameron’s amniotic soft-focus work consistently objectifies the ‘dead’ and the sexual child. Similarly, Harriet Wrye and Judith Welles define the intra-uterine influence of maternal bodily fluids which Cameron captures in her imprinting as erotic ‘body loveprints’ (xiii), evoking the pre-Oedipal sensuality of ‘gaze, smell, taste, touch, holding feeding, bathing, cooing’ (19) but neglecting the presence of a sexual drive in the dyad, and the force and abuse implicit in the notion of the (s)mothering womb imprinting the child.

While Cameron operates a resistance to the sharp focus of the nineteenth-century photographic aesthetic, the ‘compositional mastery’ for which Lewis Carroll was commended (Smith 1998: 35), this does not mean that her compositions are any less exploitative or fetishising of its child subjects. Although her use of Christian iconography made her permissible and accessible as a female artist in the nineteenth century, understanding Cameron’s work as a documentation of maternal abuse radically subverts the received Marian artistic tradition. While they may seem incongruous considering the amniotic beauty of Cameron’s photography, such readings should not be precluded because of Cameron’s sex, motherhood, her sacred subject matter, or her stylistic (un)focus, and it is myopic not to question if these photographs would continue to be so celebrated if they had been produced by a man.
Marina Warner has described Cameron’s photography in terms of ‘eidetic recollection’, projecting the image in her mind’s eye through the subject, producing compositions ‘[close] to thought-images of a certain kind, to a fugitive darting, glancing movement as the mind’s eye tries to stay the moment’ (2006: 209, 218). Echoing Mavor, Warner sees Cameron’s subjects as participating in a gauzy ‘passionate erotic aestheticism’, and the children she photographs are given agency as angelic ‘dream voyagers’ and ‘incarnate intermediary beings’, vessels for Cameron’s inner eye who ‘offer themselves as its undisputed inhabitants’, much like Georgiana Houghton’s nephew Charlie, whom she used for guidance through the spirit realm (206, 215, 213). Both Warner and Mavor interpret Cameron’s work in terms of dyadic reciprocity and so assume consent on the part of the child subject. Yet, in viewing her early Marian work as a reinvigoration of the Virgin Mary’s
ambivalent maternal gaze which Hillier subsequently performs as an infanticidal one, the notion that the child subjects understood the implications of Cameron’s compositions becomes an impossible one. Combining the defocused aesthetic of spirit photography with the fixity of memorial portraiture, Cameron Gothicises the Victorian iconography of the Virgin Mary, the domestic space and the photographic process by ‘redefin[ing] the literal space of the hearth by the manipulation of photographic focus’, a process which ‘undermines the sovereignty of the hearth as a stable place underpinning the foundation of Victorian culture’ and enabled Cameron to stealthily fetishise the ‘dead’ child (Smith 1998: 37).

Consequently, Cameron’s style has consistently blinded the viewer to the dead child of her mind’s eye which she recreates through the manipulated body of the living one; Warner suggests that ‘her blurred images and different lengths of focus within one image consciously forestall that mortuary stillness of the daguerreotype portrait’ (216) despite the clarity of the subject matter, and in the case of The Shunamite Woman and her Dead Son, Cameron’s choice of title. Similarly, Mavor interprets Hillier’s working-classness as a positive subversion of Victorian bourgeois codes of femininity and maternity which blurred ‘hierarchical distinctions between women’ and created a ‘narrative of difference’ (47, 50), but neglects to question the implicit masteries Cameron had over Hillier as her employer, instructor and photographer - although Hillier’s maternal gaze is captivating, it is always captured by Cameron’s. While her male counterparts are culturally perceived as dirty old men meditating on their photographs, like Lewis Carroll who ‘lived erotically by way of his camera’ and later J.M. Barrie, who ‘left without his boys [the Llewelyn Davies brothers], still had his memories and photographs’ (Kincaid 1992: 303), motherly Cameron escapes this
scrutiny despite consistently portraying child abuse and infanticide as enacted by Hillier's Virgin Mary, disseminating her own maternal gaze through her artistic vision.

**The Maternal Gaze's Gothic Technologies**

The emergence of photography in the nineteenth century opened up a visual space in which the previously invisible and intangible manifested as visible and accessible. Photography reinvigorated and prolonged the illusion of life; while memorial portraiture captured the dead, the 'invisible culture' of Spiritualism, 'distinguishing between outer (material) and inner (spiritual) eyes' (Willburn: 5), employed photography as the medium through which these different ways of seeing converged to resurrect the spirits of deceased loved ones, producing a comforting image of an afterlife attesting to Marryat's edict that 'there is no death'. This enduring sentience was imitated and intimated to produce a totemic image upon which the grieving mother meditated, and so through photography the maternal gaze technologised itself to explore alternative ways of focalising, fetishising and capturing the child within the domestic space. The photograph of the (playing)dead child, the trace of its body exposed, becomes the 'sort of umbilical cord' Barthes describes which reconnects the mother and 'links the body of the photographed thing to [the] gaze': 'Light though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed' (81).

Through its democratisation from the latter half of the nineteenth century photography was Gothicised by female domestic practitioners of psychic spirit photography, like Houghton and later Deane, who impressed their influence both onto the plate and in
the Spiritualist and wider communities through their act of imprinting the dead child into the photograph, a method repeated and subverted by Julia Margaret Cameron’s infanticidal vision. However, the photographic maternal gaze neither memorialises nor immortalises the child through the photograph, as these are modes of nostalgia used by the Symbolic, a process which Stewart shows is an inauthentic repetition based on lack (23). The maternal gaze which captures the child by imprinting her vision onto the plate is not a false nostalgic experience of romanticised dyadism but the authentic lived one. The plate is fused to and extends the maternal body as the child is conceived and birthed through it; here the lack which troubles the nostalgic does not exist. Similarly, mothers’ meditation on such photographs is an authentic process as it recalls and reinvigorates the experience of maternity. Through imprinting and infecting photography the maternal gaze catches and traps the object of desire, the child beholden to the maternal body for which the Symbolic viewer unconsciously yearns.

The maternal gaze denies access to the child it captures and through which it reproduces itself, and this denial was extended throughout, and because of, the democratisation of photography. As Patrizia di Bello has shown, through the introduction of Kodak roll film cameras in 1888 ‘which freed amateur photographers from having to make their own prints’ and ‘made taking photographs available to those who previously had only commissioned or purchased carte-de-visite’ (19, 76), photography became accessible to a wider audience, in particular mothers. For these amateur domestic practitioners album-making was a popular pastime, reproducing images of their children upon which to gaze and hoarding them together inside one fetishised object which functions metonymically as the maternal body, yet for the nostalgic Symbolic viewer denies access to its true meaning.
(see Smith 1998: 52-73). In photography the maternal gaze creates and inhabits a visual space which traps the child, denying it both life and death. While ‘the child’s body serves to embody the photographic action of bringing into being’ (Armstrong: 125), this birthing is at the expense of the child. The process of imprinting is a parthenogenetic performance which fuses the child to the plate, the omniscient photographic maternal body, and so for other spectators the child is unreachable, untouchable. Rather than a symbol of technology and modernity, photography becomes Gothicised by maternal operators and observers who use it as a medium through which the gaze can void the child in the Symbolic and absent it back into the body.

It is the Gothicisation of the maternal domestic space through technology which I continue to explore in Part Three, where I examine how the incest and maternal child abuse narratives of Virginia Andrews’ novels are hypertextually perpetuated through the unpoliced space of the internet. Showing how the internet is a matrixial web which is historically rooted to feminine modes of communication and story-telling, I argue that the maternal gaze of Andrews’ novels is endlessly reproduced through fan fiction written by adolescents whose mothers exposed them to these narratives of maternal child abuse and incest.
Part Three
The Maternal Gaze and the Gothic Domestic

Part Three interrogates the motivation of mothers to read child abuse and incest memoirs, and the compulsion to psychically repeat the abuse by eidetically meditating on acts depicted in these texts and rewriting them hypertextually on internet forums, blogs and fan fiction sites.

Chapter Five focuses on Virginia Andrews’ sibling incest serial the Dollanganger saga, in particular *Flowers in the Attic* (1979), which traces the cause of incest back to maternal neglect and the desire for the mother’s attention, the mother’s gaze, and I argue that Andrews validates her sympathetic depiction of incest through intertextual references to canonical texts including *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and *Great Expectations* (1860-61), which sympathetically portray quasi-incestuous relationships between brothers and sisters and echo the sibling incest in Romantic poetry where ‘the emphasis is on a shared childhood, on experience that unites the couple’ (Alan Richardson: 739).

Andrews’ intertextuality exposes the coded incest in these canonical texts, and I begin by considering how *Great Expectations* can be read as an incest text in which Pip and Estella are caught in a web of desire for each other which cannot be consummated, and which always leads to the sadistic Miss Havisham and Satis House at its centre. Establishing a precedent of maternally-induced incest, I show how *Flowers in the Attic* articulates post-war psychoanalytical concepts of the daughter’s Oedipus conflict as the cause of incest which had at its core not a desire for the father, but instead a desire to take revenge against the pre-Oedipal mother who has abandoned the child to the paternal order. As the siblings are absented back into the womb of the attic, a pre-Oedipal space without the pre-Oedipal mother, Cathy and Chris’ incest becomes a call to the maternal gaze which has abandoned
them, and while these theories are problematic as they exonerate the father by apportioning blame to the daughter’s Oedipal maturation and embroiling the often-absent mother as a third-party in the incest, they place the mother as the focus of her daughter’s desire as well as her discontent (see also Audrey Ricker). Andrews’ incest fictions remain largely unread by the academic establishment, and I argue that it is this blindspot that enables Andrews’ readers to continue to read, enjoy, and circulate the incest she sanctions in her novels. Analysing the appeal of Andrews’ incest texts for a female audience, I look at readers’ practices of circulating, discussing and rewriting the texts, as well as the consumption of incest through television talk shows, memoirs and misery literature, to argue that the act of reading incest narratives enables their largely female demographic to vicariously participate in the acts of maternal sadism which compels a desire for the mother’s attention, while outwardly displaying sympathy for the abused child.

Chapter Six concludes the thesis with an examination of how the maternal gaze exploits the invisibility afforded by the unpoliced space of the internet to circulate such narratives of incest and child abuse. Discussing how fan fiction allows readers a hypertextual platform to repeat and reaffirm images of incest, abuse and trauma presented in Andrews’ novels, I show how it is adolescent readers who perpetuate these narratives, to which their own mothers originally exposed them. Plotting the web’s matrixial maternal origins, I examine how the technology of the internet which feeds into the domestic space and transfixed fascinates its users has become another domain occupied by mothers to weave their stories of child abuse, and I discuss the intriguing case of Rebeccah Beushausen, who faked the existence of her terminally-ill foetus through her blog ‘littleoneapril’, which exposed her own MSBP maternal gaze and incensed the gaze of other mothers who desired the image of the suffering child.
Chapter Five

Guilty Pleasures: Incest and the pre-Oedipal Maternal Tangle in Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations*, Virginia Andrews’ Dollanganger Saga and Misery Literature

The structure of the pre-Oedipal space where siblings’ emerging sexual relationships are encouraged by a maternal tyrant which Andrews writes in *Flowers in the Attic* can be traced back to Pip and Estella’s coded incest, presided over by the bitter and sadistic Miss Havisham, in Dickens’ *Great Expectations* (1860-61). This is echoed in *Flowers* through Cathy and Chris’ sexual relationship caused by their incarceration at the hands of their mother and grandmother, and is explicitly signalled towards in the third novel in the series *If There be Thorns* (1981), where the children’s disguised mother Corrine moves next door to the adult Cathy and corrupts her son Bart. A ‘rich, rich woman who could afford anything!’ (33), Corrine wears a funereal black veil which reveals only her blue eyes and evokes Miss Havisham’s decayed wedding dress, and beguiles Bart ‘like I was the pin and she was the magnet’ (49), transforming him into a ‘changeling child’ (86) through the lure of her gaze. In the Prologue of *Flowers* the adult Cathy invokes Dickens as a model for her writing, covertly endorsing her own visceral and violent confession by association:

Charles Dickens would often start his novels with the birth of the protagonist and, being a favourite author of both mine and Chris’, I would duplicate his style – if I could. But he was a genius born to write without difficulty, while I find every word I put down, I put down with tears, with bitter blood, with sour
gall, well mixed and blended with shame and guilt [....] So, like Dickens, in this work of ‘fiction’ I will hide myself away behind a false name, and live in fake places, and I will pray to God that those who should will hurt when they read what I have to say. (3)

Dickens was a favourite author of the teenage Andrews, who ‘went through a period of trying to duplicate [his] style’ (E.D. Huntley: 10), and so Andrews/Cathy exploit the canonical status of Dickens’ work to sanction their own incest narrative. While Andrews’ trite and cloying melodrama lacks the subtle treatment of complex relationships found in Dickens’ writing, her depiction of incest and maternal abuse nonetheless finds a precedent in the themes of *Great Expectations*, and so Andrews can legitimately, albeit unexpectedly, draw these comparisons between his writing and her own.

‘Like Charles Dickens’: *Great Expectations* as Incest Intertext

As Emile Durkheim argued, exogamy, the rule of marrying outside of one’s social unit, is not only applied to blood relations. Discussing tribes and clans and the incest taboo, Durkheim explained that community and intimacy are founded not exclusively on ‘a definite bond of consanguinity’ but through a shared totem from which members believe they are descended (15-16). This notion of the symbolic importance of lineage as the foundation of a society which can be destroyed through incest implies that incest can be committed by symbolic as well as consanguine siblings. Pip and Estella are symbolic siblings; while both are infected by Miss Havisham’s maternal influence, they also share Magwitch, Estella’s father and Pip’s
mystery patron, as a paternal connection, which a number of critics make explicit: ‘That Magwitch is Pip’s “second father” conjures up the wisp of incest so beloved by the Gothic, and also incorporates Estella with Pip’ (Carolyn Brown: 50; see also, Peter Brooks, Valerie Sanders, and John Cunningham who argues that Magwitch ‘births’ Pip in the graveyard at the beginning of the novel (37)).

A bitter, jilted spinster, Miss Havisham’s maternal existence is defined by her hostility to patriarchy and a desire to thwart heterosexual relationships through her corruption of her adopted daughter Estella, ‘hard and haughty and capricious to the last degree’, ‘brought up by Miss Havisham to wreak revenge on the male sex’ (155). ‘More mummy than Mummy’ (Sharon Marcus: 173), Miss Havisham is defined by the deathly state of her body likened to ‘bodies buried in ancient times, which fall to powder in the moment of being distinctly seen’ (51) and the energy of her gaze which Pip describes when he first apprehends her:

I saw that the bride within the bridal dress had withered like the dress, and like the flowers, and had no brightness left but for the brightness of her sunken eyes [....] Once, I had been taken to see some ghastly waxwork at the Fair, representing I know not what impossible personage lying in state. Once, I had been taken to one of our old marsh churches to see a skeleton in the ashes of a rich dress, that had been dug out of a vault under the church pavement. Now, waxwork and skeleton seemed to have dark eyes that moved and looked at me. I should have cried out, if I could. (49)
Through her sartorial subversion, matrimony and heteronormativity are voided by the ‘corpse-like’ Miss Havisham as marriage is undone by death; her ‘bridal dress, looking like earthy paper’ resembles ‘grave-clothes’, ‘the long veil so like a shroud’ and, foreshadowing Stoker’s Tera, she desires to be buried in her wedding dress: ‘When the ruin is complete [...] when they lay me dead, in my bride’s dress on the bride’s table’ (51, 78). Aborting normative (hetero)sexual development for Pip and Estella and disrupting the Bildungsroman convention, Miss Havisham’s hostility towards patriarchy contributes to what Catherine Waters describes as the novel’s ‘pervading pessimism about the bourgeois male plot of aspiration and upward mobility’ (150).

To Pip Miss Havisham is, like Tera, a sublime figure, ‘perfectly incomprehensible to me’ and beyond signification, as ‘I felt convinced that if I described [her] as my eyes had seen it, I should not be understood’ (56). He is petrified by her gorgon gaze, and it is this sense of suspension which pervades his time at Satis House with Estella and her adoptive mother, and which stalks him in his ‘pursuit of gentility’ (Waters: 161), preventing him from entering into both heterosexual relationships and wider society. Symbolically castrated by Miss Havisham’s and Estella’s withering gazes, Pip is warned by them both about his own romantic blindness, and Miss Havisham sets out the sadomasochistic dynamic, describing love as ‘blind devotion, unquestioning self humiliation, utter submission’, which is confirmed by Estella when she warns Pip against pursuing her: ‘If you don’t know what I mean, you are blind’ (213, 268).

Miss Havisham, whose own mother ‘died when she was a baby’ (158), initiates the puerperal narrative of maternal deaths which evoke the gaze in ‘Laura Silver Bell’, ‘Carmilla’ and The Jewel of Seven Stars, and embodies a ‘maternal deviance’ born out of and defined by
her ‘arrested development from bride to mother, a sign of female “insufficiency” in the frozen 
anticipation of an ever imminent wedding’, with Satis house being the barren womb which 
she fills with children in order to mimic and suspend ‘the stage most crucial in the formation 
of female subjectivity: pregnancy’ (Waters: 157, 155, 156). Miss Havisham employs Pip as she 
desires him ‘play’ for her voyeuristic pleasure, a play which mimics and simultaneously voids 
heterosexual love which she regards as a ‘sick’ fantasy:

‘I am tired […] I want a diversion, and I have done with men 
and women. Play […] I sometimes have sick fancies […] and I 
have a sick fancy that I want to see some play. There, there!’ 
with an impatient movement of her fingers on her right hand; 
‘play, play, play!’ (50)

Pip cannot ‘play’ without a partner, and so must perform with Estella:

‘Let me see you play cards with this boy’

‘With this boy! Why he is a common labouring boy!’

I thought I heard Miss Havisham answer – only it seemed so 
unlikely – ‘Well? You can break his heart’. (51)

As they play Pip is bewitched by the cold and beautiful Estella, and Miss Havisham observes 
and manipulates Pip’s male gaze, as ‘[she] watched us all the time, directing my attention to
Chapter Five – Incest and the pre-Oedipal Maternal Tangle

Estella’s beauty, and made me notice it all the more by trying her jewels on in Estella’s breast and hair’ (78):

[She] would often ask me in a whisper, or when we were alone: ‘Does she grow prettier, Pip?’ And when I said Yes (for indeed she did), would seem to enjoy it greedily […]. Miss Havisham would embrace her with lavish fondness, murmuring something in her ear that sounded like ‘Break their hearts, my pride and hope, break their hearts and have no mercy!’ (83-4)

The maternal gaze is energised by Pip’s desire for the unattainable star Estella as his affections remain unrequited – “do you feel you have lost her?” There was such malignant enjoyment in her utterance of the last words (102) - and it becomes a violent and frenzied gaze as the children grow up and enter into society:

‘Love her, love her, love her! How does she use you? […] Love her, love her, love her! If she favours you, love her. If she wounds you, love her. If she tears your heart to pieces – and as it gets older and stronger it will tear deeper – love her, love her, love her!’ (213)

As Sharon Marcus shows, Miss Havisham fetishises doll-like Estella for her own gaze while taunting Pip with a love-object he will never obtain: ‘[She] requires him to witness her passion for Estella, and takes pleasure in his awareness that he is excluded from the female
dyad. The younger woman takes Pip in only to express contempt for him, while the elder scrutinises him in order to relish his pain’ (167). Pip’s desire is ‘the object of the female dyad’s gaze’ (184), and Miss Havisham’s exploitative gaze, her ‘sick fancy’, conforms to a sadistic voyeuristic model, naturalised as male by feminist and film theory, and it is edified by the degradation of Pip through Estella’s own cruelty, the product of her upbringing. This delighting in Pip’s pain – ‘how does she use you?’ – is repeated throughout the text, and most explicitly when the children return to Satis house as adults:

There was something positively dreadful in the energy of her looks and embraces. She hung upon Estella’s beauty, hung upon her words, hung upon her gestures, and sat mumbling her own trembling fingers while she looked at her, as though she were devouring the beautiful creature she had reared.

From Estella she looked at me, with a searching glance that seemed to pry into my heart and probe its wounds. ‘How does she use you, Pip? How does she use you?’ she asked me again, with her witch-like eagerness. (269)

Like Carmilla who eats no food but devours young girls, Pip realises he has never seen Miss Havisham eat or drink and describes her as consuming Estella, ‘kiss[ing] [her] hand to her with a ravenous intensity’ (213). The wedding feast, symbolic of the matrimony and patriarchy she despises, is abjected, ‘covered with dust and mould’ (74). Instead, her maternal gaze is figured as devouring and penetrative, an aggressive act of visual consumption which takes succour from the emotional pain of a man, inflicted by a woman.
Miss Havisham accentuates Estella’s femininity in order to render her an unattainable object of desire for Pip:

The fetishism, objectification, scopophilia, exhibitionism and sadism that we saw at work in mainstream Victorian representations of mothers with their daughters and girls with their dolls are reproduced in a more concentrated form in *Great Expectations*, which draws a man into a female world of love and ritual organised around women’s aggressive objectification of femininity. (Marcus: 170)

Miss Havisham mocks the objectifying process of the male gaze by hyper-feminising her daughter to the point of excess which cannot be sustained by heteronormativity, and this maternal fetishisation of femininity is repeated by Andrews in *Flowers in the Attic*, as Cathy Dollanganger, a Dresden Doll, becomes the image of her extremely beautiful and feminine mother through her pursuit of feminine archetypes of princess and ballerina.

**Her Mother’s Daughter: Maternal Sadism and the Cycle of Abuse**

Miss Havisham’s maternal gaze is one which pleasures in provoking and observing the breakdown of male sexual power, an assaultive and sadistic gaze which prefigures and challenges the dominance of the Mulvean male voyeur. This sadism is passed down to Estella, ‘her eyes scorning me’, who pleasures in seeing Pip in emotional and physical pain (95), who describes how after their first encounter ‘I was so humiliated, hurt, spurned,
offended, angry, sorry [...] that tears started to my eyes. The moment they sprang there, [she] looked at me with quick delight in having been the cause of them’ (53), and how he harms himself in order to ‘[get] rid of my injured feelings for the time, by kicking them into the brewery-wall, and twisting them out of my hair’ (54). Estella, aroused by the sight of Pip’s tears taunts him - ‘why don’t you cry again, you little wretch?’ (71) - and recalls her pleasure in watching the fight between Pip and Herbert: ‘I must have been a singular little creature to hide and see that fight that day: but I did, and I enjoyed it very much’ (210).

Estella has inherited her mother’s violent gaze and contempt for patriarchy - ‘I am what you have made me’, ‘it is in my nature [...] it is in the nature formed within me’ (271, 322) – and here she speaks of the cycle of abuse in which she is caught, as she becomes a vessel for Miss Havisham’s hatred. The product and perpetuator of abuse, this sadistic maternal gaze is limitless, as Herbert muses that ‘there has always been an Estella, since I have heard of Miss Havisham’ (162).

Miss Havisham’s corruption of Estella through the instruction of sadism mirrors the original Sadeian model of the widow Madame de Saint-Ange and Eugenie in Philosophy in the Bedroom (1795). At fifteen the virgin Eugenie leaves her biological mother Madame de Mistival to be instructed by Saint-Ange and Dolmancé ‘in every principle of the most unbridled libertinage’ (191). Eugenie, like Estella after her, is separated from her biological mother and corrupted by a replacement mother who rejects patriarchal heteronormativity: ‘Be certain I’ll spare nothing to pervert her, degrade her, demolish in her all the false ethical notions [...] I want to render her as criminal as I ... as impious ... as debauched, as depraved’ (ibid.). Saint-Ange is what Luna describes as ‘an anti-mother’ whose behaviour, like Miss Havisham’s, expresses a violent rejection of the maternal as nurturing and compassionate
and exposes the construct of motherhood as ‘a veritable abomination’ (78, 79; see also Beverley Clack: 10). By shedding this image of maternal benevolence both Havisham and Saint-Ange are liberated to control and corrupt children they have not given birth to themselves, and both anti-mothers’ sadism is constellated around the womb; while Miss Havisham’s barren state engenders a hostility towards patriarchy with which she infects Estella, Saint-Ange instructs Eugenie to ‘dread not infanticide; the crime is imaginary: we are always mistress of what we carry in our womb, and we do no more harm in destroying this kind of matter than in evacuating another’ (249).

In the Sadeian dynamic the child as symbolic of the continuation of the moral order is seen as waste, and Saint-Ange’s own incestuous relations with her brother le Chevalier, like Cathy and Chris’ in Flowers, are fundamentally antithetical to the successful reproduction of patriarchy, as Terry Eagleton describes incest as ‘a kind of radical politics in itself, a shaking of the symbolic order to its roots’ (164). While Saint-Ange’s corruption is far more extreme and explicitly sexual than Miss Havisham’s, both these anti-mothers encourage the rejection of conventional heterosexual relationships and the reproduction of motherhood they endorse in favour of a sadistic maternal instinct which is not predicated on and so surpasses biological maternity. While Saint-Ange savours the sight of Eugenie physically and sexually abusing her own ‘proper’ mother – “Ah! the little monster!” (she bursts out laughing)’ (361), so too does Miss Havisham enjoy watching Estella cruelly taunt Pip. In these spaces the roles of mother and child are irrevocably subverted.

Miss Havisham perverts heteronormativity by encouraging a quasi-incestuous longing in Pip for Estella within a maternal space which renders his heterosexual function in the paternal realm impotent. While Pip still believes Havisham is his mystery benefactor, his
‘fairy godmother’ (140, 141), he describes how ‘she had adopted Estella, she had as good as adopted me, and it could not fail to be her intention to bring us together’, and how he believes he will ‘do all the deeds of the young Knight of romance, and marry the Princess’ (205-6). Here, as we will see with Cathy’s fairytale fantasies, incest is made permissible through its coding as acts of courtly love and chivalry. Consequently, Pip rejects initiation into patriarchy by refusing a relationship with Biddy, despite knowing that, unlike the sadistic Estella, ‘she would have derived only pain, and no pleasure, from giving me pain’ (115).

Similarly Estella, who marries Bentley Drummle for money, is reported ‘as leading a most unhappy life, and as being separated from her husband, who had used her with great cruelty’ (430). Pip and Estella are unable to achieve sexual or emotional fulfilment with anyone else, having been fused together in their sadomasochistic dynamic under Miss Havisham’s gaze in the womb of Satis house, as Pip expresses: ‘You are part of my existence, part of myself [....] Estella, to the last hour of my life, you cannot choose but remain part of my character, part of the little good in me, part of the evil’ (324). This sense of oneness echoes the unfulfilled incestuous desires that characterise Cathy and Heathcliff’s ‘foster kinship’ in *Wuthering Heights* (Solomon 1959: 81, see also Dorothy van Ghent) - ‘He’s more myself than I am [....] Nelly, I am Heathcliff! He’s always, always in my mind - not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself- but, as my own being’ (86, 88) – a novel Cathy reads in the attic and replicates through her own emotions, describing her and Chris having ‘one heart shared between us’ (300; interestingly, Moers describes Cathy and Heathcliff’s dark dynamic as being conceived in a maternal space ‘through fantasies derived from the night side of the Victorian nursery – a world where childish cruelty and childish
sexuality come to the fore’ (105)).

The womb of Satis House will not endure Miss Havisham’s eventual repentance, and she dies from the severe burns she sustains when her wedding dress catches fire. However, while Miss Havisham expresses this convenient remorse, it ultimately crystallises her ‘status as monstrous victim’, the ‘monument of female suffering at the hands of men [...] a monument of female masochism’ who compels our sympathy despite her abuse of Pip and Estella (Juliet John: 229). Wronged by patriarchy, Miss Havisham melodramatically cleaves the maternal victim-position which shields her sadistic gaze from our condemnation, and so Pip and Estella can never be free of her influence or memory, as they too are forced to remember her as the image of the repentant and pitiable masochistic mother, despite her history of sadistic cruelty. Their inability to dissolve the maternal dyad, to break away from each other and from the memory of Miss Havisham and Satis House, is confirmed at the end of the novel when they both return simultaneously to the house’s ruins at nightfall. Estella explains that the land is now hers, ‘the only possession I have not relinquished’ (431), and her inheritance perpetuates her adoptive mother’s presence, which hangs over them in the final lines:

I took her hand in mine, and we went out of the ruined place; and, as the morning mists had risen long ago when I first left the forge, so, the evening mists were rising now, and in all the broad expanse of tranquil light they showed me, I saw no shadow of another parting from her. (433)
The ambiguous ‘another’ Pip refers to can be interpreted as the lingering spectre of the dead Miss Havisham, and also Pip himself. Psychically fused to Estella through their shared experience of the maternal space, he cannot sever the tie which binds them, to each another and to Miss Havisham.

This was the second ending Dickens wrote for the novel, with the original seeing Pip and a re-married Estella meeting briefly in London, where ‘in her voice, and in her touch, she gave me the assurance that suffering had been stronger than Miss Havisham’s teaching, and had given her a heart to understand what my heart used to be’ (445). Edward Bulwer-Lytton persuaded his friend Dickens to change to the ‘happy ending’ readers are now familiar with (Edgar Johnson: Vol. 2, 505), but I see little happily-ever-after for Pip and Estella in this revised ending, as their (sexual) relationship must always be mediated through the memory of their shared abuse in the maternal space where their incestuous desire is both enabled by and drawn back to mother’s cruelty, as Marcus notes how Estella’s manipulation into a fetish-object at the hands of Miss Havisham implies ‘the erotic appeal of having been an instrument, object or appendage, and the piquancy of attributing the desire for a female object to the woman’ (174). This dynamic is echoed in Flowers, as Cathy, self-fashioned into the image of her mother, consistently refers to her mother’s body as a marker of erotic femininity which seduces her own brother.

Reading the bind of Miss Havisham, Estella and Pip as a Sadeian one reveals Great Expectations as a text which undoes the Victorian social imperatives of motherhood and heteronormativity by performing their gender codes to excess, and Marcus suggests that ‘Miss Havisham’s relationship with Estella simply intensified the normal dynamics of the Victorian mother-daughter relationship’, of ‘the maternal determination to make a daughter
an irresistible marriage prospect, or the appeal of turning a young girl into a pretty poppet to be adorned and adored’, and that ‘a man’s desire for a woman is shaped by his identification with the desire between women woven into the fabric of the family’ (170). It is this sense of femininity tipping over into excess which is amplified in the Dollanganger saga.

As Valerie Sanders comments, brother-sister relationships in Victorian novels reflected how siblings of the opposite sex ‘rehearse[d] the complexities of the connections they will have with other, men, other women, as adults’ and ‘learnt how to articulate their feelings in a way that we now, in a post-Freudian, abuse-conscious culture, consider embarrassingly open’ (183, 184). The Gothic influence of Miss Havisham perverts Pip and Estella’s rehearsal into an incestuous one which prevents them from entering heteronormative patriarchy, and this sense of perversion is repeated explicitly in *Flowers in the Attic*, written as it was in the post-Freudian era Sanders mentions where readers are now mindful of, and paranoid about, sexual perversion and abuse. While Andrews’ novels initially appear to promote healthy, ‘normal’, heterosexual relationships to their readership through Cathy’s fantasies of fairytale heroes and chivalric knights, her psychosexualisation is arrested through her incarceration as she continues to meditate on these fantasies, fuelled by her consumption of Dickens and *Wuthering Heights* which her mother brings her (248). Furthermore, there is only her brother Chris, named after their ‘perfect’ father and the living imago of him, to fulfil the role of her prince (4):

‘My God, you’ve made me look like blond Prince Valiant!’  
'Prince Valiant should be so lucky as to look like my handsome, manly blond brother'  
[....] As I looked at Chris, I
grew very confused. He was so very much like Daddy, only younger. (265, 315)

Both Cathy and Chris fail to disavow their pre/Oedipal desires because the tools which children typically use to destroy the Oedipus complex are absent in the attic, like Satis House a symbolic space of arrested development which encourages an incestuous desire that leads back to the mother's body.

‘Goodbye Daddy’: Virginia Andrews and the Maternal Tyrant

*Flowers in the Attic* is the first novel in Virginia Andrews' Dollanganger Saga, a series of five novels which chronicle the sensational and convoluted sexual dynamics of the Dollanganger dynasty. The novels, allegedly ‘based on a true story’ (Huntley: 4, 9), are arch examples of Gothic family melodrama, as the innocence and impossible beauty of our ingénue heroine Cathy emphasises the sadistic cruelty and neglect which she and her older brother Chris and the younger twins Cory and Carrie must endure in the attic at the hands of their tyrannical grandmother Olivia Foxworth and the absence of their mother Corrine. *Flowers* and its sequels *Petals on the Wind* (1980), *If There be Thorns* (1981), *Seeds of Yesterday* (1984) and the prequel *Garden of Shadows* (published posthumously in 1987) were immediate best-sellers, received by a voracious readership which thrived on Andrews’ tawdry depictions of burgeoning adolescent passion and sexuality through the expression and fulfilment of incestuous desire, infused with portrayals of maternal child abuse. The Dollanganger saga forms an epic, sprawling and ultimately abortive *Bildungsroman* in the conventional sense,
as Cathy cannot escape the spectre of her living mother who, like Miss Havisham with Estella, reflects her own maternal deprivation and heterosexual loss onto her children. Instead, Cathy’s narrative corresponds to Michael Minden’s analysis of the German *Bildungsroman*, which he contends is characterised not by linearity but a narrative circularity which is troubled by anxieties about incest and inheritance, and which for girls leads back to the mother (3), a pattern which characterised Andrews’ own life.

Cleo Virginia Andrews was born in Virginia in 1923 to William and Lillian Lilnora Andrews, and her childhood, much to the dismay of her readers, was uneventful: ‘I didn’t have a terrible childhood [...] a lot of people think I was tortured, but my parents didn’t do anything. They didn’t beat me. They didn’t whip me. They didn’t lock me away. I didn’t even go hungry. And I had a lot of pretty clothes’ (in Douglas Winter: 165). When she was fifteen Andrews fell down the stairs, sustaining injuries from which she developed arthritis. Forced to use crutches and a wheelchair much of the time, she continued to live with her parents into middle age.
In 1957 Andrews’ father died, leaving her in the care of her mother, her only companion for the remainder of her life. From accounts given by Andrews and other relatives, Lillian Andrews bears some similarity to the maternal tyrants in *Flowers in the Attic*; one relative explains that ‘[Lillian] was ashamed of [Virginia’s] arthritis so she lied about it to everyone and told them that she was recuperating from surgery. She really would never let people come to visit her because of her physical condition’, and ‘[she] kept Virginia so shielded that she ended up for a long time only knowing us. Virginia told me she turned to writing to
escape her mother - and the dullness of day to day life’ (The Complete V.C. Andrews 1995, ‘Memories and Revelations’; online). Andrews felt imprisoned by both her disability and her mother, and used writing as a way of dealing with the trauma, as she explained in a rare interview granted to Douglas Winter: ‘So it does affect you, and that’s why I write. When I wrote Flowers, all of Cathy’s feelings about being in prison were my feelings. So that, when I read them now, I cry’ (169). Andrews wrote in secret, expressing her fears and her frustrations of being trapped in her house and her body and creating a textual space in which she explored illicit ideas which her mother, much like the grandmother in the novels, frowned upon: ‘I guess I’m writing around all the difficult things that my mother would disapprove of [...] She doesn’t read it. She tells me she hears so much about it that she doesn’t need to’ (176, 177).

For Andrews, writing taboos such as incest, rape and maternal child abuse became a way to obstruct the scrutiny of her mother, who was otherwise her constant companion. It is exactly this absence of maternal surveillance in a space otherwise embodied by the maternal gaze that encourages the incest in Flowers, a topic which clearly obsessed Andrews. Revelling in this authorial autonomy, she saw her mother’s gaze as locus of control and approval to rebel against, explaining ‘when I’m typing or writing on the computer, she can’t see a thing’ (in Winter: 168). Between 1972 and 1979 Andrews wrote nine novels and twenty short stories, and her first piece of published writing was an (apocryphal) short story entitled ‘I Slept With my Uncle on My Wedding Night’, which allegedly appeared in a pulp confession magazine and heralded Andrews’ obsession with incest. Flowers in the Attic followed in 1979 and confirmed Andrews’ success, spending fourteen weeks on the New York Times Bestseller list. Andrews’ death from breast cancer in 1986 did not quell her output or
its consumption, as her estate commissioned Andrew Neiderman to flesh out the sixty-three incest-themed synopses Andrews had written before she died. Although a letter from the Andrews family clarifying Neiderman’s position as ghostwriter began appearing at the beginning of paperback issues in 1990, due to Andrews’ reclusive and largely unpublicised life many readers still believe that Andrews writes the novels to which her name is given. Neiderman confessed to the Washington Post that ‘sometimes I do feel possessed’ (in Huntley: 135), and Andrews’ spectral influence lingers as he continues to ghostwrite as the ‘The New Virginia Andrews’, dutifully abiding by her themes of family tragedy, secrecy and incest, and to date twenty-one series have been published, making Andrews'/Neiderman’s franchise the longest-running in publishing history (Huntley: 13, 131-141). Indeed, there is nothing unspeakable about incest in Andrews’ Gothic.

Like The Turn of the Screw, The Others and The Orphanage, Flowers subverts the Bluebeard archetype of the paternal tyrant through mothers who desire to capture and consume their children, to conceal knowledge rather than reveal it, as conventional Bluebeard heroines did. These mothers resemble both Bluebeard and his female helper, whom Daniela Hempen shows has been ‘constantly overlooked in “Bluebeard” criticism’ (45), but whom Brontë and du Maurier revive in Jane Eyre and Rebecca through Grace Poole and Mrs Danvers. In the Grimm versions of the fairytale this crone lives in the cellar and participates in the slaughter of her master’s victims, cooking their corpses in ‘The Robber Bridegroom’, and in ‘The Castle of Murder’ disembowelling them: ‘My Goodness, granny, what are you doing there?’ – ‘I’m scraping intestines, my child. Tomorrow I’ll be scraping yours too!’ (670). Here the crone is explicitly maternal and devouring, transforming the torture chamber of the paternal tyrant into the devouring womb (see also Rose Lovell-
Smith). In *Flowers* the Dollanganger children are a secret which must not be found in the attic, ‘a symbolic womb into which Corrine thrusts her four children, attempting to reverse history and un-birth them’, the womb in which they make their own secrets (Huntley: 53). Thus *Flowers* knowingly draws on Gothic, romance and fairytale archetypes in the portrayal of the children’s incarceration, and their equally traumatic and perverse relationships in the outside world which form the plots of the sequels. Andrews exploits generic codes and structures, previously understood as ultimately promoting and preserving the patriarchal order, to create a framework which validates her depiction of maternally-induced sibling incest, a sexual act which disrupts the status quo by denying normative reproduction and demoting the father as Oedipal incest object-choice within the Freudian family romance.

‘Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down’ (Job, 14: 1-4): *Flowers in the Attic*

Recently widowed and heavily in debt, Corrine Dollanganger spirits her children Cathy, Chris, Cory and Carrie back to her childhood home of Foxworth Hall, where they are hidden in the attic from their rich and infirm grandfather Malcolm, who disapproved of his daughter’s marriage to their father, her half-uncle Christopher (revealed to be her half-brother in *Garden of Shadows*). Corrine tells her children she is waiting for her father to die so she can inherit his wealth and make ‘every dream you’ve ever had [...] come true’ (23), and while the children wait Corrine’s puritanical mother executes a panoptic gaze in the attic through her invocation of God who ‘sees everything!’ and ‘will see what evil you do behind my back!’ (41). Convinced the children are ‘spawned from the Devil! Evil from the moment of conception!’ (71) and have inherited an incestuous predisposition from their parents, the
grandmother is intent on discovering these desires in Cathy and Chris and punishing them for their sins. When her mother’s visits become less frequent Cathy realises Corrine has been seduced by the luxury of her new life and regards her children as a hindrance, after admitting that she has married her father’s attorney Bart Winslow.

Worried about their younger siblings’ stunted growth Chris and Cathy plan an escape, and periodically steal into their mother’s room to take money and jewels, and on one such occasion Cathy kisses Bart while he is sleeping. Learning this, Chris fulfils the incest prophecy by raping Cathy in a jealous rage - ‘you’re mine, Cathy! Mine! You’ll always be mine!’ – although Cathy’s observation that ‘it wasn’t much of a battle’, the sensual tone of the sexual violence, her coquettish behaviour and sympathetic narration of the patent desire they share problematically validate the rape (297, 298). Chris discovers that their grandfather has been dead for nine months and when Cory becomes ill and dies (Carrie dies in *Petals on the Wind* of complications from a suicide attempt), Cathy realises that their mother, in typical fairytale fashion, has been poisoning the children with donuts laced with arsenic brought to them in a picnic basket, and the remaining Dollanganger children finally escape after three years, although the traumatic effect of their incarceration and the potential for it to return in various sequels is portended in Cathy’s assertion that ‘the wisdom of the attic was in my bones, etched on my brain, part of my flesh’ (335).

Her compulsion to narrate the trauma and her desire for her story to be read by others is written on the blackboard in the attic, “We lived in the attic, Christopher, Cory, Carrie, and me, Now there are only three” [...] an enigma for someone in the future to unwind’ (337), and the imprint of the attic and the influence of her maternal forbears is confirmed at the end of *Petals*, in which the adult Cathy, now married to Christopher and
mother to Jory and Bart, children from short relationships with the dancer Julian Marquet and Bart Winslow, describes how ‘it worries me because I went yesterday into our attic’ and ‘in a little alcove to the side I found two single-sized beds, long enough for two small boys to grow into men’ (409). As the womb of the attic consumed and imprinted the children, so does Cathy's body absorb its influence and that of her mother, writing the maternal body through her narrative of trauma.

The assumption that Andrews’ writing is neither a worthy or viable subject for analysis reveals a shortsightedness to understand the mechanisms of her Gothic that continue to captivate her readership. Reading the Dollanganger saga through the lens of the maternal gaze, Andrews’ work can be seen as underpinned by a complex theoretical dynamic and galvanised by explicit and embedded intertextual references to canonical novels, and the Dollanganger saga becomes an example of what Ann Douglas has termed ‘family horror’, American Gothic which ‘eerily reinterprets and rearranged, sometimes explicitly, sometimes not, what Freud called the “family romance”, the Oedipal grouping and interactions of parent and child’ (302). These allusions weave a web of literary authenticity around the saga which endorses Andrews’ representations of incest, rape and abuse, making it permissible reading for adolescents, the next generation of Andrews’ demographic who I show are encouraged to read the novels by their own mothers.

‘Momma’s story’: Envisioning the Gothic Unspeakable

The genesis of Flowers has Andrews’ rebellion against her mother at its core. The novel sprang from an earlier rejected novel The Obsessed, with Andrews advised to cut down the
length and include more visceral, ‘gutsy’ subject matter, the ‘unspeakable things my mother
didn’t want me to write about, which is exactly what I wanted to do in the first place’ (in
Huntley: 4-5). The manuscript was purchased by Pocket Books in 1978, and an expanded
version appeared the following year. This notion of the unspeakable and the author’s
compulsion to speak it is typically Gothic; however, where Andrews differs in her depiction
of the incest taboo is her overtly sympathetic approach. Andrews’ Gothic does not condemn
but condones incest, and she stated that ‘readers like the fact that I don’t say whether I am
for or against it. But if you read between the lines, you can tell’ (in Winter: 172), although
even this coy sense of subtext is overstated (oddly, incest is completely omitted from Jeffrey
Bloom’s 1987 film adaptation. An earlier screenplay by Wes Craven which included the
incest was never produced).

Within the tawdry psychoanalytic milieu of the Gothic it is tempting to assume that
Andrews, unable to assert her autonomy as an adult and suspended in a childlike state,
harboured incestuous desires for male family members as the result of her invalidism and
her mother’s claustrophobic care which would have made sexual relationships difficult, if
not impossible, as one relative asserted that Andrews was ‘virginal’, ‘pure’, and that ‘she
never even saw a naked man in her life’ (‘Memoirs and Revelations’). While such ‘based on a
true story’ theories have lured and seduced her readership they are, ultimately, specious.
What is certain is the extent to which Andrews was subjected to the constant surveillance of
her mother (whom Flowers is dedicated to) and who ‘[knew] every move she made’ (ibid.).
Writing these fantasies became the only logistical means of enacting them, and allowed
Andrews to create an incestuous textual space from which her mother’s gaze was prohibited,
yet paradoxically, only through the absence of which it could exist.
Moral disapproval executed through the maternal gaze is represented by the children's grandmother, ‘a very observant woman who misses nothing’ with her ‘gunshot eyes’ and ‘stabbing glare’ (47, 48, 195), a Medusaesque ‘warrior Amazon, ready to do battle with the glare of her eyes alone’ (161), whose violent maternal gaze invokes the omnipotent eye of God against the children’s transgressions: ‘God sees everything! God will see what evil you do behind my back! And God will be the one to punish when I don’t!’ (41). God, who ‘had His keenest eye riveted on us’ (58), is feminised by Cathy’s observation that the ‘single great eye of God’ was ‘shining up there in the moon’ (301), a symbol of maternal violence for Rachilde (see Chapter One) and which Luna identifies as unifying ‘the balance between maternal forces and the dictates of nature’ (34), which Cathy reiterates in Petals when she remembers how ‘Chris and I had so desperately prayed while we huddled on the cold slate roof under a moon that looked like the scowling eye of God’ (32). Yet, while the grandmother keeps her eye on the children through the invocation of God, a blindspot lurks; while the ‘keenest’, ‘single great’ eye is fixated on the children, this implies that there is another, weaker eye which neglects them that allows the incest to occur, and is weaker precisely because it does so. It is this blindspot in the prohibitive maternal gaze which enables the incest that, at its core, desires a response of (dis)approval from the mother whose absence compelled the act; while Andrews delights in writing incest her mother refuses to read, it is this refusal which perpetuates it.

Andrews attempted suicide twice during her lifetime, and when she was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1986 she did not seek treatment and died in December of the same year, aged sixty-three. Her writing was the only means of escaping the maternal surveillance which beleaguered her life and became a textual body articulating the desires her disabled
body could not, and the novel reads like an incest survivor memoir which depicts a life the author feels she has lived: ‘I live all of my books. When I go to my office, I lose touch with my conscious; I come in tune with my subconscious and it turns on like magic’ (in Winter: 177). Yet, in writing an incest fantasy which unfolds in the maternal space of the attic, Andrews’ fiction constantly calls back to the mother from whom she wishes to escape through her act of writing. As such, Andrews subverts the conventions of both Gothic and autobiographical incest narratives by recasting the trauma of incest as a fantasy, made possible by converting the incestuous household, typically presided over by a paternal persecutor in both genres, into a space of maternal tyranny.

While Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*, with Manfred’s unwittingly incestuous pursuit of his daughter Matilda, established the genre’s preoccupation with incest, and incest memoirs like *My Father’s House* by Sylvia Fraser (1987), and recently Toni Maguire’s *When Daddy Comes Home* (2007) and Megan Lloyd-Davies and Alice Lawrence’s *Daddy’s Prisoner* (2009), explicitly figure the domestic space as one ruled silently by paternal sexual abuse, Andrews’ notion of incest instigated and kept secret by the absent mother challenges the cultural given that it is the father who abuses the child and demands their silence. Imprisoned in the attic by Corrine, Cathy and Chris’ inevitable sibling incest occurs because mother, not father, has interfered with their psychosexual maturation.

Through content and structure the Dollanganger novels become Andrews’ maternal body, through which she parthenogenetically conceives and births her characters, writing her maternal self into existence. Fragile and isolated, Andrews cuts a Miss Havisham figure recoiling from society, exclaiming ‘I have adjusted to my way of living [...] sometimes I rather like it’ (in Agnes Garrett and Helga McCue: 23, 21), and by her own admission she
took pleasure in subjecting her creations to sadistic maternal abuse and manipulating them to commit incest: ‘I enjoy the awful things, because they are kind of fun’ (in Winter: 172). Sadistic and debilitating injuries are inflicted on the majority of her characters, including Cathy, who writes the manuscript for *Flowers* while she is wheelchair-bound after a ballet accident in *If There Be Thorns*. Throughout the saga Andrews weaves an elaborate web of multi-generational incestuous affairs which are all instigated by the influence of either maternal desire or maternal absence, and at times both. Deprived of a physical maternal presence, children in the texts attempt to satiate their emotional and pre/Oedipal sexual attachments to their mother by finding comfort in incest.

Mother becomes the origin of all incest, a pattern established by Walpole’s early Gothic play *The Mysterious Mother* (1768), a tale of double incest which simultaneously repulsed its author and compelled him to write it: ‘I have less repugnance for my *Castle of Otranto* [...] but a tragedy with a revolting subject, there’s a curiosity’ (to Mme du Deffand, in Clery 2001: 24). Clery notes that in his correspondence Walpole repeatedly describes his play as ‘revolting’ or ‘disgusting’, ‘so disgusting that it could never be made available in a public edition, let alone on the stage; so disgusting the text, must instead, be kept under lock and key’, yet this forbidden narrative piqued the curiosity of Walpole and du Deffand, who begged the author for a copy over a number of years (24).

The eponymous mother is the Countess of Narbonne, who knowingly seduces her unwitting son Edmund, who believes he is having sex with a maid. The Countess gives birth to her son’s daughter/sister Adeliza, with whom he – naturally - falls in love and marries. While Walpole’s *Otranto*, the archetype of paternal incestuous desire, appeared four years earlier in 1764, *The Mysterious Mother* drew inspiration from the thirteenth tale of *The
Chapter Five – Incest and the pre-Oedipal Maternal Tangle

*Heptameron* (1558), a collection of stories written by the French queen Marguerite de Navarre, and so a historical and overarching intertextual, or as Ellen Pollak terms it ‘intercestual’, narrative logic is established, where ‘maternal desire produces and structures [...] stories about incestuous siblings or incestuous relations between fathers and daughters’ (130). *Flowers* follows this narrative pattern which ‘displace[s] the threat of incest from the parent-child to the sibling relation’, and it is the ‘introduction of the figure of the maternal guardian’, which reconfigures and manipulates parent-child incest into its echo sibling incest (ibid.). The ‘entangled categories of representation, maternity, incest and origins’ are brought to the fore by these narratives (ibid.), and so while Chris and Cathy’s incest initially suggests the fulfilment of Oedipal wishful thinking, following the movement of incest in which the family folds back into itself, Chris and Cathy’s intercourse can only represent a call towards the maternal body as their shared origin and existence, the womb of the attic, the place of their incest.

‘You want to catch us’: Pre-Oedipal Desires and Maternally-induced Incest

The children’s arrested sexual development is the result of being absented from patriarchy back into the pre-Oedipal maternal space of the attic, presided over by a panoptic maternal gaze which simultaneously condemns and causes their incest. In their early teens at the time of their incarceration, Cathy and Chris appear to still be caught in the Oedipus complex; Cathy observes that ‘of us all, [Chris] loved our mother best. He had her high on a pedestal of perfection [...] he’d already told me when he grew up, he’d marry a woman who was like our mother’ (72), while she describes her dead father like a dashing hero from a romance
novel: ‘Our father was perfect’, ‘he stood six feet two, weighed 180 pounds, and his hair was thick and flaxen blond, and waved just enough to be perfect; his eyes were cerulean blue and sparkled with laughter’ (4). After his death, her mother confirms the Oedipal attachment, explaining ‘your father used to say you were like his mother, and he loved his mother’, that ‘your father thought you were something very special’ and that ‘you and your father had a very special close relationship’ (14). This ‘special’ quality of their relationship, so mawkish and unsettling, is abruptly aborted by their father’s death at the beginning of the novel, and so ostensibly Cathy’s Oedipal desires must be cathected into other love-objects in order to resolve them, and the logical object choice is Christopher, the imago of his father. Because the children are removed from patriarchy on which the conquering of the Oedipus complex is predicated, the siblings’ Oedipal wishes are prolonged, encouraged and eventually fulfilled through their act of incest. Thus, the pre-Oedipal maternal space allows the child to indulge in a sexuality ruinous to the patriarchal order, as incest threatens the processes of normative reproduction and evolution.

There is another layer to this Oedipal tangle, however. While the consummation of father/daughter and equivalent brother/sister incestuous desires threatens to undo the heteronormative processes which sustain the Symbolic order, within the Freudian apparatus it nonetheless privileges male sexual power and the girl’s pursuit of such power, as her desire is constellated around the phallus, that which her mother has denied her. In ‘Femininity’ (1933) Freud details the aetiology of the female Oedipus complex, in which he posits a powerful pre-Oedipal attachment to the mother, the girl’s subsequent disavowal of which being at the core of her desire for the father once she becomes aware of both her mother’s and her own lack of penis, and blames the mother for this lack. While Freud
advises staunchly that ‘one cannot very well doubt the importance of envy for the penis’ (125), before proceeding to prescribe/fabricate this importance, he concedes that pre-Oedipal attachment to the mother and its (un)successful resolution ‘is the decisive one for a woman’s future’ (134), which governs her subsequent libidinal choices and has the potential to ruin the child for the paternal heterosexual contract, ‘leav[ing] behind so many opportunities for fixations and dispositions’ (119; Freud name-checks Ruth Mack Brunswick (1928), Jeanne Lampl-de Groot (1927) and Helene Deutsch (1932) for their work on the influence of pre-Oedipal maternal attachment: 130-131). If then, incest is understood as a residue Oedipal wish-fulfilment, the role of the pre-Oedipal mother in the girl's psychosexual development has profound implications.

As Rachel Devlin discusses, American psychoanalysts in the 1950s, the period in which Flowers is set, deployed the Oedipus complex to cast incest as the female child’s fantasy as ‘an avenue of escape from her pre-Oedipal attachment to her mother – an attachment that was increasingly understood to be overly intense, emotionally threatening and potentially dangerous as girls entered into adolescence’: ‘Relative to the danger that the mother presented, any activity with the father – including sex – was perceived to be somewhat benign’ (610, 611). Consequently, the Oedipus complex provided an explanation for incest which apportioned will to the daughter and blame to the mother, as ‘[the daughter's] new erotic attachment to her father is either healthy or disturbed, depending upon her psychological state upon entering the Oedipal stage’ (617). Successful resolution of the complex, outgrowing the desire for the father through choosing another male love-object and indentifying positively with the mother again, is predicated on the state in which the pre-Oedipal mother has left her child's psyche; the daughter who consummates her
desire for her father through incest is understood to have been deeply affected by her pre-Oedipal experiences and traumatised by her extrication from this phase.

If, as Freud contends, during the pre-Oedipal phase ‘the girl's father is only a troublesome rival’ (119), Cathy's jealousies – ‘[Chris] loved her more than me, I thought bitterly’ (190) - particularly those centred on Chris’ access to their mother's breast, are not an expression of her Oedipal rivalry waged against the mother for the father-figure, but the reawakening of pre-Oedipal resentment felt against the father who is rival to the mother's body. Consequently, within this context incest between the father-figure and daughter can be read as a punishment against the mother's body, the absence of which (and not the absence of the penis) creates a longing and resentment in the child, and a school of thought emerged which explicitly indentified mother as catalyst for father-daughter incest and posited it as an act of revenge against her. As Lillian Gordon writes in 'Incest as Revenge Against the Pre-Oedipal Mother':

It sometimes develops that a woman, apparently leading an active heterosexual life, is using the man not as an object in himself, but simply as a weapon [like Estella] in her pre-Oedipal struggle with the mother. To quote Freud [...] these are cases where ‘the hostile attitude to the mother is not a consequence of the rivalry implicit in the Oedipus complex, but rather originates in the preceding phase and has simply found in the Oedipus situation reinforcement and opportunity for asserting itself'. (284)
Within the dynamic of Oedipal incest as revenge ‘the father was the sexual object, the mother, the emotional aim’ (Devlin: 619). Thus, the desire at the core of the daughter’s incest with the father, or as in Cathy’s case the father-imago, is revealed to be not an Oedipal one but a deeper, prehistoric need for the maternal body which has apparently abandoned the child to the paternal order. Within the context of the maternal gaze and Cathy as its reflection, the figure of the absent mother serves the subversive purpose of precipitating an act of sibling incest which confirms Cathy and Chris’ inability to separate from her (discussing Chris’ attachment to Cathy-as-mother would be tautological as Freud prophesied for boys that ‘mother is the first object of his love, as she remains so too during the [complex] and, in essence, all through his life’ (‘Femininity’: 118)).

Regressing the children into the pre-Oedipal space of the attic and reigniting their desire for their mother, it is the maternal gaze of the grandmother, both its prohibitive presence and its absence, which precipitates their incest, and Karin Meiselman notes how ‘very rigid, puritanical attitudes toward sexuality’ displayed by the mother-figure ‘and the resultant lack of real sex education in the home’ is a common factor in cases of sibling incest (265, 266). Meiselman postulates that ‘it is possible that this maternal attitude [stimulates] siblings’ curiosity about the delights that they were forbidden so frequently’ (266), and this is how Cathy and Chris’ incestuous desires are stoked, as they act on ideas and feelings ignited by the prohibitive maternal gaze of the puritanical grandmother, once that same gaze absents itself. Furthermore, the active denial of reciprocity between the maternal gaze and the child-object, laid down by grandmother’s rule ‘nor will you allow your eyes to meet with mine; nor will you seek to show signs of affection towards me, nor hope to gain my friendship, nor my pity, nor my love, nor my compassion’ (45), provokes incest as a response
to maternal rejection.

Their incarceration and the incest it compels are born of the maternal gaze, as Cathy observes about the grandmother ‘I knew she was happy to see us locked up. Every time she glanced our way, it showed in her eyes – her smug satisfaction to have us so neatly captured’, while Chris accuses ‘You helped put us here. You have locked this wing so the servants cannot enter. You want to catch us doing something you consider evil’ (114, 227). The sense that the omnipotent maternal gaze conspires incest is implied through the symbolism of the maternal moon that watches over them: ‘It was a peculiar kind of night, as if fate had planned this night, long ago, and this night was our destiny, right or wrong. It was darkness lit up by the moon so full and bright, and the stars seemed to flash like Morse code beams […] fate accomplished …’ (299).

The performance of prohibition on the part of the maternal gaze initiates incest which confirms the overwhelming desire for maternal attention, as Judith Herman and Lisa Hirschman explain that ‘in the archetypal incest stories, the mother’s absence is literal and final’, and it is the female child’s unrequited desire for the mother’s love which drives her to find affection elsewhere, to be seduced by, or seduce, the father-figure (44). Similarly, Meiselman postulates a type of sibling incest induced by a matrilineage of neglect, as ‘it has been found that the mother’s relationship with her own mother (the maternal grandmother) has been characterised by rejection and hostility’, so that the mother ‘continue[s] to be emotionally tied to the grandmother in the vague hope of receiving love and approval from her’ – Corrine’s unconscious reasoning for returning home (144).

While incest as revenge against the pre-Oedipal mother is an aggressive performance of rebellion, it betrays a deeper need to reunite with her, a need so great in Cathy that she
begins to become her mother: ‘I patterned my movements, and my expressions, after those of my mother’ (152). As Chodorow seminally argues, the act of mothering is reproduced by and for the continuance of patriarchy through behaviours which the daughter learns from her mother; ‘women, as mothers, produce daughters with mothering capacities and the desire to mother’ (7), and this desire is stoked by a continuing identification with the mother despite the intervention of the Oedipus complex:

Because her first love-object is a woman, a girl, in order to attain her proper heterosexual orientation, must transfer her primary object choice to her father and men [...]. A girl's reaction to him is emotionally in reaction to, interwoven and competing in primacy with, her relation to mother [...]. [The] libidinal turning to her father does not substitute for her attachment to her mother. Instead, a girl retains her pre-Oedipal tie to her mother (an intense tie involved with issues of primary identification, primary love, dependence and separation) and builds Oedipal attachments to both her mother and her father upon it. (192-3)

Echoing Chodorow, Susan Wolstenholme suggests that female Gothic is characterised by a ‘reexperience’ of the ‘preverbal communication’ – most potently the gaze – between the baby girl and her mother, that in the mother/daughter relationship the daughter does not usurp the mother but is ‘multipositioned, in the place of the daughter and the mother simultaneously’ (151). Thus, the children’s Oedipal maturation is decontextualised by the maternal space of the attic, as Cathy is destined to not only identify with but become her
mother through her incest. Cathy mimics her mother's beauty and femininity to such an excessive extent that Chris cannot resist her, and the semblance of patriarchal order collapses.

Chodorow states that the pre-Oedipal tie to the mother is transformed into identification as the mother through sexual intercourse, as ‘a woman identifies with the man penetrating her and thus experiences through identification refusion with a woman (mother)’, and then ‘becomes the mother (phylogenetically the all-embracing sea, ontogenetically the womb)’ (194). In the Symbolic contract of intercourse in which (hetero)sexual and parental desires and drives are discrete this serves to suppress female sexuality at the expense of the maternal subjectivity, as ‘a woman in a heterosexual relationship cannot, like a man, recapture as herself her own experience of merging’ (ibid.). However, within the pre-Oedipal space of the attic which naturalises Cathy and Chris’ incest the maternal and the sexual are merged, and this merging is galvanised by their incest as an act which replicates the mother and father’s incestuous intercourse. Cathy can never resolve her Oedipus complex nor her pre-Oedipal attachment, as her primary source of identification with her mother comes from sex with her brother, the image of her father but more fundamentally a fellow product of her mother’s womb, another inhabitant stalked by its gaze.

Consequently, the behaviours Cathy reproduces follow the pattern established by her mother, as acts of love, nurturance and protection she performs for the twins are revealed as a masquerade of benevolence which disguises a deeper drive for rebellion and revenge. During their incarceration Cathy and Chris become ‘the genuine parents of Carrie and Cory’ (210), with Cathy’s maternal role made explicit. She asks Cory ‘why can’t you
pretend I'm your Momma? [...] I love you very much Cory, and that's what makes a real mother' (129), and the twins, beginning to forget their real mother, call her 'Momma'. This creates tension between Cathy and Corrine through which Cathy's own maternal gaze is manifested; when Cory becomes ill Cathy exhibits jealousy towards her mother who insists on the position of maternal concern, explaining 'I narrowed my eyes as I watched her eyes close, and her lips move as if in silent prayer' (138), and when Cathy challenges her mother about Cory's deterioration, 'glaring hard at a mother who refused to see what was wrong', Corrine responds 'why do you incessantly persist in making everything so hard for me?' (142). Cathy's gaze is not so much a rival as a Doppelgänger one: 'I was his mother now, not her' (308).

Cathy's maternal gaze is confirmed by her reflection, as she looks in the mirror and sees 'my own mother's face as she must have looked at my age' looking back (301). The Lacanian function of the mirror stage as initiation into the Symbolic is refracted as Cathy views herself and her mother as the same person. E.D. Huntley observes that the novel echoes *Snow White* as the mirror reflects maternal ambivalence and rivalry, and that 'Cathy relies on her mirror image to mark her transformation from child to adult', that she 'is simultaneously pleased to resemble Corrine and disheartened' (74, 55). Like Laura for Carmilla, Margaret for Tera and Estella for Miss Havisham, Cathy is her mother's metonym, and the effect of mother's mirroring fragments Cathy's body into pieces which only make sense when put back together in the maternal image. As Kahane shows, the mirror has an
The female child, who shares the female body and its symbolic space in our culture, remains locked in a [...] tenuous and fundamentally ambivalent struggle for a separate identity. This ongoing battle with a mirror image who is both self and other is what I find at the centre of the Gothic structure, which allows me to confront the confusion between mother and daughter and the intricate web of psychic connections that constitute their bond. (1985: 337)

The mirror also reflects and repeats the siblings' incestuous desire, as Cathy catches Chris with his ‘stabbing glare’ watching her watch herself in the mirror as she ‘stared, preened and admired [...] keeping my eyes glued to my reflection’ (195, 194), and confirms their incest as an echo of their parents’ transgression: ‘I caught a glimpse of us in the dresser mirror across the way. An eerie feeling stole over me, making all of this seem so unreal. He and I looked like doll parents, younger editions of Momma and Daddy’ (130). Written and controlled by Andrews, Cathy as narrator is destined to repeat both bodily and textually the transgressions of her mother. This is how Luna understands the purpose of the child subjected to the maternal gaze, as ‘the child functions similarly to that of a text which is read by others, who in turn look beyond the words and towards the sub-text that is mother’ (24). Considering Chodorow’s contention that women become their mother by fulfilling the heterosexual inheritance through intercourse, Cathy and Chris evoke the absent mother through their incest, confirming her as their originary and strongest desire and the attic as womb. As
Cathy becomes increasingly resentful of the mother who has abandoned them, her incest becomes an act of revenge against the maternal gaze: ‘That’s when it came over me in a cataclysmic flood – I loved Chris – and he was my brother [....] and what a perfect way to strike back at Momma and the grandparents’ (255).

This desire for revenge, for ‘a day when both my mother and my grandmother would be under my thumb … and I’d snap the whip, and handle the tar, and control the food supply’ (253), becomes Cathy’s obsession in Petals: ‘Like a coiled fuse attached to a time bomb, I knew that sooner or later I would explode and bring down all those who lived in Foxworth Hall [....] Damn you, Momma! I hope Foxworth Hall burns to the ground!’ (8-9). Cathy’s revenge fantasy, her ‘moment of triumph!’ (379), is realised at the climax of the novel when she returns to the Hall as the site of maternal trauma to confront her mother, who suffers a mental breakdown and starts a fire in which the grandmother, now old and infirm, dies in another echo of Miss Havisham. With her own mother incarcerated in an asylum Cathy has taken up the maternal mantle, and the sequel concludes with her bewildered observation that the two child-sized beds and a picnic basket have appeared in her own attic and her hollow insistence that ‘I am not like her! I may look like her, but inside I am honourable! I am stronger, more determined. The best in me will win out in the end. I know it will. It has to sometimes … doesn't it?’ (409). Here the cycle of abuse is fulfilled, a perpetuation of maternal violence which Welldon argues is entirely unconscious on the mother’s part: ‘[The mother] is quite unaware of her participation in the cycle in which she is perpetuating her own trauma by placing her child in identical circumstances to those she suffered’ (2000: 68). As Corrine believed she was doing the best for her children,
so does Cathy insist she is the better, more honourable, mother. As the trauma is perpetuated, so is the mother’s victimhood.

**Breast is Best: Oral Fixation in the Attic**

Simultaneously refusing and re-fusing mother, Andrews’ narrative recasts incest as a desire for the mother, as Cathy’s revenge binds her to the pre-Oedipal maternal body, the womb of the attic. This echoes Gordon’s understanding of incest as a ‘vengeful use of the Oedipal relationship to get even’ with the mother, which simultaneously betrays a desire for her attention, her gaze (287). Gordon’s analysis centres on her patient Helen who was involved in an incestuous relationship with her father for years, but remained ‘masochistically attached to her mother, feeling strongly deprived by her’ (288). A younger brother was born during Helen’s childhood who was delicate and needed special foods, and Gordon identifies the deprivation as indicative of an oral fixation on the mother who ‘deprived her by feeding him better’ (287). Thomas Gutheil and Nicholas Avery also discuss incest cases where ‘the daughters [...] are oral-dependent characters’ who commit incest ‘in a spirit of revenge against a withholding mother’ (114), while Matilde de Rascovsky and Arnoldo Rascovsky link incest to maternal oral deprivation in their analysis of Suzanna, whose mother is described as ‘a cold woman who had not suckled her daughter’ (45-46). Cathy’s incest is similarly circumscribed by orality; fixated on her mother’s breast, she ‘wonder[s] what size bra Momma wore’ (238) and jealously feels that she has not experienced Corrine’s breast in the same sensual manner as Chris (170), while the Grandmother’s house is repeatedly characterised as consuming the children, ‘a monster, holding us in its sharp-toothed mouth’
in which they are swallowed whole and ‘buried alive’ (37, 56).

This image of the house as devouring monster is repeated in Cathy’s Hansel and Gretel dream, where the wicked witch in the gingerbread house with ‘grey flintstone eyes’ is revealed to be their mother (199). Bruno Bettelheim understands the witch’s desire to cook and eat the children as a warning against pre-Oedipal ‘unrestrained oral greed and dependence’ symbolised by their own consumption of the gingerbread house (162), an expression of oral reciprocity which is translated by the paternal order into oral anxiety, reflected as a destructive orality symbolised by the poisonous donuts their mother brings, an echo of Snow White. This aggressive pre-Oedipal orality which is transformed into anxiety is summarised by Freud:

A mother is active in every sense towards her child; the act of lactation itself may equally be described as the mother suckling the baby or as her being sucked by it [....] the child’s avidity for its earliest nourishment is altogether insatiable, that it never gets over the pain of losing its mother’s breast [....] the fear of being poisoned is also probably connected with the withdrawal of the breast. Poison is nourishment that makes one ill. (1933: 115, 122)

Once nurturing, the maternal body has turned on the child and becomes a hostile space which threatens to consume it, and through the domestic Gothic framework Flowers rewrites the maternal oral sadism which characterises the incestuous lesbian vampire relationship found in Carmilla to bring it uncomfortably close to home.
This association between the mother and oral denial/aggression manifested in the womb-space is repeated in *Thorns*, when Cathy and Corrine are locked in the latter’s cellar by her puritanical butler John Amos, who wants them both to starve to death (Corrine eventually dies a Havishamesque death when the house catches fire, echoing her own mother’s burning in the previous instalment). Thus, the breast as symbolic of mother’s nurturance is linked to vagina as devouring mother in the attic, and echoes Wilf Bion’s understanding of a ‘greedy vagina-like “breast” that strips of its goodness all that the infant gives or receives’ (115). The vampiric quality of the attic as *vagina dentata* is echoed when Chris slashes his wrist so the twins can drink his blood for sustenance, an image evocative of Dracula breastfeeding Mina and an imitation of the maternal breast’s capacity to give milk and succour to the child (206). Considering the primacy of the maternal breast in the attic, this act might betray Chris’ own breast envy, which Karen Horney identifies as part of ‘the boy’s intense envy of motherhood’ and the female body’s capacity for pregnancy, parturition and suckling which demonstrate ‘a quite indisputable and by no means negligible physiological superiority’ (60). The attic is suspended in a stage of oral fixation wherein the libido’s drives and anxieties are constellated around the mother’s breast. This stage is the first in Freud’s understanding of psychosexual development, and oral gratification is the primary source of erotogenic pleasure. Two stages before the phallic phase in which the child becomes aware of their genitalia and its anatomical difference and in which the Oedipus complex occurs, the stage of oral fixation privileges the mother as the source of all pleasure, both immediate and proceeding, and Hanna Segal comments that ‘sucking at the mother’s breast is the starting point of the whole sexual life’ (14).

Similarly, Welldon invests the breast as the phallus’ equivalent, its alternative, with
‘a controlling power that mothers could harness to guide their young infants’ lives’ (1988: 31).

The threat of castration posed by the mother’s body in the Symbolic and the vengeful father do not exist within this oral pre-Oedipal space; their father is dead from the beginning of the novel and both children are drawn to the sexual potential of their mother’s breast, not repulsed by her lack of penis. Concomitantly the gaze is bound to the breast, rather than the phallus, through the act of breastfeeding, as Adrienne Rich describes: ‘Suckling [my child] I saw his eyes open full to mine, and realised each of us was fastened to the other, not by mouth or breast, but through our mutual gaze’ (31; see also Stern). Breastfeeding confirms the primacy of the maternal gaze, and gaze and breast as objet a are irrevocably connected; if one is removed from the child, so is the other. Consequently, when Corrine leaves the children in the attic she not only denies them her visual attention but also maternal nourishment, forcing them to relive weaning and reigniting a desire for her breast.

The understanding of the pre-Oedipal breast as a predicate of desire and anxiety was discussed extensively by Melanie Klein, whose work on object-relations privileged the influence of the mother’s breast. For Klein the breast is the primary object through which the child comes to terms with both pleasure and aggression. Having left the womb, the newborn child sees the breast which fills their field of vision for the majority of their consciousness as their entire world, and Klein explains that their gratifications and frustrations are perceived as originating from the breast which the suckling child ‘imbue[s] with the characteristics of good and evil’ (1936: 291). The child’s introjecting and splitting of the breast into the part objects of ‘good breast’ and ‘bad breast’, that which satisfies the child and that which denies them, expresses their struggle to integrate the fundamental drives of love and hate, and demonstrates a wish ‘to possess [...] the content of the mother’s body and
to destroy her by means of every weapon which sadism can command’ (1930: 219).

The infant is beset by ambivalence towards the maternal breast onto which they have projected the feelings of pleasure and aggression, and the process of weaning where the child learns that ‘the breast or bottle is gone irrevocably’ (1936: 295) is instrumental in constructing the child’s image of a loving mother, or otherwise as the case may be. As Klein notes: ‘In so far as the baby never has uninterrupted possession of the breast, and over and over again is in the state of lacking it, one could say that, in a sense, he is in a constant state of being weaned or at least in the state leading up to it’ (ibid.). Luna sees the nourishing function of breastfeeding as a smokescreen for the devouring maternal instinct which feeds from the captive audience of its child, and that once the child is weaned ‘the maternal body does not retain the same signification to the child as it once had [... and] instead becomes obsolete for it is no longer home (womb)’ (19). Thus, while the breast is a continuation of the pre-natal succour of the womb, a break from the breast is essential for the child to understand the mother and themselves as whole and discrete objects and enter into the Symbolic contract.

What happens in Flowers is a regression back to a space where the child is emotionally reattached to the breast which is once again divided, and this ambivalence is demonstrated by Cathy towards her mother’s breast which she views simultaneously as giving and denying:

She drew [Chris] into her open arms and covered his wan, splotched, moustached face with quick little kisses that sought to take away the harm she’d done. Kiss, kiss, kiss, finger his hair, stroke his cheek, draw his head against her soft, swelling
breasts, and let him drown in the sensuality of being cuddled close to that creamy flesh that must excite even a youth of his tender years [....] And it came to me then, I had never felt my cheek against the softness of her breast. (170)

Here we detect envy on the part of Cathy, both for Chris’ position to the breast and for the ‘soft, swelling’ breast itself. Klein argued that ‘the first object to be envied is the feeding breast’, because the child recognises ‘it possesses everything that he desires and that it has an unlimited flow of milk and love which it keeps for its own gratification’ (1956: 238). For Klein, the girl’s breast envy predates and precipitates that for the penis, supplanting the primacy of the phallus with the earlier, ‘original envy of the breast’ (Segal: 142) and consequently ‘diminishing the importance of castration anxiety’ (Janice Doane and Devon Hodges: 11). Klein contradicted the privileging of the abstract phallus-as-signifier which forms the basis of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis by positing a much earlier and more tangible experience of anxiety and lack transmitted through the maternal breast. As Simon Richter summarises, within Klein’s work ‘the breast is the basis of the ego’ (60), and anxiety originates from the breast which denies the child its nourishment.

Cathy sexualises her mother’s breast, and this sexualisation echoes the sensual feelings produced through breastfeeding, during which the hormone oxytocin is released which also has the effect of contacting the uterus, producing painful cramps (Jan Riordan and Karen Wambach: 91). Thus the womb has a physical reaction when the baby sucks on the breast, a pull of desire akin in strength to a sexual one. As Alison Bartlett discusses, breastfeeding ‘shift[s] the erotic dyad of male-female to female-child’ (75), and mentions
that some women reach orgasm while breastfeeding (71, see also Rich: 183). The (heterosexual) mother's libido is transferred from her male partner to her child, ‘displac[ing] the father as the usual source of sexual pleasure’ (70), and Christopher Bollas confirms the link between the maternal gaze and the maternal sexuality of breastfeeding, describing the pleasure in feeding and being fed as ‘registered through the mutuality of gaze that is as star-crossed as any lovers’ (42). Bollas clearly defines breastfeeding as a sexual act, ‘a type of lust in the breast to be suckled that meets with an increasing lust in the infant to suck’, an ‘initial intercourse’ communicated through the maternal gaze which condemns the child’s desire to mediate itself through the mother’s (87). Feeding is a sexual act which gratifies the mother while establishing the child’s oral fixation which is sustained by the womb of the attic, the lust of/for the maternal breast which Andrews writes. As Barbara Schictermann discusses, mothers can ‘satiate (“feed”) themselves on their children’ (68), while Rich comments that ‘the mother has to wean herself from the infant’ as well as ‘the infant from herself’ (36); thus the womb devours the child through the vampiric act of breastfeeding, transferring the cannibalistic function from the child to the mother.

The association between oral gratification and Corrine’s breast is made again when she returns in Thorns and entices and corrupts her grandson Bart by plying him with sweets, cakes and milk and cradling him like a baby, regressing him to a state of oral fixation in which he becomes dependent on her: ‘She fed me a biscuit, a slice of chocolate cake, then held the glass of milk for me to drink. With a full stomach I snuggled more comfortably on her lap and rested my head on the softness of her full breasts that smelled of lavender’ (227); ‘I snuggled closer and waited for her to call me Baby, but she just went right on rocking and singing a lullaby. I put my thumb in my mouth. Nice to be hugged and kissed and made to
feel helpless and loved’ (49). Like Miss Havisham and Carmilla, Corrine does not eat food, only children.

Cathy understands the consuming power of the maternal breast which arrests and bewitches the male gaze, noting how Chris ‘seemed impressed and dazzled’ by her body, ‘just as he had been when he’d gazed so long at Momma’s swelling bosom’ (166), and she mimics her mother when comforting her brother: ‘I cupped his face in my palms first, then drew his head down to my breast as I’d seen Momma do in the past’ (268). As the threat of castration is absent in this pre-Oedipal space in which Cathy’s burgeoning body mirrors her mother’s, Chris is suspended in a phase of maternal attachment from which he will never escape. This rings true in the fourth instalment Seeds of Yesterday, when he dies in a car accident, an echo of his own father’s death. Having married Cathy, as his father married his half-sister, and cemented his incestuous desire for the mother-figure, Chris cannot exist in the paternal order in which the phallus is Law and incest and the maternal body are prohibited.

In the pre-Oedipal space of the attic the phallus is eschewed and desire and its attendant anxiety are centred on the maternal breast, as Cathy dreams that the grandmother ‘took a long shiny knife and sliced off my breasts and fed them into Chris’ mouth’ (272). This dream is an oral-sadistic fantasy against the mother’s breast which has been denying the children adequate nourishment during their imprisonment. Klein argued that in the early months of life the child feels sadistic impulses towards the breast and maternal body as a whole, violent fantasies of ‘scooping it out, devouring the contents, destroying it by every means which sadism can suggest’; ‘In fantasy the child sucks the breast into himself, chews it up and swallows it; thus he feels he has actually got it there, that he possesses the
mother's breast within himself' (1935: 262; 1936: 291). These cannibalistic fantasies are aggressive manifestations of anxiety attached to the 'bad' breast which frustrates the child by denying it the constant gratification and attention it demands. Cathy's dream serves the dual function of expressing her wish to hurt her mother's body, as represented by her own, and feeding Chris with the maternal breast. Otto Rank notes the motif of disfiguring and severing the breast as punishment for incest (367); for Rank violence against the breast, not violence that originates from it, correlates with castration, and as such within the maternal space of the attic the breast supersedes the phallus as the most symbolically-invested and powerful object.

For Luna 'the child feeds at the breast of one who will come to desire its devouring, a desire that lurks in the very posture assumed in the feeding scenario' (19). The breast is a Lacanian objet a, like the gaze a remnant of the pre-Symbolic existence that creates an excess of jouissance in the paternal realm and for Luna the 'natural position' of breastfeeding reconfigures the maternal body as an extension of the consuming womb which issues the gaze, and she equates the 'enveloping' posture of breastfeeding with a 'collapsing' of the infant into the mother; thus the maternal breast functions much as her gaze does, to insert the child back into the womb by creating a desire, a drive, for it in the child (ibid.). As Lacan summarised: 'What is fundamental at the level of each drive is the movement outwards and back in which it is structured' (1964: 177). Having already incarcerated her children in the attic, perhaps this is why Corrine feels no need to sustain sustenance, as the feelings created by maternal deprivation indicate the child's desire for its mother more than those produced by expressions of gratification and love. This is the sadomasochistic pattern which Welldon has observed in clinical practice, noting 'it is amazing how maltreated babies respond in a
complimentary way to their mother’s exploitation: it seems they sense this as a means of survival. They are terrified of losing their mother, and therefore their own existence’ (1988: 67). Indeed, while Cathy is bent on revenge throughout the saga, Chris is willing to ‘forgive and forget’ their mother’s murderous actions: ‘Perhaps you can pretend she doesn’t exist, but I can’t’ (Thorns: 119).

In the attic fixation on the mother’s breast, ‘an aftereffect of nostalgia for the womb’ (Kristeva 2001: 92), echoes the children’s desire for the gratification afforded to them in the pre-Oedipal oral phase, and meditating on the breast speaks of a desire to physically latch back on and reunite with the maternal body. The ambivalent nature of the breast, that which nourishes but not always, permeates the atmosphere of the attic-as-womb which Klein states ‘implies a feeling of unity and security’ dependent on the ‘psychological and physical state of the mother’ (1957: 179). Klein argued the urge for ‘constant evidence of the mother’s love is fundamentally rooted in anxiety. The struggle between life and death instincts and the ensuing threat of annihilation of the self and of the object by destructive impulses are fundamental factors in the [child’s] initial relation to his mother’ (179-180); thus for Cathy the maternal breast becomes the marker of desire on which her longings for love and revenge are founded.

Klein’s early theories sanctioned sibling incest in a similar way to Andrews and the American psychoanalytic school of thought, suggesting that sibling sexual relationships can repair normative heterosexuality after the fallout of the Oedipus complex. For Klein sibling incest is characterised by a ‘secret complicity’ in which the children are ‘in league [...] against the parents’, and happens ‘much more frequent[ly] even during latency and puberty than is usually supposed’ (1932a: 224, 1932b: 118). The girl’s transference of desire to the penis as ‘an
organ which, unlike the breast, can provide her with a tremendous and never-ending oral gratification’ (ibid.), is explicitly understood by Klein as a response to the frustrating maternal breast (Prophecy Coles: 55-58). Thus, incest exposes a desire for the ephemeral nurturance and jouissance provided by the pre-Oedipal mother which the daughter tries to gain from her father(figure) instead. However, whereas sex with the father within the context of vengeance was psychoanalytically perceived as ‘a solution to the problem of maternal hostility in the psyche of the young girl’ (Devlin: 621), Cathy complicates this solution by having sex with Chris, the imago of her father but primarily her brother, whom she physically resembles and with whom she shared the pre-Oedipal maternal experience, which has been recommenced on entry into the attic.

Consequently Flowers breaks from the female Gothic tradition established in novels such as The Mysteries of Udolpho and Rebecca, where the heroine pursues the mystery of the spectral mother to complete the mother/child separation and marry the hero, and restore order through the heterosexual ‘happy ending’. For Modleski these female Gothics ultimately ‘serve in part to convince women that they are not their mothers’ (71), and are characterised by a transient uncanny masochistic identification with the mother which is necessary for the heroine’s pursuit of the truth and precipitates the eventual rejection of the maternal bond in favour of a marital one. The difference with Flowers is that Cathy can never escape her mother because she is the image of her, an extension of the narcissistic maternal gaze whose purpose ‘is to reflect the idealised image of her own self’ (Luna: 24), and Flowers articulates the female fear of not only being like one’s mother but being one’s mother (Modleski: 70). Nor can she reject this literal identification with the mother because her sexual partner is her own brother, the mirror of their father, and their intercourse
mimics that of their parents, cementing Cathy’s subjectivity as always predicated on her mother’s.

Andrews’ female Gothic also differs radically from the tradition in its depiction of maternal sadism. Massé argues that ‘it is a critical commonplace that the genre is “about” suffering women whose painful initiations provide some vague pleasure for women authors, characters and readers’, and that women are taught masochism through this act of vicarious pleasure as the fear and pain experienced by the Gothic heroine at the hands of the male tyrant is absented through the romantic happy ending of marriage: ‘The ideology of romance insists that there was never any pain or renunciation, that the suffering they experience is really the love and recognition for which they long’ (1, 3; see also Howells (1978)). While Massé declares that ‘this pattern structures every Gothic novel’ (4), such an analysis services a feminist agenda which, paradoxically, garners strength from a masochistic victim position of blamelessness and so ultimately undercuts itself.

In response to the critical neglect of the female tyrant, Andrews’ mothers commandeer and subvert the gendered roles of sadomasochism prescribed by patriarchy and upheld by critics of female Gothic. Andrews’ mothers are creators of a sadomasochistic cycle of abuse; committing sadistic acts against their children they simultaneously foster a victim position for themselves and ensure that this pattern will be replicated through their own child. This maternal sadomasochism is profoundly narcissistic as it commands attention be paid to the mother as both victim and persecutor while exonerating her of any innate culpability. Furthermore, this cycle of abuse confirms the overarching power of the mother, as Welldon identifies that ‘the main feature of perversion is that, symbolically, the individual through her perverse action tries to conquer a tremendous fear of losing her
mother’ (1988: 9). This reproduction of perverse, incestuous and sadomasochistic mothering is the plot of the Dollanganger saga which mother and daughter readers share, and further reproduce through the act of reading, and as I discuss in Chapter Six, re-writing.

The Doppelgänger Dollanganger children are uncanny subjects destined to repeat in true Gothic style their parents’ sibling incest through which they were created, as Cathy reflects after she and Chris have had sex: ‘All I had to do was look in my hand mirror [...] and I could see my own mother’s face as she must have looked at my age. And so it had come to pass, just as the grandmother predicted. Devil’s issue. Created by evil seed sown in the wrong soil, shooting up new plants to repeat the sins of the fathers. And the mothers’ (301).

From the outset of the novel the children are initiated into incest by being exposed to their parents’ lustful looks for one another, the ‘teasing games [played] with their eyes’ (5, 289), an incestuous primal scene acted out through the gaze observed and then repeated by the children (Meiselman cites observation of parental intercourse as a common factor in cases of sibling incest: 266). Through the incarceration of the children in the attic as Gothic domestic space, Flowers subverts the domestic elements of romance fiction which Janice Radway seminally argues ‘leaves unchallenged the male right to public spheres of work, politics and power’, promotes marriage as a happy ending and so ultimately ‘avoids questioning the institutionalised basis of patriarchal control over women’ (217), as Cathy and Chris’ bizarrely chivalrous incest courtship can occur precisely because they are confined to the maternal domestic.
‘That’s another story’:
Serialisation, Invagination and the Gothic Textual Tease

The undoing of patriarchal heteronormativity through an over-determination of its codes and processes established in *Great Expectations* is written into Cathy’s narration, which draws repeatedly on fairytale themes and symbols to express her fears and desires. As with their more adult counterpart the Gothic, reading the violence and sexuality present in fairytales enables the child reader to siphon their own subconscious anxieties. As Bettelheim has shown, through their plots of struggle and resolution fairytales intend to socialise and moralise the child, codedly encouraging them through characters and scenarios to resist their Oedipal desires: ‘What the child needs most is to be presented with symbolic images which reassure him that there is a happy solution to his Oedipal problems [.... that] it guarantees a happy ending’ (39). However, for the child reader ‘reassurance about a happy outcome has to come first, because only then will the child have the courage to labour confidently to extricate himself from his Oedipal predicament’ (ibid.), yet for the child Cathy, who does not read the fairytale but is the fairytale, this reassurance is not guaranteed.

Nor does the adult Cathy writing her fairytale offer this reassurance to her reader; the visceral Prologue, which sets the Gothic tone with ‘tears’, ‘bitter blood’ and ‘gall’ ominously ends with ‘certainly God in his infinite mercy will see that some understanding publisher will put my words in a book, and help grind the knife that I hope to wield’ (3), while her Epilogue denies any sense of closure or resolution for the reader: ‘But how we managed to survive – that’s another story’ (346), denying the finite ending Anne Williams insists ‘the female [Gothic] formula demands’ (103). Both the beginning and ending of the
novel are preoccupied with the acts of writing and publishing, of disseminating Cathy’s trauma beyond the close of her text. While the act of telling her story is a ‘relief’ for Cathy (346), this catharsis is not extended to the reader, who must read the next instalment(s) to futilely pursue the resolution of the pre/Oedipal/incest tangle Cathy weaves. However, *Petals on the Wind* denies the possibility of resolution, as Cathy and Chris’ incest is recommenced by the beginning of the second chapter – ‘It was evil and wrong! Yet I didn’t really want him to stop’ (25) - and they are married by the close of the novel. Rebelling against the rules and traditions of the Gothic their incest is neither symbolic, mistaken nor contained and restrained by the Gothic space.

Cathy’s initial ambivalence towards incest is an extreme articulation of the responses of the conventional sentimental Gothic heroine, the ‘image of sublimated sexual fantasy’ and her creator the Radcliffian Gothic novelists who ‘flirt with sexuality treating it with a mixture of fascination and coy withdrawal from its implications’ (Howells 1978: 11, 13), and there is a chasteness which endures throughout Cathy’s incest, a sinister innocence that makes her strangely unimpeachable. Thus, Andrews draws on and perverts literary precedents and archetypes to validate her portrayal of sibling incest for a teenage demographic, and in his study of adolescent reading processes Jack Thomson describes ‘the exploitation of adolescent readers by *[Flowers]*’, in which ‘the fairytale elements are only too thin a disguise for a novel which offers its young readers too direct an emotional involvement in the events it depicts’ (58-9). For Thomson, Andrews does not afford the reader the emotional or temporal distance which Bettelheim asserts is needed to vicariously experience and resolve their pre/Oedipal anxieties (Thomson: 59; Bettelheim: 38). Thomson shares the critical distaste for Andrews’ writing, not only for the novel’s ‘cloying
sentimentality’ but also the author’s endorsement of Cathy and Chris’ relationship: ‘There is no attempt on [Andrews’] part to establish any emotional or psychic distance between narrator and reader to involve the reader’s social and moral judgements more deeply’ (60). Andrews’ novels are textual spaces within which the readers’ received understanding of sexual normality and morality are forgotten, and in the case of younger readers ‘very vulnerable to the emotional blandishments of this novel’, impeded or corrupted: ‘They are blatantly deceived into hating the adults, weeping with and for the children, and experiencing a guilt-inducing prurient fascination in the perverted events portrayed in such a nastily suggestive manner’ (ibid.).

Thomson identifies Andrews’ agenda in writing a first-person narrative which blurs the author/narrator/reader roles of production and reception. Exposed to a sympathetic narrative of sibling incest as pre/Oedipal wish-fulfilment by proxy, the latent desires of Andrews’ voracious readership have been primed for innumerable sequels, prequels and similarly-themed sagas in which the presence of incest is the rule rather than the exception - one of Cathy’s reasons for kissing Bart was ‘just to know also, what a kiss was like from a stranger who was no blood relation at all’ (289). Similarly the rape as inauguration of their incest is depicted as more of an inevitability than a transgression by Andrews; she consents to the act even if Cathy does not explicitly do so. Contravening Bettelheim’s pattern, incest and sexual violence as a means of initiating children into sexuality are naturalised in Andrews’ maternal textual space: ‘This is the kind of neat structure Andrews provides: violence is transformed into “love” so that the “happy ever after” ending conveys a spurious impression of moral triumph’ (Thomson: 57). This is certainly Andrews’ sadomasochistic pattern; her only stand-alone novel My Sweet Audrina (1982) is an equally disturbing
exoneration of rape, as the eponymous Oedipal victim-heroine marries Arden, who, it is revealed, watched her being gang-raped when she was a child.

In Andrews’ writing rape, considered by feminist discourses to be an apparatus of male sexual domination and power in patriarchy, is subverted into an act which precipitates tyrannical maternal agency. The grandmother Olivia becomes hardened and powerful after her husband Malcolm rapes her while calling out his mother’s name (another Corrine) in *Garden of Shadows*, while Corrine Dollanganger, revealed to be a product of Malcolm’s rape of his stepmother Alicia, sexually manipulates all men around her, including her son. Cathy, whose sexuality is inaugurated by sibling rape, learns these behaviours from her mother and grandmother and reproduces them. Instead of being an act of male domination and aggression, incestuous rape and its (pre)Oedipal implications are evidence of male weakness and lack, as Chris swears to Cathy ‘I’ll castrate myself before I’ll let it happen again’ (299). Mothering as a sadistic act antithetical to patriarchy is reproduced, and throughout the saga children created by this skewed maternal sexuality are either killed through maternal mistreatment or are sexually perverse, psychologically damaged or aborted (the case with Cathy and Chris’ malformed baby in *Petals*, a ‘two-headed embryo with three legs – twins who didn’t separate properly’ (192)). In Sadeian fashion Andrews explicitly depicts rape and incest to her readership, coyly intimated in previous Gothic novels, which ultimately denies normative heterosexual reproduction upon which the continuation of patriarchy depends, yet does so within the Gothic fairytale romance framework, a genre which conventionally restores and upholds patriarchal order by the close of the novel.

Consequently, by writing the pre/Oedipal incest narrative in the saga format of serialisation, Andrews’ novels perpetuate themselves through a process of textual
parthenogenesis, a formula which simultaneously encourages and denies the pursuit of textual and emotional closure: 'The catharsis readers might think they are experiencing will resolve nothing for them' (Thomson: 56). Through this parthenogenesis the texts and the characters who live through them are sentient subjects birthed by Andrews, with which she sustained a psychic and visceral connection. Andrews believed she had powers of ESP and clairvoyance (she claimed to have dreamt her father’s death two weeks before it happened (Winter: 176)), and evoking the maternal metaphor of Spiritualism exclaimed ‘I have my own philosophy, my own belief in reincarnation, sustained by my psychic experiences’, and that ‘in writing of my characters, I assumed their bodies, and their minds, and literally, I became what they were’ (in Frances Locher: 15-16). Having birthed these characters she lived through them - ‘I suffer when [they] suffer, I lose weight when they do’ - and claimed to have lost sixteen pounds while writing *Flowers* (in Winter: 172).

The Dollanganger children are embodied by the mother-author; taken from their paternal home in Gladstone, Pennsylvania they are spirited away to Foxworth Hall in Charlottesville, Virginia, the state of Andrews’ birth. Virginia is the motherland where Andrews’ characters are narcissistic extensions of herself, confirmed by her writing process during which she would mount a mirror behind her typewriter ‘so that she could watch herself as she composed in order to “project better”’ (Huntley: 11); Cathy is as much a reflection of Andrews, her authorial mother, as she is Corrine, her textual one. Created by her maternal gaze, Andrews (re)lives traumatic experiences through these children, who in turn are offered up to an adolescent audience. Luna explains that ‘the [child] is indeed part of the mother's self/narcissism’ (14), and as such the characters are both conceived and controlled by Andrews' maternal gaze, as galvanised by its own narcissistic reflection.
While *Flowers* perverts the perceived female Gothic tradition through the maternalisiation of the tyrant narrative, the text’s promotion of incest through a veneer of heteronormative propriety and prohibition nonetheless exploits the genre as ‘a coded system’ through which female authors ‘covertly communicated to other women – their largely female audience – their ambivalent rejection of and outward complicity with the dominant sexual ideologies of their culture’ (Diane Hoeveler: 3). Anna Jackson et al. note that ‘the children in many contemporary Gothic novels court their dark side, and own it as an aspect of the self’ (8), and Huntley remarks how ‘that readers have purchased millions of copies of Andrews’ novels seems to suggest that something in those books fulfils a need that has not been addressed by any other popular writers of Gothic fiction’ (8). The licentious subject matter of Andrews’ bestsellers scandalised parents, schools and libraries, and *Flowers* was banned from circulation by various American school boards during the 1980s and 1990s due to ‘the filthiness of the material’ (Robert Doyle: 145-6). Despite her enduring popularity Andrews’ novels have never been well-received by reviewers or the critical establishment; on its publication Carolyn Banks, writing in the *Washington Post Book World*, denounced *Flowers* as ‘the worst book I have ever read’, with ‘unbelievable’ plot and ‘indigestible’ dialogue, while other critics condemned the ‘execrable’ writing in *My Sweet Audrina* (1982) (Banks and Eden Ross Lipson, in Huntley: 8).

But while wary adults found Andrews’ sympathetic incest narratives unpalatable, her female demographic consumed them voraciously. Kristiana Gregory in *The London Times* articulated this disconnect between reader and critic responses when she complained about the novels, that ‘it’s hard to figure out why everyone acts so creepy’ (ibid.), suggesting that Andrews’ writing resists a dispassionate critical approach which fails to invest in the illicit
emotion her readers so readily devour. The failure of scholarship to engage with Andrews’ work is evidenced by a marked absence of academic analysis, despite the glut of her/Neiderman’s output, with only Huntley’s monograph *Virginia Andrews: A Critical Companion* (1996), a chapter in Cosette Kies’ analysis of young adult horror fiction, where she describes the incest as a ‘fascinating, horrific theme’ (33), and various brief mentions of Andrews in collections on popular fiction and horror providing the exception. This reluctance is most apparent in W. Bernard Lukenbill’s ‘Incestuous Sexual Abuse Themes in Contemporary Novels for Adolescence: A Cultural Study’ (1999), which fails to mention, let alone analyse, *Flowers in the Attic* - perhaps the novel failed Lukenbill’s criterion of ‘literary merit’ (154).

As Angela Rice notes, Andrews writes against the understanding generally accepted by (most) societies that the type of inbreeding depicted in *Flowers* can lead to genetic defects and produced physically or mentally impaired children. Instead, she valorises the children’s beauty precisely as a product of incest, and ‘it is made clear that incest produces passionate romance and genetically superior offspring’ (39); ‘blond, flaxen-haired, with fair complexions’, the family are nicknamed the Dresden dolls, ‘fancy porcelain people’ (5, 6), whose preternatural beauty is made possible through their parents’ incest. Even their disgusted grandmother concedes ‘just as you said, Corrine. Your children are beautiful’ (31).

Despite Chris’ initiatory rape of Cathy, Andrews’ treatment of sibling incest exploits the cultural concessions Meiselman signals towards regarding brother-sister sexual relationships which are seen circumstantially as ‘an understandable, completely natural consequence of a lack of parental guidance’ which ‘less often carries the additional stigma of “child molestation” and can be seen as akin to the heterosexual experimentation in which children
and adolescents engage’ (269). Similarly, ‘sisters are more likely than daughters to experience conscious sexual pleasure in the incestuous act’ (271), and the passion which characterises Cathy and Chris’ relationship, as well as their parents’, reflects this. Andrews seems to suggest that a sense of ‘completeness’, both emotional and sexual, can only be achieved through this kind of sexual union (Rice: 39), and it is precisely the author’s non-judgemental depiction of sibling incest and its attendant drives and desires which the texts’ maternal and adolescent readership take pleasure in, and which critics and educational authorities have condemned.

Through Cathy Andrews writes drives and desires which stimulate both herself and the reader, a stimulation which is prolonged through the serial narrative form her novels take. Discussing the appeal of soap operas for women, Kinder observes how the narrative structure of serialisation mimics the pattern of female sexuality, specifically the movement of the female body towards orgasm. ‘Open-ended, slow paced, and multi-climaxed’, modern modes of serialisation have evolved from eighteenth-century epistolary novels of sensibility, particularly Richardson’s Clarissa and Pamela, which, like Flowers, ‘focus on heroines whose exceptional virtue and strength of personality enable them to break social convention’ and which, through the episodic structure of ‘highly-detailed’ ‘slow-paced’ letters ‘which also have multiple climaxes’ captures the fluidity of the heroine’s fears and feelings for the reader (51-52). Sophia Lee’s The Recess (1783) and Radcliffe’s Gothics it inspired were characterised by this rhythm of slow-paced suspense and climax which Jane Austen parodied in Northanger Abbey (1818) and it is also the effect of the original serialised format of ‘Carmilla’, The Turn of the Screw and Great Expectations (first published in All the Year Round from December 1860 to August 1861), and the instalments of the Dollanganger saga function in
the same way, as readers are teased by the open-ended potential of the novels and the possibility of more incest in future instalments. This echoes the sexual catharsis of the Radcliffean Gothic plot in which the heroine, reader and writer experience undulations of suspense, fear and relief as the heroine is pursued by, or indeed pursues, a sexual aggressor (Mary Fawcett, Howells 1978: Ch.1).

Andrews recognised this, explaining ‘I like the build-up and suspense’ (in Winter: 173), and in her writing this Gothic orgasm is intensified by the interruptions and suspensions which prolong serialised narratives. Lidia Curti similarly characterises the ‘melodramatic mode’ of soap operas as ‘filled with invention rather than information, fantasy rather than facts, tales rather than events. Its form is one of suspension, both because it is serial and because it moves from one interrogation to another, one enigma to another’ (55). Again, the emphasis is placed on exploration of sexuality through the ambiguities of ‘fantasies’ and ‘tales’, and Flowers, described enigmatically by Andrews as ‘not quite fiction’, becomes this space in which the question of authenticity does not produce anxiety, as with traditional master narratives which demand unequivocal truth, but the quiver of pleasure attendant to uncertainty.

Serialisation as ‘a female aesthetic mode [...] overflowing its own confines’ (ibid.) echoes the theoretical notion of écriture féminine where the language and structure of a text inscribe the ‘rhythms and articulations of the mother’s body’ to create a feminine libidinal economy which provides the reader with ‘a link to the pre-Symbolic union between self and m/others’ (Susan Sellers: xxix). Yet, as Deborah Rogers rightly reminds us about these feminine forms in her study of matrophobic Gothic, ‘the fear of becoming a mother as well as fear of identification with and separation from the maternal body and the motherline’
which Cathy embodies, ‘we must be wary of [...] celebrating them just because they are female genres – especially when they might be potentially harmful’ (1, 122). Andrews’ serialised narratives are a treacherous narrative continuum of maternally-produced incest which engulfs her readers who desire to read what she writes, while resisting the condemnation of academic scrutiny - for critics her incest is not only in bad taste, it is also badly written.

*Flowers* as Andrews’ infinite textual/sexual maternal body opens up and consumes not only its characters but readers who attest to its page-turning quality, as well as its creator, if her claim of weight-loss is to be believed. The matrilineal serial concludes with a prequel which documents the grandmother’s adolescence, a movement back inwards which splits the temporal structure and logic of the patriarchal master narrative, and like ‘Carmilla’ and *The Turn of the Screw* performs Derrida’s concept of invagination, creating ‘an internal pocket larger than the whole’ (59) wherein ‘there is only content without edge – without boundary or frame’ which exposes conventional narrative structures, where ‘there is only edge without content’, as hollow (70). This invaginated narrative space which is always pursuing itself inward ‘in an unarrestable, inerrable and insatiably occurring manner’, is ‘terrible for those who, in the name of the law, require that order reign in the account’ (ibid.), and is the pre-Oedipal narrative space in which the pursuit of pleasure back inside the mother’s body proves all-consuming for the avid reader. While feminist scholarship may be loath to admit it, Andrews can be classed as one of the twentieth-century women writers Rachel DuPlessis identifies who ‘undertake a reassessment of the processes of gendering by inverting narrative strategies, especially involving sequence [...] that neutralise, minimise or transcend any oversimplified Oedipal drama’ (37).
The texts’ movement of opening up and abjecting onto and capturing the reader occurs through the frame narrative of Flowers, a Prologue in which Cathy establishes her authority which she defines as violent and abject - ‘every word I put down, I put down with tears, and bitter blood, and sour gall’ (3) – and which is answered with a short Epilogue where she hoodwinks the reader into thinking the story has ended, expressing ‘relief’ at finishing writing, before re-opening the narrative with the concluding sentence which establishes the serial ‘but how we managed to survive – that’s another story’ (346); as Cixous remarks, ‘we are already in the jaws of the book’ (1997: 1). As the maternal gaze is the residue of the womb’s desire for the child, so does the narrative of this gaze take the shape of the body which seeks to absorb the child. As Christine Wilkie-Stibbs writes, a text has the capacity to gaze at the reader and mark them through the act of reading:

The gaze, like the act of reading itself, is discursive [...] in that it involves not only looking, but being looked at and, further, looking at oneself being looked at [...] the gaze effectively textualises the subject and is present in every act of seeing. So the gazing subject is simultaneously both subject and object, at once voyeur and exhibitionist seeking confirmation of its own imagined fantasies. (18)

The text interweaves itself through the reader’s own psychic text, ‘the subject’s moi’, making the acts of reading and writing ‘projections of both the text’s and the subject’s ego, upon which each is mutually reliant for the exchange of the recognition and value it requires’ (17). Text and reader engage in a reciprocal act of devouring, as Andrews exploits what Freud
describes as the ‘depravity of the childish heart’ (1909: 240), latching onto innate incest fantasies which are not sublimated but encouraged through her romanticisation of incest.

The maternal gaze of the text infects the reader, as Andrews, her characters and her readers share a consciousness which exists beyond the paternal order. The text inscribes its reader’s desires, and here there is absolute reciprocity between the texts’ desire to consume and the readers’ desire to be consumed by what Kristeva defines as ‘the sublime point at which the abject collapses in a burst of beauty that overwhelms us’ (1982: 210). Consequently, both the Gothic and serialisation are constantly responding to and reproducing female desire. The saga format of Andrews’ incest narratives, in which the original act occurs in the first novel and then various reactionary episodes and revelations are teased out gradually through subsequent instalments echoes the process of trauma, described by Cathy Caruth as ‘an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena’ (11), and Cathy’s incest narrative as a text which documents personal trauma for mass consumption echoes the testimonies of incest survivors, who use narrative as a therapeutic process.

As Kalí Tal explains, ‘these narratives are dedicated to transforming a personal journal into public record’, and the testimony process is a ‘ritual with dual purposes’, as ‘when a survivor testifies, she both purges herself of an internal “evil”, and bears witness to a social and political justice’ (200). Similarly, Suzette Henke, paraphrasing Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman, argues that through testimony ‘a surrogate transferential process can take place through the scene of writing that allows its author to envisage a sympathetic audience and imagine a public validation of his or her life testimony’ (xii). Certainly, Cathy (and
Andrews) wants her story to be accepted by its readers; however, the crucial difference between Cathy’s incest narrative and factual incest testimonials is that it demands witness and sympathy from the reader for the (fictional) crime and the perpetrator, as well as the victim. Cathy breaks her silence, but it is to confess her love for Chris and condemn the mother's abuse which pushed them together, not the patriarchal 'systematic violence against women' which feminist readings of trauma and incest narratives have homed in on (Laurie Vickroy: 6).

Within the context of Andrews’ previous output ‘I Slept With my Uncle on my Wedding Night’, *Flowers* is as much a confessional novel as it is a survivor testimonial, and Cathy and Chris’ sibling incest is a fairytale in which Andrews’ readers desire to participate. Andrews signalled towards the ambivalent form of her novel in her pitch letter, (cannily) couching the tale as fictionalised, true, then archetypal Gothic horror: ‘This is a fictionalised version of a true story. Real children who struggled to survive under almost unendurable circumstances. Basically a horror story’ (‘Based on a True Story’: online). In mimicking elements of these different fictional and autobiographical genres, Andrews created a hybrid text, the ambiguity of which continues to titillate and captivate a huge readership. Thus, Andrews writes against the intellectual co-opting of incest as a tool of patriarchal oppression and exploits the unimpeachable position of the victim writing her trauma, to present a narrative which romanticises consensual incest, precipitated by maternal tyranny.
I Couldn’t Put It Down: Misery Loves Company

Fictionalising the incest survival memoir the Dollanganger saga resembles misery literature, a genre which has become increasingly popular in the past decade with women readers, in particular mothers, where the (usually female) author writes about their (usually sexually) abusive childhood. Misery literature, defined more coyly as inspirational memoirs by the leading publisher HarperElement, is explicitly aimed at maternal readers and the books’ formulaic pastel covers – a wide-eyed, beautiful child accompanied by an emotive title written in a feminine cursive font – offer up an accompanying image of corrupted innocence on which to meditate. While such narratives are branded inspirational triumphs over abuse I see these texts as profoundly Gothic, weaving conventions of the genre into the autobiography including incest, incarceration, torture and sadistic abuse at the hands of a tyrannical parent.

As with misery literature, the motives for reading Andrews’ incest need questioning; why would a mother want to read about children being sexually abused? Within the Gothic apparatus of sublimation and catharsis where the heroine embodies ‘feminine fantasies and neuroses’ (Howells 1978: 9), reading these narratives allows the maternal reader to simultaneously condemn the abuse and vicariously participate in it. This has the effect of galvanising her own maternal instinct while sanctioning incest and sexual abuse, and the performance of repulsion readers make towards these texts echoes reader/audience responses to Victorian melodrama, where the flawed victim-heroine, like Estella, must endure her tragedy to attain virtue and generate our sympathetic responses, our psychic pleasure.

Martha Vicinus writes that domestic melodrama which centres on the (pre)Oedipal
or generational plot is ‘the most important type of Victorian melodrama’ as ‘it is here that we see primal fears clothed in everyday dress’ (128), and soap operas, talk shows, misery literature and other domestic serialisations – including the Dollanganger Saga - are our modern-day melodramas, to which we have been conditioned to respond accordingly by the Victorian melodramatic heritage with outrage, sympathy and, ultimately, enjoyment. Consequently, in passing these books onto friends and their own children mothers encourage others to bear witness to the sexual abuse and trauma of children, transforming it into a melodrama - a performance, a spectacle. Considering Kinder’s idea of soap opera serialisation as an apparatus for prolonging the female audience’s sexual pleasure, it is troubling that several examples of misery literature and incest memoir are published in instalments. Maguire’s Don’t Tell Mummy, which recounts how she was sexually abused by her father was followed a year later by When Daddy Came Home (2007), in which she relives the trauma when he is released from prison. Dave Peltzer’s account of maternal sadism in A Child Called It (1995), the original and most notorious example of misery literature, was also prolonged through sequels, the authenticity of which has been called into question by Peltzer’s siblings as well as the media. David Plotz brands Pelzer a ‘professional victim’ (‘Dave Pelzer: The Child Abuse Entrepreneur’: Online), identifying the lucrative business of child abuse which echoes Kincaid’s contention that such narratives are so popular because they accord readers with a ‘hard-core righteous prurience’:

Through these stories of what monsters are doing to children, we find ourselves forced (permitted) to speak of just what it is they are doing; we take a good, long look at what they are doing. We denounce it all loudly but never have done with it,
and are back denouncing it the next day, not ignoring the
details. We reject this monstrous activity with such automatic
indignation that the indignation comes to seem almost like
pleasure. (2000: 7)

Such readers’ responses activate and validate Chris and Cathy’s incest as provoked by their
mother’s abuse, and Andrews commented with reference to interviewers and reporters that
‘they see me as an abused child who has really suffered. They feel sorry for me that I have
gone through this awful abuse and was then locked away. A lot of them say, “Don’t be
ashamed that you are in love with your brother”. All of these kind of things’ (in Winter: 165).

Andrews also subverts the cathartic function of the trauma narrative as she does not
salve the trauma and make it benign by bringing it to an end, instead continuing the effect
of the maternal abuse and the incest it provoked through the saga’s serialisation. The novels
as imposter autofictive survivor testimonies also exploit the notion of a position of
survivorship as theorised in trauma studies, which allows the victim to define a subjectivity
and agency based on the telling of their trauma which becomes a ‘potential site of feminist
political intervention in heteropatriarchy’ (Rosaria Champagne: 1). Cathy survives her incest
trauma only to consent to and participate in it, to enjoying it while continuing to use her
victim-status of survivor in order to tell her story, and to perpetuate the incest she
(re-)presents. Challenging Massé’s reading of the used and abused Gothic maternal
masochist, Cathy is the archetypal manipulative masochist-victim of melodrama as Ellen
Rosenman understands it, where ‘masochism is a negotiating tool in which pain is the price
of a chosen desire that violates a moral or ideological norm’, as she ‘pursues a forbidden
pleasure or agency but arranges to suffer for it, and therefore maintains moral credibility’ (25).

For Rosenman the masochistic victim position is extremely powerful because it simultaneously acts as ‘a ruse, a cover for pleasure or power’ and resists condemnation, as the victim has already suffered (ibid.). As readers we would be sadistic if we were to punish Cathy anymore for the actions for which she is not responsible, and this is where our melodramatic response is skewed. While we should at least question her actions, her victim-status at the hands of the maternal tyrant blinds us. Furthermore, as I discuss in Chapter Six, some readers unashamedly enjoy Cathy’s incest, not an enjoyment produced by catharsis but an active desire to participate in her narrative; as Vicinus notes, ‘our sympathies have shifted openly’ (141). Consequently, for Andrews, incest is not a means of sexual violence against women but a mode of female desire encouraged by the maternal space. Furthermore, as a trauma narrative which evidences maternal tyranny Flowers challenges the feminist critical given that the traumas which form the basis of such fictional testimonials are the result of patriarchal violence, while the serialisation of these lurid narratives emphatically undoes the feminist understanding of the ‘unspeakable’ nature of the ‘horror of incest’ which results in a ‘silencing’ of victims (Deborah Horvitz: 14, 15).

As the mother of her texts Andrews writes the maternal space as one which encourages the exploration of her readership’s repressed desires, and this sense of maternal influence, approval and reproduction is echoed by the reading practices of her adolescent demographic. As Meredith Rogers Cherland shows in her ethnographic study of the reproduction of gendered reading, children ‘learn’ gender and heterosexuality through the act of reading fiction, through both the gender codes represented in the text and the
examples set by their parents: ‘Girls learned gender through reading to emulate their mothers [....] Marcia began to read V.C. Andrews novels because her mother was reading them, and because they were distinctly different from what she had been reading, attractively adult, and, in that way, a challenge’; Marcia says “I sort of admire my mother because she reads such good books” (Cherland: 94, see also Valerie Walkerdine). Yet, while Flowers promotes femininity through the characterisation of beautiful Cathy the princess ballerina and her mother, its representation of an ostensibly heterosexual desire so potent that it leads to incest is problematic. More recently, one reader recommending the book online comments how ‘my mum had gone on and on about Flowers in the Attic, as she had read it when she was younger. Finally she convinced me to read it and I’m so glad I did, I have now convinced my friends to read it and they love it too’ (‘A Spectacular Read!’: online); again the mother is actively encouraging her child, who has to be convinced, to participate in the consumption and circulation of incest and abuse literature.

While much feminist scholarship has identified the lure of the excesses of visual melodramas for the female spectator, Laura Hinton understands their effect as a specifically maternal visual response bound up in excesses of female vision and female sympathy which fuse together mothers, daughters, characters and audience:

The female image drives the excess of vision, which is also an excess [...] of sympathy. The excesses of female physicality compete only with the excesses of ‘natural’ female sentiment, especially in the roles of mother and daughter. These roles symbiotically bind women, as characters as well as spectators, in mutual identification and dependency. (189)
As such the child’s need for the maternal gaze is confirmed through the drama of incest. If, then, incest calls back to the pre-Oedipal mother’s body, maternal recommendation of the novel and the sympathy it produces in its readers serve to bind the mother and daughter in a shared experience of reading incest trauma which creates a Gothic experience of excess, the sublime point of collapse of which Kristeva speaks. While Cherland mentions a couple of girls whose mothers ‘had labelled the book “sick” and had forbidden them to read it’ (94), this censorship is the exception to the rule. As Andrews as the mother of her texts influences her readers, so too do they influence their own daughters.

This conforms to Freud’s understanding of the origin of perversion set out in ‘A Child is Being Beaten’ (1919a), where he discusses how patients confessed to the childhood fantasy of watching a child being beaten by an adult, an imaginary scenario which climaxes as ‘almost invariably a masturbatory satisfaction’ (179). Freud presents an analysis of four female and two male patients, which suggests that female fantasies of not simply sadism but also sadism against children are more common than the psychoanalytic aetiology of gendered sadomasochism suggests. Three phases of the beating fantasy are identified in girls, which begins with enjoying watching another child, not herself, being beaten by an adult later identified ‘unambiguously as the girl’s father’ (185). This voyeuristic display of desire is denied its sadism by Freud, who states ‘one cannot neglect the fact that the child producing the fantasy is never doing the beating herself’ (ibid.). In the second phase the child being beaten is identified as the girl producing the fantasy after all, and so the fantasy itself becomes a masochistic one; despite being brazenly ‘a construction of analysis’ (ibid.), Freud manipulates these interpretations to valorise his Oedipal model as ‘the actual nucleus of neuroses’ (193) and inevitably attributes this fantasy to an Oedipal wishful-thinking where
the beating represents the girl's guilt over her desire for her father (189). Like the first, in the third phase the child being beaten is not the girl-subject and the identity of the aggressor is ambiguous, but Freud concentrates on the second phase because of its Oedipal implications, its 'masochistic nature' and the 'libidinal charge and the sense of guilt' it carries (195-6).

While Freud marginalises the sadistic aspect of his female subjects' fantasies it is clearly present, and what is interesting is how the fantasy is nourished throughout the child's psychosexual development. He states that beating fantasies ‘were entertained very early in life’, ‘reinforced and noticeably modified’ by seeing fellow pupils being beaten at school, and most crucially, when ‘in the higher forms at school the children were no longer beaten, the influence of such occasions was replaced and more than replaced by the effects of reading, of which the importance was soon to be felt’ (179, 180). The cases shared the same fictional influences, as ‘it was almost always the same books whose contents gave a new stimulus to the beating-fantasies: those accessible to young people, such as what was known as the Bibliothe’que rose, Uncle Tom’s Cabin etc.’ (180). Thus, the violence of popular mass-market fiction fuelled the young readers’ fantasies of observing sadism, and ‘the child [begins] to compete with these works of fiction by producing [their] own fantasies and by constructing a wealth of situations and institutions, in which children were beaten’ (ibid.).

Flowers functions in the same way; the depiction of maternal sadism and sibling incest provides the opportunity for melodramatic sympathy while it vicariously fulfils the readers’ subconscious desire to participate in such perverse behaviours, and this is further demonstrated by the popularity and repetition of incest confessional narratives on talk shows, which Mark Edmundson describes as ‘one of the major repositories of [modern] Gothic’, as ‘onto Oprah’s stage troop numberless unfortunates, victims and villains’ (xiv). A
Chapter Five – Incest and the pre-Oedipal Maternal Tangle

A spectrum of deviant and Gothic behaviours are broadcast into the home and infiltrate the maternal domestic space, with the primary talk show demographic being women aged 18-49, in particular single mothers and teenage girls (Christine Quail et al.: 38, xii), the same women who devour Andrews’ sympathetic narration of incest.

Like reading Flowers and incest memoirs, women watch talk shows to participate vicariously in the incest, and mothers gratify their maternal gaze by presiding over narratives of trauma which allow them to outwardly assert their condemnation and sympathy. Programmes dealing with incest excite the maternal gaze by periodically repeating the trauma, refusing to put incest to bed and instead commodifying the abuse through victim testimonials for the maternal audience to consume. The talk show serialises and specularises the incest memoir, with incest as the Gothic unspeakable reinvented and reintroduced into the domestic space as something everyone is encouraged to discuss and confess; no longer a shameful taboo, incest disrupts the paternal moral order as what was once repressed becomes part of the cultural consciousness. Survivor discourse is no longer a panacea but a proliferator, a perpetrator, as ‘the very act of speaking out has become performance and spectacle’ (Linda Alcoff and Laura Gray: 275). Culturally conditioned to respond to melodrama and the catharsis, sympathy and moral indignation it produces in its spectators, maternal audiences engage in a reciprocal dynamic with publishers and producers of trauma, which perpetuates a demand for these kinds of misery narratives.

Responding to this demand, self-help guru Oprah Winfrey’s eponymous talk show consistently exposes private incest traumas and specularises them into public discourse. This endless (uncanny) repetition of abuse trauma mutates into a kind of ‘super-realism’ which Corinne Squire describes as ‘realism torn out of shape by excesses of emotion or
empiricism’ that tips over into the sublime and overwhelms the viewer ‘so that the show forgoes to provide information and simply displays an extreme effect’ (75-76, see also Eva Illouz, Elspeth Probyn). This melodramatic effect of excess provides the maternal ‘perverse gaze of sympathy’ as Hinton terms it with a continual narrative loop of child sexual abuse on which to meditate, and while Winfrey is a proxy for incest narratives, she remains unimpeachable as, like Cathy who perpetuates the incest narrative in *Flowers*, she is herself a victim of childhood incest. The Gothic domestic space becomes one in which the discussion and contemplation of incest is not prohibited but encouraged, and the adolescent viewer/reader is exposed to incest through these maternal channels. As Hinton writes about talk shows, while ‘the gaze that controls women might be gendered male’ this gaze is ‘activated by actual females, though a relay point of female spectators on and off the show who encourage spectators to embrace their own sadistic, fetishistic images’ (208). This Gothicising of technology is explored in my conclusion, where I examine how the acts of incest which excite the maternal gaze are reproduced through the eidetic fantasising of fan fiction, a hypertextual genre which modernises the novel form and exploits the matrixial web of the internet to weave new incest narratives which catch adolescent readers.

*Flowers in the Attic* and its offshoots deserve much of the criticism waged against them. Andrews’ sickly-sweet narration, in contrast to the sordid incest induced by maternal abuse it endorses, is hard to digest. Yet these novels continue to be insatiably consumed by teenage girls and their mothers who recommend them. Andrews wrote novels which exposed and encouraged pre/Oedipal drives and desires; themes of sexual perversion, incest, rape and abuse stoke the imagination of her female adolescent demographic who sympathise with and, furthermore, desire Cathy’s situation. Like *Great Expectations*, the
texts are conventional in their insistence of heteronormativity yet simultaneously deeply subversive precisely because this insistence folds in on itself under its own weight and leads to incest, and Andrews' surface Oedipal incest narrative is further complicated by the pre-Oedipal womb of the attic in which it is played out. Incest is naturalised through the idea of a genetic predisposition and the mise-en-scène of the Gothic womb-space; within the generic conventions the act is fiercely forbidden and so inevitably desired and performed. Andrews exposes incest as a fundamental human drive, 'a natural event in the story that came out [...] after all there's incest in the Bible!' (in Garrett and McCue: 22), and in her readers a desire to participate in that drive; that the noun 'incest' never occurs in Flowers implies that the act is an originary, pre-Symbolic function which takes place before linguistic signification. Andrews' repetition of the incest plot suggests that a prohibition against this form of sexuality is needed precisely because it is such a powerful, originary desire, and one which relates back to the maternal spaces of body and house.

Douglas argues that family horror novels pay tribute to the abused children they portray through 'hypothesising and dramatising their view of reality, and how it feels to exist within its range' (330), and this is the effect of Cathy's intimate first-person narration. Andrews invokes the claustrophobic incestuous maternal space of her characters’ experience through this narrative mode and makes it desirable and permissible, subverting the prohibition against incest in paternal tyrant Gothic. As well as subverting the sadomasochistic dynamic of the Gothic novel, Andrews manipulates the function of culturally-reproduced fairytale archetypes which proscribe incest, as Cathy’s Prince Charming fantasies are fulfilled by her own brother. While Luna offers a defence against the maternal gaze when she suggests that ‘it is incorrect to believe that the child will never
strike back’ (101), Cathy can never succeed in this rebellion, as the Sadeian revenge she enacts against her mother and grandmother (including a whipping in Petals) can only ever be a violence against herself as the mirror of her mother. As Estella mimics Miss Havisham’s anti-patriarchal behaviour, so does Cathy desire to perform Corrine’s abuse in Petals on the Wind through her re-staging of the attic. Thought to be a safe haven, the maternal domestic is exposed as a lethal space, and this is a variation of the haunted house theme which particularly troubles American Gothics (see Dale Bailey), with Gilman’s ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’, Shirley Jackson’s novels The Haunting of Hill House (1959) and We Have Always Lived in the Castle (1962), the films Whatever Happened to Baby Jane? (inspired heavily by Miss Havisham (1962)), and more recently The Blair Witch Project (1999), echoing Andrews’ architectural maternal gaze of the attic. As Creed aptly surmised, ‘the body/house is literally the body of horror, the place of the uncanny where desire is always marked by the shadowy presence of the mother’ (1993: 55).

The suburban house is our modern-day Gothic castle-as-maternal-body, and trapped inside this body and her own, Andrews rewrote the Gothic archetype of prohibited incest, transforming it from an anxiety about this body into a desire for it, and for the gaze it issues.
Chapter Six

(Never)ending the Story: The Maternal Gaze and the Matrixial Gothic Abyss

This thesis read the Gothic through the lens of the maternal gaze to offer new possibilities for both the genre’s critical direction and gaze theory. While there is a strong heritage of writing about mothers in the female Gothic, seeing the Gothic mother as a tyrant who exerts her control over the domestic space through incarceration and surveillance via her infanticidal gaze challenges the archetype of the paternal tyrant and offers the mother a more active position than previous spectral or victim readings allowed her. Understanding her tyranny as executed through a maternal gaze issued from the womb also redresses the imbalance of gaze theory which privileges the phallus, where the male gaze is perceived as the active, fetishising one, and the female as passive and lacking, or mediated by that of the male.

The feminist focus concentrated on the male gaze accords women a universal victim position which ultimately maintains the inequality of the gender binaries that sustain patriarchy. Consequently, while a tyrannical and infanticidal gaze is by no means a positive attribute (evading detection by feminist scholarship precisely because it is not), it is nonetheless an extant one which I have made to mothers in the Gothic, because it offers an equal footing with its paternal counterpart. Through my analysis of Gothic productions I have shown how the maternal gaze Gothicises the domestic space in its search for the child. From the folkloric through the socio-medical to the technological, the maternal gaze has historically exploited symbols, trends, anxieties and discourses to erupt into novels, films,
art and photography, using image, text and technology to mobilise itself and capture the child.

**Looking Back**

In Part One ‘The Gothic Heritage of the Maternal Gaze’ I excavated the presence of the maternal gaze in traditional male-authored Gothic novels. Chapter One showed how Le Fanu's and Stoker's texts of the Victorian Gothic revival draw on archaic folkloric and socio-medical gynaecological discourses to articulate the maternal gaze through an intertextual symbolic economy of cats and vampires and bites and birthmarks, maternal impressions seared onto the skin of the child as a mark of the womb’s ownership, and I showed how existing symbols of the maternal body like the *vagina dentata* are a conduit for the maternal gaze issued from the womb. I also discussed how the narrative presence of the maternal gaze perverts the traditional Gothic structure of closure and the re-establishment of order, which led to my analysis of James’ *The Turn of the Screw* and its filmic adaptations in Chapter Two. Here I argued that the invaginated frame narratives allowed the governess', Laura's and Grace's hysterical visions to invade and infect the different texts beyond their endings, engaging in an intertextual dialogue in which these mothers weave a web of deceit that traps both characters and readers into believing their masquerade of self-sacrificing maternal benevolence. I argued that the infanticidal maternal gaze in these texts rejects Freud's Oedipal model of hysteria, instead relocating its cause back to the womb which laments for the child it no longer holds, and I showed how these mothers exploited the diagnostics of hysteria to trap the reader/viewer in the supernatural vs. hysterical debate in order to distract us from their infanticide.
Part Two ‘The Maternal Gaze’s Gothic Practices’ continued with the tensions between the supernatural and the psychological, and Chapter Three discussed how the practices of Spiritualism and psychic spirit photography were used by the maternal gaze to Gothicise the domestic space through the reproduction and dissemination of images of the dead child. I showed that the maternal gaze favoured different modes of Spiritualist output to ectoplasmic photography, which fetishised the maternal parthenogenetic body of the medium for the photographic male gaze. Instead, the act of imprinting through the maternal body, photographically onto the plate and textually onto the page, enabled female Spiritualists like Marryat, Deane and Houghton to manifest the image of the dead child while resisting the scopophilic male gaze.

I showed that the maternal gaze captures the dead child on the photographic plate (and in the case of Marryat on the blank page) for mourning mothers to meditate on, and in Chapter Four I reframed the work of Julia Margaret Cameron to show how her Marian photography, in which child sitters ‘play dead’, is influenced by the morbid aesthetics of memorial portraiture and spirit photography and reveals the infanticidal fantasies of the maternal gaze. Cameron’s Marys evoke medieval matrilineal holy kinships and trinities as Cameron-as-Anne instructed Mary-as-Mary in the gaze, and I examined how these compositions exposed the vengeful potential of the Virgin Mary’s maternal gaze, which has troubled the Catholic collective consciousness. Continuing with the notion of maternal imprinting, I discussed how Cameron’s impregnation of the plate with her hairs, fingerprints and scratches is an act of abuse against the image of the ‘dead’ child, but one which remained undetected beneath the veil of holy maternal benevolence her Marian compositions created.
Born in the Victorian parlour, these infanticidal photographs Gothicised technology and the domestic, and in Part Three ‘The Maternal Gaze and the Gothic Domestic’ I returned to the home and the novel to discuss how the house is an inherently Gothic space with the maternal gaze at its core. In Chapter Five I discussed the incest narratives of Dickens and Andrews to contend that while paternal incest is understood to be the Gothic convention, these texts intertextually/intercestually draw on a precedent of maternally-induced sibling incest in the genre which reveals a desire for attention from the maternal gaze. Paying attention to the critically-neglected Dollanganger saga, I examined how the maternal space of the attic created an arena for sexuality ruinous to the paternal order, as the children engage in incest which calls back to mother who has neglected them. Discussing how Cathy perpetuates her incest narrative through the serialised structure of the novels, I looked at the phenomenon of misery literature and argued that mothers voraciously consume narratives of child abuse and incest as it allows them to feed their masquerade of maternal sympathy while vicariously participating in these behaviours which create a longing for the mother in the child.

Reading and circulating incest memoirs gratifies the maternal gaze with the opportunity to eidetically consume the child’s abused body, and in this chapter I conclude my thesis with an examination of how in recent decades, echoing its earlier commandeering of technology through memorial and spirit photography, the maternal gaze has hijacked new media and the infinite anonymity the internet provides, to hypertextually weave a narrative web of child sexual abuse and trauma, which captures the child and fixes it as an image in a state of pain, distress and at times death, for mothers to meditate on.
Weaving the Web: The Maternal Gaze and 21st-Century Media

To conclude my thesis I show how the internet forum allows the maternal gaze to perpetuate narratives of childhood trauma and abuse on which to meditate. There are two areas I will explore: I return to *Flowers in the Attic* and examine hypertextual fan fiction to show how fans have rewritten the text to recreate the sadistic and incestuous content, eidetic images which excite the maternal gaze, and I then discuss the intriguing case of Rebeccah Beushausen, who faked the existence of her terminally ill foetus on an internet blog, to show how new media and technology facilitates the maternal desire for the image of the suffering, abused and dying child.

While Jason Whittaker and Catherine Spooner both show how the internet encourages Gothic productions and subcultures, it is also an innately Gothic narrative structure, a framework of the sublime maternal abyss which threatens to consume its users, a ‘cyberspatial matrix [...] which presents the specular subject with complete imaginative plenitude’ (Botting 2008: 34). As Sadie Plant writes, ‘there is more to cyberspace than meets the male gaze’ (170), and the internet operates as a sublime visual economy which exists beyond the Symbolic. Gothic in both content and form, the web framework of the internet echoes Ettinger’s matrixial womb, which restores the matrix structure ‘to its ancient feminine/maternal source – as the word means uterus, womb (Latin)’ which issues an archaic ‘non-Oedipal beyond-the-phallus’ maternal gaze (1995: 22, 9), while the image of the world wide web also invokes the maternal oral tradition of weaving narratives and stories, and Plant (180), Claudia Springer (59) and Anneke Smelik (142) all discuss how the technology of the cyberspatial matrix, simultaneously real and virtual, etymologically calls back to the womb.
The notion of a maternal web of semiotic communication evokes the internet’s origins of the telephone cord, which Chion connects to ‘the vocal connection, the umbilical cord’, and is part of the ‘umbilical web’ where the telephone is used to call back to the maternal body (62, 61), while Liesbet van Zoonen shows how the telephone is embedded in the cultural history of female stories as a domestic tool of (excessive) communication (7), one which was initially controlled by female operators, through the manual medium of their body (Galvan). So while cyberfeminists like Plant define the internet as a limitless space which encourages subjectivities not beholden to gender, telecommunications technology remains rooted to the maternal metaphor through which this limitlessness becomes the Gothic maternal abyss, as the umbilical cord of the telephone leads back to the womb. As Plant points out, the technology of the internet as an interface between humans and machines has decidedly maternal Gothic origins, as Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein (1818) ‘a woman’s mythmaking on the subject of birth’ (Moers: 93), produced ‘the first post-human life form’ (Plant: 176), and expressed anxieties about the destructive potential of both technology and the (mother’s) body.

Van Zoonen comments on how using the internet and ‘the immersion of its user in its textual, visual and virtual realities’ can be compared to the immersion ‘of the foetus in the womb’ (10), while Linda Carroli, quoting Donna Haraway, contends ‘being on the internet is akin to being located in “the womb of the pregnant monster”’, that like the womb ‘the matrix of computer communications is unconfinable and ungovernable: it is the post-apocalyptic, artificial mother’ (360). Recalling its umbilical root of the telephone through which women exchanged stories, the web is a space in which maternal stories continue to be woven, beguiling and trapping its users. Consequently, the internet becomes a space in
which mothers’ stories, the conduit for the maternal gaze, continue to be told beyond their endings, and this is demonstrated by the fan fiction rewritings of Andrews’ Dollanganger saga, which fetishise the incest and maternal abuse of the original texts.

Anticipating the effects of misery literature, *Flowers in the Attic* encouraged maternal readers to meditate on and circulate images of child abuse and incest, and Gothicised the suburban domestic space which it depicted and in which it was read. These images are not only re-enacted and reproduced through the process of fantasising in the mind’s eye, but also in recent years through the hypertexts of internet forums, discussion boards and fan fiction, where readers take characters, settings and plots from an original text and reinvent them to write other versions. Whittaker shows how, like the archetypal Gothic manuscript, hypertextuality is a Gothic narrative form that is hybrid, non-linear, incomplete and disorienting (270), and so these virtual, democratic and largely unpoliced spaces transform the capabilities of reader-responses, and take Andrew’s serialised franchise to another, viral, level. One fan rewriting *Flowers* as a poem eagerly describes the text’s fairytale incest as ‘My brother’s love, a sin divine/Lying awake on that old mattress/With him, I’m his princess’ (‘Flowers in the Attic’), while another writes glibly ‘we were not always acceptable in the bedroom (we were related, who cared) It was difficult to live, day in-day out, and always keep the intimate parts of our bodies secret from the other sex’ (‘Flowers in the Attic: Retold’).

Sheenagh Pugh terms fan fiction as the ‘democratic genre’ (2005), one which allows readers to build an interactive community where they can articulate and circulate ideas and fantasies and expand on favourite novels and manipulate the characters into recreating desired scenarios, Freud’s ‘wealth of situations and institutions’ (1919a: 180), which in the
case of *Flowers* fan fiction is the repetition of incest. Fan fiction written by contemporary adolescent readers whose mothers recommend the Dollanganger saga to them evidences the enduring appeal of Andrews’ incest narratives and creates another level of intercestuality, functioning in the same way as their mothers passing the novel to friends and relatives and discussing the plot did, during the pre-internet years following its publication. The social networking site Facebook hosts a fan-group called ‘Lock Me In the Attic! A Flowers in the Attic Appreciation Group’, where adolescent members’ mawkish posts include ‘I love this book [...] I really hope Chris and Cathy are together I am on the third book [...] I really hope Cathy doesn’t keep thinking it’s sinful’, ‘Yes Christopher would b great 2 b locked up with! ♥’, and ‘I ♥ Chris! especially the part where he slits his hands in order to feed (blood) the little kids’. Like Cathy who desires a happy ending for the ‘star-crossed lovers’ of the novels she reads (261), her own incest as a fantasy is galvanised through what Jenny Alexander describes as ‘the shared and transmitted imagination’ (119).

Alexander discusses how the circulation of fan fiction provides a forum for re-writing texts which are not (explicitly) sadomasochistic to present ‘a central or graphic part of the *mise-en-scène* [that] involves a body or bodies deliberately wounded and/or apparently stressed in an eroticised context’ (ibid.), and it is telling that *Flowers* fan fiction tends to repeat, rather than emphasise, the sadistic and incestuous content, as this is already extant and explicit in the original. Instead, as the examples above show, taking Andrews’ lead fans author Cathy and Chris’ incest to be brazenly wilful and completely void of guilt or shame. For them there is none of the hypocritical ‘hard-core righteous prurience’ (Kincaid 2000: 7) which characterises the surface response of readers to abuse and incest narratives. Echoing strategies of paedophile rings which use the anonymity and instant gratification of the
internet to network and circulate ‘an immediate and constant supply’ of child pornography (Rachel O’Connell: 65), the maternal gaze exploits the freedom afforded by the unpolicied web to circulate narratives of child abuse and trauma on which to meditate, as daughters hypertextually rewrite and reproduce the Gothic stories of sadism, incest and maternal abuse to which their mothers first exposed them.

**Trapped in Her Own Web:**

**Rebeccah Beushausen and the Virtual Maternal Gaze**

The ‘shared and transmitted imagination’ of the internet also provides a space for the maternal gaze to confess and co-opt trauma, and Marc Feldman shows it is the unpolicied, democratic and virtual nature of the internet and the paradoxical ‘level of intimacy that can be established while maintaining near-perfect anonymity’ which enables people to create hypertextual imaginary trauma or tragedy and court the sympathy it produces (2004: 162). The internet becomes a limitless Gothic space where users create multiple identities and scenarios, and Feldman examines cases of Munchausen Syndrome and MSBP online, which he terms Munchausen by Internet (MBI; 2000), where forum users have either faked their own illness or death – ‘pseudocide’ – or that of a loved one for attention and sympathy, and there are several examples of ‘mothers’ who create a cyberspatial maternal identity and manipulate the anonymous intimacy the internet affords.

Feldman discusses ‘Darlene’, who claimed in an online support group to be the mother of a baby girl battling cystic fibrosis, and who befriended a woman whose own child suffered from the condition and was also seriously ill with a respiratory virus. ‘Darlene’
questioned the mother about the child’s illness, and a few weeks later reported that her own baby had died from the same virus. The mother became suspicious of inaccuracies in ‘Darlene’s’ story, and when members learned that no information existed about the deceased child, the fakery was exposed and ‘her posts abruptly ended’ (2004: 164). ‘Darlene’ is one of a number of women who have used the internet to fabricate a sick or dying child and with it the esteemed position of the selfless, sacrificing mother, and more recently there has been the high-profile case of Rebeccah Beushausen, who in 2009 wrote the poetic and poignant blog ‘littleoneapril’ about carrying her terminally-ill foetus to full-term.

In the blog, which attracted much sympathy as well as the approval of American pro-life Christian groups, Beushausen claimed her unborn baby April Rose had been diagnosed with Trisomy 13 syndrome, a chromosomal defect that causes mental retardation and death, and after the ‘birth’ posted a photograph of herself holding the dead child, echoing the popular mother and dead child pose of nineteenth-century memorial portraiture. However, like Benigna in The Orphanage, Beushausen’s baby was a doll, a simulacrum fetish-object to be doted on and treasured, and it was when a toy-maker recognised the baby as one of her own creations that Beushausen was exposed, and the maternal outrage of her former supporters flooded messageboards and articles online. Such cases are a hypertextual combination of hysterical pregnancy (pseudocyesis) and MSBP, allowing women to indulge their maternal instinct by birthing an imaginary baby which they depict as suffering in order to garner emotional gratification from (other) mothers. These traumas spread virally through the internet and the maternal gaze exploits the invisibility of hypertext, as it is extremely hard to be detected, traced and punished or prosecuted, as Feldman notes that in the case of Munchausen Syndrome and MSBP it is often the medical community which fears
legal action from patients against (mis)diagnosis (2004: xix).

While this expression of the maternal gaze is troubling, so are the responses of the deceived mothers. Although the anger and betrayal felt by the ‘casualties of deception’ in cases of factitious disorders is understandable (Feldman 2004: 173), the outrage expressed towards cases like Beushausen’s where the sick and dying child never existed is problematic. Just like that of the perpetrator, the sympathetic maternal gaze exploits the image of the sick child to galvanise the masquerade of selfless benevolence; as much as Beushausen thrived on the attention given to her, so too did those bestowing it. Susan Wagner expressed about Beushausen’s story ‘heartbreaking, right? Here’s the most heartbreaking part: The entire story was a lie’ (‘Blogger Fakes Baby’s Death’: online), and at its most basic level this moral indignation translates into a resentment which objects to the reality of the child which is not sick or dying, of the child’s suffering not existing; as Luna writes, it is ‘every mother’s honest instinct’ to desire the dead child (94).

In a similar case in 2008 which Genevieve Roberts discusses in the recent article for She magazine ‘Who are You Really Talking to Online?’ (July 2011), ‘Louise’ lied about the existence and death of her two-year old daughter Eva on the website babycentre.com in emotive posts which ‘reduced most of the mothers to tears’ (60), and one forum member similarly expressed her resentment about the lie, explaining ‘I felt very upset that someone can make that up about a child ... and the length of time she sustained the deception to create such an elaborate, negative fantasy’ (61). Yet it is the negative fantasy on which these mothers thrive, as this act of betrayal allows them, in the spirit of the melodrama spectator, to co-opt a maternal grief which did not exist, one which is weaved through the ‘mother’s’ lies and perpetuated through the journalistic coverage of the fallout, both virtual and
hardcopy - even Roberts’ article is tinged with a lingering sense of moral indignation which would appeal to the magazine’s bourgeois maternal demographic.

In this scenario mothers real and fake fetishise their own grief and that of others, and Beushausen and those she deceived reciprocally participated in a melodramatic dynamic which everyone chose to believe was real, and so both parties successfully cleaved their victim position. This is typical of MBI incidences; while confidantes sacrificed time and emotions only to have their maternal sympathy abused, once exposed, perpetrators often claim deep-rooted psychological issues or past trauma. This is the case with Beushausen, who posted an apology stating she had previously experienced miscarriages, and wrote her blog as therapy but became addicted to the attention it received, playing up to the part of masochist victim in this melodrama dynamic ‘who declares that he or she suffers, and that social recriminations are unnecessary since the punishment has already been self-inflicted’ (Rosenman: 23): ‘I have suffered this type of loss, more than once, to varying degrees, and while the circumstances and the times vary ... the pain is very constant’ (in Tammy Webber, ‘Little One April’: online).

Kathryn Kruger writes in myth female weavers ‘are often depicted as agents creating spells or curses to cast on others’ (126), and Beushausen was caught in her own matrixial web of lies which she weaved to trap the attention of (m)others, sucked back into the cyber abyss of maternal mythmaking and responding to the demand for tragedy which her audience created. Beushausen was telling tales, trapping herself and others in what Laurence Talairach-Vielmas elegantly terms ‘the bondage of stories’ (17), offering up the image of the dead child for the conspicuous consumption of the sympathetic maternal gaze, whose bearer is the ‘scopophilic pervert’, a ‘purveyor of sympathy within and around narrative
texts’ (Hinton: 5). Weaving the (ww)web with her lies Beushausen reveals the true extent of maternal desire, both her own and that of her readership, as Ettinger understands the act of ‘matrixial interweaving’ as a ‘total symbiosis, a “feminine incest”’ where ‘the encounter inside the maternal womb appears and reveals to us that there is a basic human condition where transgression of borderlines is certain’ (2006: 77-78). In a ‘matrixial sharing’ like the internet forum, ‘the other’s most intimate but hidden unconscious zones are accessed’ (85), and the maternal gaze which desires and produces trauma is the ‘matrixial link’, the ‘fascinance’ that ‘enables a glimpse at the forever-out-of-time-and-space’ (61, 85), the maternal abyss which consumes us. The internet is the cyberspatial matrixial womb which infects its storytellers, its weavers; as Botting writes, ‘the consumer is being consumed’ (2008: 202).

Consequently, the Gothic exists beyond the fictional and imaginative realms through which we try to understand and control it, and our ‘Gothic fixations’ with murder, incest, abuse, paedophilia and infanticide are not conventions invented by the genre but rather are seen more vividly through it (Edmundson: xii); collective cultural paranoia and suspicion do not render an event Gothic but exposes its inherent Gothicness, and our Gothic monsters, our infanticidal mothers, are ‘nominated by popular, not singular acclaim. They only play to crowds’, as Edward Ingebretsen writes about the case of Susan Smith, who murdered her two young sons in 1994, a case of ‘unspeakable’ actions of a mother which at the time was all anyone talked about (99, 101). Edmundson contends that ‘in ‘90s America it seemed that almost everyone was tied up, in one way or another, with the Gothic’ (xii-xiii), showing how this fin de siècle was just as fearful and obsessed with what lurks in the shadows as the last. The Gothic is endemic to our existence, and at the new fin de siècle was mobilised through
new media. Commandeering technologies of television, telephone and the internet, the maternal gaze transmits itself into the home to re-Gothicise it with narratives of death, abuse and incest. Understanding the scopophilic fetishisation and consumption of these events by a maternal audience does not diminish or abstract the real pain felt by the parent(s) of the pained or abused child, and most importantly by the child itself. Rather, it shows how such events and the emotions they create are - not always consciously - co-opted by those who feed their maternal gaze by meditating on and fetishising the image of the suffering child.

The gaze of maternal instinct which characterises the sacrificing mother explored in this thesis thrives on crisis, trauma and grief, and in the twenty-first century exploits the Gothic possibilities of telecommunications, of the matrixial maternal space and the umbilical web, to circulate and make viral narratives which fuel its masquerade of concerned benevolence, and impregnate and imprint the domestic space with the Gothic. Technologising the Gothic, the maternal gaze achieves omnipotence through the content and structure of its infanticidal fantasies, which have been narrativised from the genre's inception and reinvigorated through the matrixial abyss of the internet which permeates our homes. The Gothic, which Kate Ellis contends forms a ‘discourse about the home, about women’s inscription into that space and men’s relationship to the home thus defined’ (218), is a genre obsessed with the womb which issues the gaze, the original home for us all which we leave but which will not forget us. As Luna writes, ‘having been delivered from a body, one finds that there is no escape from the place of its conception’, and as these Gothic texts and realities attest, we live in a ‘wombed-in world’ (5, 9). We are surrounded by the maternal gaze.
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