

# Uncanny Stories

## The Ghost Story As Female Gothic

*Diana Wallace* University of Glamorgan

The ghost story as a form has allowed women writers special kinds of freedom, not merely to include the fantastic and the supernatural, but also to offer critiques of male power and sexuality which are often more radical than those in more realist genres. Despite this, critical accounts of the Female Gothic have largely focused on the 'Gothic novel', and have been less inclined to engage with shorter fiction and the ghost story in particular.<sup>1</sup> The Female Gothic is perhaps par excellence the mode within which women writers have been able to explore deep-rooted female fears about women's powerlessness and imprisonment within patriarchy, and the *déréliction* (to borrow Luce Irigaray's term) which is the result of their exclusion or abandonment outside the symbolic order.<sup>2</sup> This state of *déréliction* renders women ghost-like: they are 'nowhere . . . never in touch with each other, lost in the air like ghosts.'<sup>3</sup>

Such anxieties are also given expression in women's ghost stories but the tendency has been to regard the ghost story as a separate genre. Although it has its roots in the Gothic tradition and frequently uses Gothic motifs and settings, it is in structure and content, R. A. Gilbert contends, 'a very different genre' because it is '*super* natural . . . it is truly the dead who return, and there is no place for rational explanation or artifice.'<sup>4</sup> If 'the Gothic' is detached from the 'Gothic novel', however, and regarded as a mode of writing rather than a genre then it becomes flexible enough to encompass the ghost story.

The lack of critical attention to women's ghost stories is also to do with a wider neglect of the short story, within which the ghost story (associated with anthologies or magazines and other ephemeral types of publication) has been doubly marginalised.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, since, as Richard Dalby notes, ninety per cent of the stories in traditional ghost story anthologies tended to be by men, critical accounts of the ghost story have reflected this by focusing on the 'masters [sic] of the uncanny'.<sup>6</sup>

More recent anthologies of ghost stories by women have revealed that women have also excelled in this form, among them Elizabeth Gaskell, May Sinclair, and Elizabeth Bowen.<sup>7</sup> These are, of course, all writers who are better known as novelists

and who have not been directly associated with the Gothic tradition. The three stories I want to explore here, however, all have clear links to the Female Gothic, most obviously through their rewriting of the Gothic elements of the Bluebeard story, especially the figure of the husband who imprisons and/or kills his first wife, and the motif of the castle or haunted house.<sup>8</sup> These fictions use the Female Gothic to push at the boundaries of the traditional ghost story, and vice versa. Because they work on the ambiguous edge between the explained/unexplained supernatural they are perhaps better called 'uncanny stories' rather than ghost stories or even Gothic tales.<sup>9</sup> Here I am borrowing the name May Sinclair gave to her own collection of 'spooky' stories in 1923.<sup>10</sup>

In her discussion of the different literary conventions which distinguish the Female Gothic from the Male Gothic, Anne Williams argues that the Female Gothic has tended towards the explained supernatural while the Male Gothic posits the supernatural as a reality.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, while the Male Gothic has a tragic plot, the Female Gothic demands a happy ending, the conventional marriage which symbolises the heroine's 'wedding to culture'.<sup>12</sup>

The ghost story is interesting because it is an exception to both these rules – it allows women writers license to use the *unexplained* supernatural and to evade the marriage ending. Elizabeth Bowen articulated what many women writers seem to have felt when she wrote that she considered it to be 'unethical . . . to allow the supernatural into a novel' but often used it in her short stories.<sup>13</sup> The very *shortness* of the short story is what makes it an excellent vehicle for the treatment of the supernatural. As Nadine Gordimer puts it: 'Fantasy in the hands of short story writers is so much more successful than when in the hands of novelists because it is necessary for it to hold good only for the brief illumination of the situation it dominates.'<sup>14</sup>

The short story has long been associated with the marginalized – Irish, black, post-colonial and, especially, women writers – writers who often use it as a vehicle for 'knowledge which may be in some way at odds with the "story" of dominant culture . . . to express something suppressed/repressed in mainstream literature.'<sup>15</sup> The ghost story, of course, deals precisely with the return of the repressed: the dead who return.

In a suggestive essay on the aesthetics of the short story, Clare Hanson has argued that, contrary to the view that regards it merely as a condensed novel, the short story is the most *literary* form of all because it is 'the narrative art form most closely associated with dream'.<sup>16</sup> Short stories, she suggests, may 'be *structured like dreams*' (26). That is, the relations between events/images in a short story are often random and arbitrary, "impelled" . . . by unconscious forces' (27) rather than logical or rational temporal sequences. Jean-Francois Lyotard has argued that 'it is *desire itself* which reworks the dream thoughts to create the dream's manifest content' (27) and that we must therefore read the dream not symptomatically (as Freud proposes) but literally as 'latent desire expressed' (27). Hanson uses this as a model for the reading of short stories. The short story shares with the dream, she suggests, 'its combination of the elements of strangeness and familiarity' because

it is similarly a channel for the 'expression of repressed or unconscious desire' (27). Thus 'it is *strange* in that it is the expression or embodiment of previously unknown and repressed desire and *familiar* precisely because desire hollows out and is the obverse image of that which is already known, that which already exists' (28, my emphasis). The short story, then, is 'the narrative form most closely implicated with desire' (30).

This is an especially useful approach to use with the ghost story, which so often uses dreams and dream structures. The 'uncanny', in Freud's famous formulation, 'is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar' and 'that which ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light'<sup>17</sup> – that is, that which is both *strange* and *familiar*. The ghost story, so often dismissed as 'popular', is in its utilisation of the uncanny perhaps the most dream-like form of the short story and, thus, ironically, could be seen (extending Hanson's argument) as the most 'literary' of all genres.

At first glance the original Bluebeard story recorded by Charles Perrault seems to be about social and cultural realities with no supernatural elements other than the un-erasable stain on the key and Bluebeard's unnaturally-coloured beard. At a deeper level, however, it is (like the stories of Eve and Pandora) a story about curiosity – that is, about *desire*, the desire for (sexual) knowledge. It is also a story about sexual difference and about the fear of and desire for the (male) Other. The key and beard can both be read as signifiers of the 'Otherness' of male power and sexuality – its 'uncanny' nature from the female point of view.

The basic structural elements of the Bluebeard story are also those of a typical Female Gothic plot. The Bluebeardesque figure who murders or imprisons his wife appears repeatedly: Radcliffe's Mazzini and Montoni, Brontë's Rochester, Austen's spoof villain General Tilney, and du Maurier's Maxim. These structures crystallise particularly clearly in the popular Gothic romances which followed Victoria Holt's *Mistress of Mellyn* (1960). In the typical plot the heroine is in love with or married to a man she suspects has disposed of one wife and is now, she fears, about to do the same with her. The potentially Bluebeardesque husband here fuses the Gothic hero and villain figures of earlier novels: he is both Rochester and Montoni, object of both desire and fear.

In her discussion of the popular Gothic romance Tania Modleski analyses this plot structure in terms of a 'female uncanny'.<sup>18</sup> Gendering Freud's arguments that the source of the 'uncanny' can be found in both the fear of repetition and the fear of castration, Modleski argues that these are, for women, 'two aspects of the more primal fear of being lost in the mother' (71): the fear of repeating the mother's life (and being 'murdered' by the remote but all-powerful father), and the fear of failing to separate from the mother (of not only being *like* the mother but actually *being* the mother). Since, she argues (following Nancy Chodorow), women have more difficulty separating from the mother, 'their sense of the uncanny may actually be stronger than men's' (71). This may help to account for the popularity of the Female Gothic with women readers. The Gothic heroine (and her reader) has to convince herself that the man she has to marry in order to establish a separate

identity, is not, in fact, a Bluebeard who will victimise her as her mother was victimised, but a 'real man' who will love and protect her.

While in the Male Gothic it is the female, especially the mother, who is the focus of horror, the case with the Female Gothic is more ambiguous. The three stories I want to discuss here use their re-writings of Bluebeard to examine the male as a focus of fear for the woman because of his social and cultural power over her. But they also use the ghostly/uncanny to explore the male as a figure for the 'Other' and even the '(m)other'.

Elizabeth Gaskell's 'The Grey Woman' (1861) is a close re-working of the Bluebeard tale which draws on both realist and Gothic modes of writing.<sup>19</sup> Its framing devices of portrait and yellowing manuscripts are typically Gothic but its precise historical and geographical location on the French–German border in 1789, the year of the French Revolution (and of political 'terror'), emphasise its cultural and social realism. Brought up by her German miller father, Anna Scherer marries a French aristocrat, M. de la Tourelle, and is taken back to his forbidding chateau, the aptly named 'Les Rochers' ('the rocks'), where he occupies a room in the older part of the structure where she never ventures. Pregnant and isolated from her family, already feeling that she is 'becoming tame to [her] apparent imprisonment' (304), she enters his room to retrieve a letter from her family. There she discovers that he is a member of the 'Chauffeurs', a band of marauding bandits, and that he has already killed an earlier wife, Victorine.

Anna is shorn of her autonomous identity when she marries, to be reborn as the powerless wife of a man she is terrified of. Her marriage brings a 'more complete and total separation than [she] had ever anticipated' (305) from her family and even deprives her of her nationality, making her 'a Frenchwoman' (299). Like the heroine of the 1960s popular Gothic, she attempts to convince herself that it is her husband's 'passionate love for [her] that made him so jealous and tyrannical' (304) but Gaskell exposes this hope as an illusion.

The uncanny in this story is located in the figure of the wife who fears that her fate will repeat that of her predecessor. Anna is 'killed' by her husband three times: once when she marries him and finds her identity destroyed; secondly, when he mistakenly kills her double, a young German lady with hair the colour of Anna's; and thirdly, when her sufferings turn her hair white and transform her from a pretty girl into the ghostly 'Grey Woman' of the title. When she returns to her former home her brother does not believe that this old grey woman is the sister he thought dead. Only by itemising the likeness between her daughter and the portrait of herself as a girl, can she convince him that she is 'his sister Anna, *even as though I were risen from the dead*' (291, my emphasis). It is Anna who is the 'ghost' of the story. In perhaps the most uncanny moment in the story, Anna is mis-recognised by her husband himself. Three years after she has fled, he glimpses her as 'an old grey woman' (339) at a window and, despite the penetrating nature of his masculine gaze – his eyes are 'keen and dreadful like those of the lynx' (339) – does not 'see' her.

'The Grey Woman' is a subtle and sophisticated exploration of the 'ghosting' of women within patriarchy. Vanessa Dickerson has argued that it was their sense of

their own ambiguous legal and social position which drew Victorian women writers to the supernatural. The ghost story could express and explore their status as ‘the “other” living in a state of in-betweenness between the walls of the house, between animal and man, between angel and demon.’<sup>20</sup> Thus, ‘The Grey Woman’ reveals Anna herself as (in Dickerson’s phrase) ‘the ghost in the noontide’ (11), both visible and invisible to her husband.

Several critics have noted that the short story format seemed to release Gaskell into more subversive treatments of contentious issues.<sup>21</sup> The Gothic mode of ‘The Grey Woman’ allows Gaskell to make one of her most radical statements about the ways in which male power erases or represses women, about the redemptive possibilities of female relationships, and about the ambiguous nature of gender itself. Rather than the hyper-masculinity of the bearded Bluebeard, M. de la Tourelle’s delicately girlish features and foppish silver and blue clothes make him seem ‘too effeminate and languid to exert his will’ (300). This ambiguous gender is all the more sinister because it masks the wife-murderer. The story suggests that only another woman can save the threatened wife, but that this rescue can only be achieved through a similar gender ambiguity. Anna’s escape is effected by her Norman maid, Amante, who dresses as a man so that they can pose as a tailor and his wife. Amante acts, as Laura Kranzler notes, as ‘surrogate mother, husband and, most intriguingly, lover, as her name suggests’ (xxiv). Her name also echoes Anna’s own, suggesting they are doubles. Only when Amante is killed by the Chauffeurs does Anna marry a local doctor to ensure safety for herself and her daughter.

The use of the heroine’s point of view for narrative purposes is a third element distinguishing the Female from the Male Gothic.<sup>22</sup> By narrating the Bluebeard story from the wife’s point of view, as a letter written by Anna to her daughter, Ursula, Gaskell retrieves the repressed voice of the mother and places the tale squarely in the tradition of the Female Gothic. The letter is written to explain why Ursula cannot marry the man she loves – he is the son of the man murdered by her father. The secret the story reveals in symbolic terms, however, is the father’s ‘murder’ of the mother. As Williams phrases it, Bluebeard’s secret is ‘patriarchy’s secret founding “truth” about the female: women as mortal, expendable matter/*mater*.’<sup>23</sup> In warning her daughter against marriage, Anna is attempting to save her from a potential repetition of her mother’s ‘ghosting’.

Written over seventy years later in the post-Freudian 1920s, May Sinclair’s ‘The Villa Désirée’ (1926) is a brilliantly economical Modernist version of the Bluebeard tale which uses the supernatural to explore the uncanny nature of erotic desire.<sup>24</sup> Told in deceptively spare prose, it reworks the classic motifs to give us a haunted Mediterranean villa and a fascinating bearded wife-killer whose ‘abnormal beauty’ is associated with ‘black, white and blue’ (77).

David Seed has argued that Sinclair espoused the new ‘psychical ghost stories’ pioneered by Henry James, who carefully distinguished them from the earlier Gothic tradition. ‘Sinclair’s evocation of the supernatural’, Seed writes, ‘combined a Freudian awareness of symbolic displacement with a Jamesian projection of ghosts as representing states of mind.’<sup>25</sup> However, I would argue that Sinclair’s

stories can also be read as an evolution of, rather than a break with, the *Female Gothic* tradition, using Freudian insights to make overt the buried subtexts of Radcliffe and Gaskell.

'The Villa Désirée' suggests that desire holds dangers for women, not because they should be punished for transgressive curiosity or disobedience, but because of the otherness of male sexuality. The heroine's name, Mildred Eve, signals her antecedents (Eve/Pandora/Bluebeard's wife) as well as her everywoman status (her initials spell 'me'). Engaged to Louis Carson, Mildred goes to stay at his villa, the eponymous 'Villa Désirée', where he is to join her later, though staying at a local hotel. The villa had been the location for his honeymoon with his first wife whom, on their wedding-night, he had found 'dead, there in the bed' (77). Mildred refuses to be put off by this knowledge – 'her poor little ghost won't hurt me' (81) – or the 'queer' smell of the villa, and goes to sleep in the bed in which the first wife died. She is woken up by a 'supernatural thing' (84) standing by her bedside, not the ghost of the first wife but a manifestation of Louis Carson, or rather of his lustful desires.

Freud notes that men often regard the female genitals as 'uncanny' (368). What Sinclair's story suggests is that a woman might find the male genitals equally 'uncanny', particularly in a state of desire, and a source of terror when, as here, 'forced on her sight' (84). Here 'It' has a body which 'From the *breasts* down was unfinished, rudimentary, *not quite born*' and '*pregnant* with its loathsome shapelessness' and shaken with the 'agitation of its *birth*' (84, my emphasis). It is a shape that is visibly growing (erecting?) into being.

Sinclair here suggests that male sexuality is a source of primitive terror for women on several different levels. Firstly, because it is Other, just as the female is the source of terror in the Male Gothic. Secondly, however, the gender ambiguity of the imagery ('breasts', 'pregnant') suggests something more complex – that the source of terror here is an Other which is both male *and* (m)other. Williams suggests that 'The gruesome materiality of Male Gothic horror expresses the "abject", the otherness of the *mater*/mother who threatens to swallow or engulf the speaking subject'.<sup>26</sup> But the 'spectral presence of the dead-undead mother, archaic and all-encompassing' is also central to the Female Gothic according to Clare Kahane.<sup>27</sup> The imagery of pregnancy and childbirth here suggest that a further reason for a fear of male sexuality is what it leads to – not just the terrors of childbirth central to Ellen Moers' account of the Female Gothic,<sup>28</sup> but also its potential to transform the woman into her mother, repeating her life (and death).

The uncanny is located most terrifyingly in the face which is 'perfect in absolute horror' (84). The black eyebrows and beard (as I suggested earlier, a signifier of sexual difference) frame something which is 'drawn back, distorted in an obscene agony, corrupt and malignant' (84) – the male flesh as embodiment of desire. The symbolism of the story reinforces this equation of the phallic with the terrifying: the villa stands between 'two palms, two poles each topped by a head of dark-green, curving, sharp-pointed blades' (78–9). As she awakens Mildred hears 'the hard sharp shirring of the palm leaves outside, as the wind rubbed their

knife blades together' (84) – an image recalling the sword used by Bluebeard to decapitate his wives.

The uncanny nature of the apparition lies in its ambiguous, even paradoxical nature – it is an *un-bodied* form of bodily desire: 'The face and the body, flesh and yet not flesh, they were the essence made manifest of untold, unearthly abominations' (84). The ultimate horror of this manifestation of male sexual desire is that it is not only flesh that is divorced from the flesh (the body of the man), but an unconscious desire uncontrollable by the conscious self: 'the frightful thing about it was that it was blind, parted from all controlling and absolving clarity, flesh and yet not flesh. It looked for her without seeing her' (84). Put bluntly, the male genitals are presented as 'uncanny' to women because they are both part of and not part of the male body (both familiar and strange). They are a source of terror in part because they are perceived as being not under the control of the conscious self. Moreover, because they work at an unconscious level they do not respond to the woman as person but as body – 'without seeing *her*' (84, my emphasis) – and therefore they deny/erase female selfhood and autonomy.

Mildred exorcises the apparition by naming it: "Louis! What are you doing there?" (85) – that is, by restoring it (and herself) to conscious self-hood – and by fleeing the villa. Questioning her friends she is told that the former Mrs Carson died 'of fright' because 'She saw something' (86), although Louis Carson had been in the other room at the time. Mrs Carson died, Mildred tells her friends, extrapolating from her own repetition of her predecessor's experience, because "It didn't wait. It got there before him" (87). The *coup de grace* is a letter from Louis telling Mildred that he is already at the local hotel, because he could not wait to see her.

Female desire and sexual curiosity are dangerous, then, because they render women vulnerable to male desire. Mildred goes to the villa of her own accord, despite knowing Louis' history. Moreover, she is attracted to Louis because of his face, with its intimation that 'he could be cruel' (77). The title – 'Villa Désirée' – suggests that female desire (both 'for' the cruel male other, and to 'be' the victimised mother) is as much of a problem as male desire, and that the two reinforce each other. The knowledge of sexual difference is attained by a confrontation with male 'Other', but this also entails recognition of her own femaleness and thus her potential vulnerability to (in Kahane's words) 'an imprisoning female destiny that denies the autonomy of the self' (347). As with Gaskell, it is the use of a version of the ghost story that seems to have freed Sinclair to explore these issues in such detail.

Finally, I want to return to Elizabeth Bowen and her statement that the short story afforded her that particular license to include the supernatural which she argued was 'inseparable (whether or not it comes to the surface) from my sense of life.'<sup>29</sup> The almost imperceptible shade of Bluebeard haunts 'The Cat Jumps' (1934).<sup>30</sup> With its juxtaposition of the 'modern' and the 'Gothic', it could, like many of Bowen's stories, be described as 'suburban Gothic'. Angus Wilson calls it a 'farical ghost story' (8) but it is also one of Bowen's most grim and horrific pieces. It is partly a satire of the 'progressive' intelligentsia of the 1930s. Buoyed up

by their reading of the latest theories (their library is strewn with 'Krafft-Ebing, Freud, Forel, Weinger, and the heterosexual volume of Havelock Ellis' [366]), the ironically-named Wright family are not deterred from buying Rose Hill, a house which has been the site of a particularly horrific murder. The previous owner, Harold Bentley, dismembered his wife over several hours, leaving her body parts all over the house – 'one of Mrs Bentley's hands was found in the library . . . but the fingers were in the dining-room' (367) – and finishing the job in the bath. As Wilson notes (10), Bowen's story reflects the Thirties obsession with high profile crimes, sensationally reported in the new tabloid newspapers with such macabre headlines as *'The Rose Hill Horror'* (362).

With 'light, bright, shadowless, thoroughly disinfected minds', however, the fashionably modern 'Harold Wrights' dread 'nothing but inhibitions' (363), so they move in, redecorate (although they retain the original bath) and invite their friends down for the weekend. As with Sinclair's villa, the motif of the haunted house is figured through the sense of smell: there is 'a smell of unsavoury habitation' (363), which they cannot get rid of, and a lingering perfume of 'Trèfle Incarnat' (364). Despite the Wrights' rational approach, the guests' increasing unease is reflected in outbursts of 'sex-antagonism' (365), affecting even the children and the servants.

In this story Bowen brings together several of the sources of the uncanny which Freud identified, to the extent that the story can be read as a kind of gloss on 'The "Uncanny"'. But Bowen uses it, ironically, to skewer Freudianism itself. At the same time she uses shifting point of view to juxtapose the Male and Female Gothic, showing how male and female fears are projected onto the other sex and make each dangerous to the other.

Firstly, the motif of dismemberment recalls Freud's argument that dismembered limbs 'have something particularly uncanny about them' (366), because of their relation to the castration complex. Harold Bentley's actions are an extreme version of Bluebeard's treatment of his wives. Secondly, Bowen uses the motifs of the double ('the uncanny harbinger of death' in Freud's words [357]) and repetition – the 'compulsion to repeat' (360). Shifting the typical pattern of the Female Gothic, however, she focuses them, as the repetition of the name 'Harold' indicates, on the two men, suggesting that Harold Wright is destined to repeat his predecessor's actions. He even uses (three times) the very phrase uttered by Harold Bentley as he went upstairs to finish off his wife: *'Here we are'* (367).

At the climax for the story, Harold Wright meditates in the bathroom on his wife: 'She would be there, densely, smotheringly there. She lay like a great cat, always, over the mouth of his life' (369). From his point of view, this is a Male Gothic plot driven by the male fear of the female Other who '(s)mothers' him. Interestingly, in another of Bowen's Thirties stories, 'Look at all Those Roses' (512–20) the name of the wife who has probably murdered her husband, Mrs Mather (mother/matter/*mater*), signals precisely this reading.

As he steps out of the bathroom into his wife's bedroom, the two Harolds are 'superimposed on each other' (369). At this point the reader, like Jocelyn Wright, expects a plot of what Freud calls 'involuntary repetition' (359) where Harold

will murder his wife. Jocelyn, entrapped in her own Female Gothic plot, faints when he utters the words 'Here we are' (369). But this is where Bowen tips the story over into farce as Harold, attempting to summon help, discovers that he, and all his guests, have been locked into their rooms by Muriel. Muriel, the person responsible for relaying the details of the Bentley murder to the other guests, appears to be in that state of paranoia typical of the Female Gothic heroine. "Now, of course, I shall never marry" she tells another guest, ". . . Shut up all night with a man all alone – I don't know how you dare sleep" (368). Her paranoia has been aroused by Edward Carteret, a scientist invited because he is thought a possible partner for her, but whose descriptions of dissecting a cat (symbolising, again, violence against the female) have repulsed her. To prevent him invading her bedroom she has locked all the bedroom doors. Female fear of the male and vice versa produce a situation where everyone is locked into their own room in a state of terror.

This may be farce but Bowen, in the third instance in which her story connects with Freud's essay, suggests that the root of this terror is the primitive fear of the dead (the ultimate Other) which is repressed by and contrasts so glaringly with the modernity of the Wrights. The Wrights are perfect examples of all those 'supposedly educated people' who, Freud argued, 'have ceased to believe officially that the dead can become visible as spirits' (365). The source of the uncanny here then is precisely, in Freud's words, that moment 'when primitive beliefs which have been surmounted seem once more to be confirmed' (372) – the moment when the fashionably blasé house guests start to doubt their disbelief in the supernatural. The irony here is that it is their reading of Freud himself, among other fashionable theorists, which is responsible for their 'modern' denial of it.

In an extraordinary image Jocelyn looks into the abyss which lies beneath the surface of modern life. She confronts the 'atavistic' (368) terror of death, and what it means within a society which, in giving up its belief in ghosts has also forfeited its belief in the immortality of the soul:

But the death fear, that one is not there to relate! If the spirit, dismembered in agony, dies before the body! If the spirit, in the whole knowledge of its dissolution, drags from chamber to chamber, drops from plane to plane of awareness (as from knife to knife down an oubliette), shedding, receiving agony! Till, long afterwards, death with its little pain, is established in the indifferent body. (368)

This transposes dismemberment from the body to the spirit. It also combines the Gothic motif of the many-chambered house with descent into an oubliette. The word 'oubliette', a pit-like dungeon into which victims were precipitated from an opening at the top, comes from the French '*oublier*' meaning 'to forget'. What Jocelyn is confronting is the primitive fear of death which has been 'forgotten' because it has been buried/repressed into the unconscious, but has now come to light.

The fear of death, Freud argues, is always projected 'outward as something foreign to [the subject]' (358). Bowen's story illustrates how that fear is projected by both sexes onto the other sex, as what is most 'foreign' or 'Other' and thus most

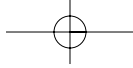
threatening to the self. In the Male Gothic the feminine becomes a figure for dissolution/death, while the masculine functions in the same way in the Female Gothic. In the Female Gothic, however, as these stories show, the fear of the male Other is doubly complicated. Firstly, it is intensified because of the material power men have over women in a patriarchal society – the power to ‘ghost’ women both physically and spiritually. Secondly, as the ambiguous gender imagery used by both Gaskell and Sinclair indicates, the ‘Other’ for women is both male *and* female. The role of women as primary caregivers in our society means that, for women as well as for men, the Other is also the (m)other. This duality possibly explains why women writers are so drawn to the Gothic as a mode of writing which can express such ambiguity.

Far from being ‘minor’ or peripheral to the main traditions of either the literary or the Female Gothic, then, these uncanny stories offer especially fertile and sophisticated explorations of women’s dreams and desires, fears and terrors.

### Notes

- 1 See, for instance, Juliann E. Fleenor, ed., *The Female Gothic* (Montreal and London: Eden Press, 1983) where out of 16 essays only three deal with short fiction and none with poetry. Anne Williams in *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995) makes a similar point. She suggests that ‘a fixation on “the Gothic Novel” has proved more distracting than revealing for critics’ (p. 96) and has obscured the fact that the Gothic is a *poetic* tradition.
- 2 Margaret Whitford gives a useful account of this idea in *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 77–8, 81–2.
- 3 Luce Irigaray, *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 91.
- 4 R. A. Gilbert, ‘Ghost Stories’, in Marie Mulvey-Roberts, ed., *The Handbook of Gothic Literature* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), p. 69.
- 5 Clare Hanson discusses reasons for the neglect of the short story in her introduction to Clare Hanson, ed., *Re-reading the Short Story*, (London: Macmillan, 1989). See also Clare Hanson, *Short Stories and Short Fictions, 1880–1980* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1985). Julia Briggs’ *Night Visitors: The Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story* (London: Faber, 1977) is the most comprehensive critical account of the ghost story.
- 6 Richard Dalby, ed., *The Virago Book of Ghost Stories: The Twentieth Century* (London: Virago, 1988), p. vii.
- 7 Anthologies include three Virago publications, Richard Dalby, ed., *The Virago Book of Victorian Ghost Stories* (London: Virago, 1988); Richard Dalby, ed., *The Virago Book of Ghost Stories: The Twentieth Century* (London: Virago, 1988); Richard Dalby, ed., *The Virago Book of Ghost Stories: The Twentieth Century*, Vol. 2 (London: Virago, 1991); and Catherine A. Lundie, ed., *Restless Spirits: Ghost Stories by American Women, 1872–1926* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996). Two valuable accounts of women’s ghost stories are Nickianne Moody’s ‘Visible Margins: Women Writers and the English Ghost Story’ in Sarah Sceats and Gail Cunningham, eds, *Image and Power: Women in Fiction in the Twentieth Century* (London and New York: Longman, 1990) and Vanessa Dickerson’s *Victorian Ghosts in the Noontide: Women Writers and the Supernatural* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1996).

- 8 See Williams, *Art of Darkness*, Chapter 2, on the relationship between Bluebeard and the Gothic.
- 9 Several of Gaskell's Gothic stories have recently been republished in *Gothic Tales*, edited and with an excellent introduction by Laura Kranzler (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000).
- 10 May Sinclair, *Uncanny Stories* (New York: Macmillan, 1923)
- 11 See Williams, *Art of Darkness*, Chapter Seven.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 103.
- 13 Elizabeth Bowen, *A Day in the Dark and Other Stories* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1965), Preface, p. 9.
- 14 In Charles May, ed., *The New Short Story Theories* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1994), p. 265.
- 15 Hanson, ed, 'Introduction', *Re-reading the Short Story*, p. 6.
- 16 Hanson, 'A Poetics of Short Fiction' in *Re-reading the Short Story*, p. 26. Further page references are to this edition and are given in the text.
- 17 Sigmund Freud, 'The "Uncanny"' in *Art and Literature*, *The Penguin Freud*, Vol. 14 (1985; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), pp. 339–76. Further page references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.
- 18 Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-produced Fantasies for Women* (1982; New York and London: Routledge, 1990), Chapter III, 'The Female Uncanny: Gothic Novels for Women'.
- 19 'The Grey Woman' in Elizabeth Gaskell, *Gothic Tales* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000). Subsequent page references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.
- 20 Dickson, *Victorian Ghosts in the Noontide*, pp. 9, 11.
- 21 See, for instance, Patsy Stoneman's *Elizabeth Gaskell* (Brighton: Harvester, 1987), one of the first studies to take Gaskell's so-called 'minor' works seriously; Jenny Uglow, *Elizabeth Gaskell: A Habit of Stories* (1993; London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1994); Carol A. Martin, 'Gaskell's Ghosts: Truths in Disguise', *Studies in the Novel*, 21/1 (1989), 27–40; J. R. Watson, 'Round the Sofa: Elizabeth Gaskell Tells Stories', *Yearbook of English Studies*, 26 (1996), 89–99 (although Watson sees Gaskell's use of humour, rather than the supernatural, as the subversive element).
- 22 Williams, *Art of Darkness*, p.102.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p.43.
- 24 May Sinclair, 'The Villa Désirée' in Richard Glyn Jones and A. Susan Williams, eds, *The Penguin Book of Erotic Stories by Women* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996). Subsequent page references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.
- 25 David Seed, "'Psychical Cases": Transformations of the Supernatural in Virginia Woolf and May Sinclair' in Andrew Smith and Jeff Wallace, eds, *Gothic Modernisms* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 44–61, p. 54.
- 26 Williams, *Art of Darkness*, p.106.
- 27 Claire Kahane, 'The Gothic Mirror' in Shirley Nelson Garner, Claire Kahane and Madelon Sprengnether, eds, *The Mother Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 336.
- 28 Ellen Moers, *Literary Women*, (London: W. H. Allen, 1977)
- 29 Bowen, *A Day in the Dark*, p. 9.
- 30 Elizabeth Bowen, *The Collected Stories of Elizabeth Bowen*, introduced by Angus Wilson (1980; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), pp. 75–82. Subsequent page references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.



**Address for Correspondence**

Diana Wallace, HLaSS, University of Glamorgan, Pontypridd, CF37 1DL, Wales UK. E-mail:  
dwallace@glam.ac.uk

