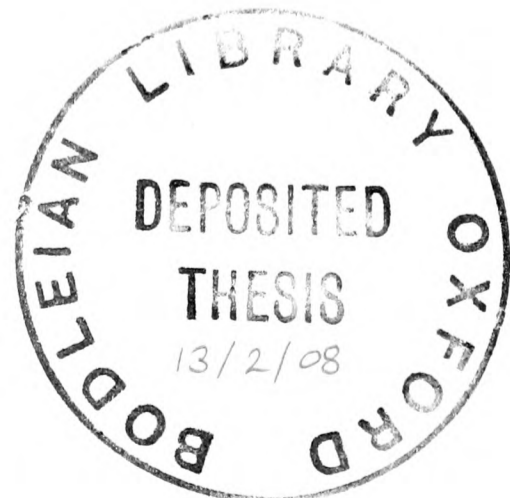


**AMBIGUOUS AND AMBIVALENT
SIGNATURES:
REWRITING, REVISION, AND RESISTANCE
IN EMMA TENNANT'S FICTION**

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ABSTRACT

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While existing criticism of Emma Tennant's work emphasizes its feminist agenda, less attention has been paid to her rewriting of different narratives and discourses. Tennant's career has centered on challenging literary values as well as generic categories, realist conventions, and gender stereotypes. Contrary to implications that rewriting is "re-vision," an "act of survival" that corrects or subverts earlier texts, this thesis argues that Tennant's characteristic resistance to categories also extends to the work of rewriting and revision. Her texts suggest that the act of "writing back" is not as straightforward as it may seem, but deeply ambiguous and ambivalent.

Developing theories of the "signature" that return the writer-as-agent to the otherwise anonymous field of intertextuality, this thesis traces Tennant's figurations of writing, metafictional devices, and intertextual allusions to show how these relate to themes in the fiction. Examining groupings of the texts from different critical perspectives, each chapter shows how Tennant's rewritings destabilize notions of originality, identity, and agency, and represent political discourses and social progress in an ambivalent way. While this thesis offers very specific insights into Tennant's work, the close readings also encompass broader themes, such as feminism and postmodernism, the gothic, myths of home and exile, and the ventriloquistic techniques of pastiche and biofiction. The arguments centered on her work contribute

to the larger discourse on rewriting in two ways. First, in problematizing assumptions that rewriting inherently strives toward progress or correction, this thesis argues that rewriting can dramatize the ambiguity and ambivalence that haunt acts of resistance. Second, in advancing challenges to the idea that intertextuality functions anonymously, it argues that rewriting can return agency to the text by offering representations of authorship that engage with literary and cultural history.

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INTRODUCTION

“One of the most modish expressions to have somehow crept in when people talk about writing or art at all, is, ‘Is she original?’ and it’s absolutely meaningless. It’s like saying somebody isn’t relevant” (Tennant, “Women Talking” 141).

Emma Tennant has made a career of rewriting other texts, and perhaps the wide range of her source texts has caused her own fiction to be labeled in many different ways: feminist and anti-feminist, gothic, magic realist, sentimental pastiche, postmodern, and, in one case, parasitic. The variety of labels is as fitting as the one I choose, “postmodernist,”¹ since Tennant’s work insistently refuses categorization. Her texts combine elements from many genres—high and low, fictional and factual—and are self-consciously intertextual. A Tennant novel is often a frustrating read, since its polyvocal structure creates a lack of closure and a complete suspension of authority. Tennant’s narrators are always unreliable, not just because they are mad or morally compromised, or because they are children, but because reliability is always destabilized by the text itself. Tennant’s complex structures collude in misleading the reader, since multiple narrative frames contradict and yet mirror each other, so that it becomes impossible to fix the narrative in any one of the different realities it posits. Even language is destabilized, as one signifier replaces another in Tennant’s endless chains of shifting tropes. In many postmodernist texts, the process of representation becomes the object of representation. In Tennant’s fiction, representation becomes a gothic transgression of the border between real and unreal: metaphors take literal form and come to life, while human subjects are transformed into texts, images, and tropes. Yet, more than reversing real and unreal, Tennant disturbs the difference between them, and this disturbance is troped through ambiguous figures that are

simultaneously real and unreal, often in more than one sense. Zombies, vampires, doubles, and other undead figures proliferate in her fiction, but so do simulacra, forgeries, and fraudsters that blur the difference between original and copy, authentic and fake, depth and surface. As these tropes of the uncanny suggest,² this is a world haunted by the past and the dead, but it is also Baudrillard's world of simulations, where "the real is no longer real" (13). In *Faustine*, the narrator Ella goes to England to "find herself" and encounters instead a "druidical Disneyland" (124)³ where tawdry tourist attractions pose as monuments, and a *doppelgänger* whose image is repeated across a multitude of media forms (Warhol portrait, posters, photographs, films, and video images). That this *doppelgänger* is a ghost of sorts (Ella's grandmother turned back into her youthful self, or "Faustine"), a corpse encased in a media shrine, begins to illustrate the complexity of Tennant's writing. Her texts expose many meanings behind any given signifier and explore how these meanings shift and become interrelated. Tropes are layered upon tropes just as plots are layered upon plots (texts upon source texts). Meaning, like identity confronted with a *doppelgänger*, is always at least double, and more typically multiple, contrapuntal, and contradictory.

Although Tennant's richly allusive novels lend themselves to what Kristeva calls the "banal" exercise of source identification (*Revolution* 60), I am more interested in the multiple, shifting text produced by Tennant in rewriting her sources. In this sense, I subscribe to Kristeva's definition of intertextuality as operating through "transposition":

If one grants that every signifying practice is a field of transpositions of various signifying systems (an inter-textuality), one then understands that its “place” of enunciation and its denoted “object” are never single, complete, and identical to themselves, but always plural, shattered, capable of being tabulated. (*Revolution* 59-60)

The collapse of differences, the constant (Derridean) deferral of meaning, the explosion of signifiers into a multitude of unstable signifieds, troped through vampires, simulacra, zombies, etc.—all of this might be understood as “the passage from one sign system to another” that occurs in rewriting, first *between* texts, and then as a self-consciously repeating process *within* the new text. Particularly concerning the real and unreal, this destabilization of meaning and representation lies at the heart of Tennant’s self-conscious, intertextual fiction and is, this thesis argues, one example of the way rewriting generates profound ambiguity and ambivalence.

Another way, however, is also suggested by these tropes and goes back to the question of problematized origins—and problematized originality. As Said argues, the writer “thinks less of writing originally, and more of rewriting” (*World* 135). Tennant’s undead and simulated figures, like her resistance to stabilized meaning or categorization, raise questions about whether rewriting is a process of “animation” or “mortification” (Favret 64), Barth’s “literature of replenishment” or “literature of exhaustion.” The question of influence, the relationship with the past, and especially with the literary past, cannot be ignored. Rewriting emanates from *somewhere*, and usually from the margins. Feminist and post-colonial writers and writers of color may challenge existing texts through subversive or corrective rewritings, using parody, mimicry, displacement, delegitimation, and/or other techniques.⁴ Rich offers the useful formulation of “re-vision” as “the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh

eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction.” For Rich, reading and writing *again*, with a difference, is “an act of survival” (18). Understood as revision, rewriting with a corrective agenda implies agency and a telos. Ostriker, discussing women poets’ rewriting of myth, argues that the new poems are “corrections” and “retrieved images of what women have collectively and historically suffered; in some cases they are instructions for survival” (215).

Yet, this is at odds with theories of intertextuality, as Nancy K. Miller has pointed out with reference to Barthes:

when a theory of the text called “hyphology” chooses the spider’s *web* over the spider, and the concept of textuality called the “writerly” chooses the threads of lace over the lacemaker, the productive agency of the subject is self-consciously erased by a model of text production which acts to foreclose the question of identity itself. (“Archnologies” 271)

Kristeva’s formulation of intertextuality is founded upon post-structuralist notions of the “death of the author” and of his or her “work.”⁵ The post-structuralist insistence on “texts” and “intertextuality” corresponds with postmodern theories about art and reality that similarly dismiss notions of essence, fixed meaning, and originality.

Baudrillard argues for a “hyperreality” in which there is no real or original because the real, the original, has been *already* been replaced by copies. Jameson laments the “reduction” of meaningful language into jargon-laden discourses, and argues that this new order is signified by the proliferation of pastiche: imitative “speech in a dead language,” or “blank parody” (“Logic” 17). Lyotard, meanwhile, argues that grand narratives no longer hold, and that “[m]ost people have lost the nostalgia for the lost narrative” (41). The proliferation of simulacra in a commoditized, depthless world, the loss of self-justifying explanatory narratives, the echo chamber of voices and

styles in Jameson's "imaginary museum of a now global culture" ("Logic" 18): all of this characterizes Tennant's fiction. Indeed, these schizophrenic aspects of the world provoke some of the terror and anxiety in her narratives. Yet, much of her texts' impact derives from what Jameson calls the postmodern sublime: the unimaginable "network of power and control" giving rise to paranoid conspiracy theories, which is the "impossible totality of the contemporary world system" (Jameson, "Logic" 38).

This paranoia about hidden forces at work points to a paradox. While Tennant portrays a world overrun by simulation and exhausted by fakes, the texts she rewrites loom large over her characters' lives—characters who invariably exist on the margins. Women, children, single mothers, servants and descendents of slaves, orphans, cast-off mistresses, exiles, freaks, secondary characters, and minor authors are her subjects: the people who live and suffer invisibly in a reality professing social progress but still in thrall to old-fashioned values. There is a contradictory consciousness here. On the one hand, Tennant's texts insist on the fictionality or superficiality of discourses, attested to in their constant transformation of meaning (discourses, texts, stories, signifiers) into shifting surfaces. On the other hand, they evince fear and rage on behalf of those haunted by the old stories, fear and rage founded on a belief that stories will repeat themselves and so become "real." (As the following chapters show, this process is variously attributed to supernatural forces, the momentum of social "progress," the persuasion of images, or secret powers with political interests). Despite its emphasis on the artificiality and constructedness of discourses, Tennant's fiction exhibits persistent anxieties about determinism and repetition. Patterns of repetition and entrapment abound: narrative frames within

frames, claustrophobic architecture, mirrored images, recurring scenes, etc. The processes of biological and creative reproduction are problematized, as prevalent tropes of incest, rape, and illegitimacy suggest. As a result of this major contradiction running through the fiction, Tennant's characters oscillate between moments of exhaustion and revival, capitulation and subversion, entrapment and transcendence. As is typical of Tennant, the difference is never clear for long.

For Hutcheon, such double-voicedness is part of the paradox at the heart of postmodernism. Although Hutcheon's discussion of "historiographic metafiction" theorizes a specific aspect of postmodern literature (its relationship with history), her broader assertions are relevant to mapping out the relationship between rewriting and the past more generally, and between rewriting, predecessor texts, and literary history more specifically. This thesis will work from Hutcheon's claim that "[o]ne of the lessons of the doubleness of postmodernism is that you cannot step outside that which you contest, that you are always implicated in the value, you *choose* to challenge" (223). Hutcheon's understanding of postmodernism's doubleness is quite different from the view espoused by Jameson, Lyotard, and Baudrillard, which implies a radical break with the past and a loss of absolute meaning, manifested in Jameson's depthless pastiche, Lyotard's fall of grand narratives, and Baudrillard's simulacra. Tennant, while exploring a world reduced to surface and artifice, at the same time represents how powerfully and persistently the written past still *means*. As the following chapters show, a postmodern rupture of meaning into limitless intertextuality, and the inexorable influence of that which is rewritten, are not separate but simultaneous possibilities.

I have said that this relates to origins and influence, and this thesis will argue that whenever origins are complicated in the text, whether on a level of plot, structure, or language, this points back to a complicated—that is, at least double—relationship with inter-textual origins, or with Tennant’s source texts. As discussed in Chapter I, Friedman has made efforts to reconcile theories of influence, such as Bloom’s and Gilbert and Gubar’s, with theories of intertextuality.⁶ This move takes its cue from earlier feminist criticism, such as Nancy K. Miller’s “arachnology” approach, which “overreads” representations of writing to uncover “the conditions for the production of literature” (“Arachnologies” 275), and Showalter’s questioning of the “assumption that women writers either imitate their male predecessors or revise them and that this simple dualism is adequate to describe the influences on the woman’s text.” Showalter argues that we must recognize the “double-voiced discourse” that is women’s writing (“Feminist Criticism” 265-66), and her point is relevant to how we read rewriting. After all, rewriting is a form of citation, and citation is always paradoxical and double-voiced. Texts that use epigraphs or allusions acknowledge the authority of cited sources, but do so in a self-authorizing move. Like parody, rewriting that corrects or subverts another text also, unavoidably, upholds the importance of that text.⁷ The double-voicedness of rewriting surfaces within Tennant’s texts in her play on double, triple, and multiple meanings, in metaphors of doubling, and in multi-layered, multi-generic texts. Emphasizing this point may seem like stating the obvious, but I do so because a “simple dualism” persists in Tennant criticism, as explained in detail in Chapter I.

Using Miller's method of overreading as developed by Friedman, this thesis posits that the signature of Tennant's text is one of ambiguity and ambivalence. Tennant's rewritings are not straightforward feminist corrections, but profoundly ambivalent about "progressive" discourses and movements, including feminism. Her fiction is postmodernist in the sense that it is self-reflexive and insists on the fictionality of discourses, but it is also anxious about the power of those discourses, and the harm they may do. Uniquely, Tennant's texts both rewrite other texts and offer a representation of rewriting. They suggest that while rewriting can be liberating, it can also lapse into dangerous perpetuation. The texts' infinite play on meaning potentially restores agency, enabling subjects to refuse inscription or incorporation into pre-written stories, but it can also become "a system of one-way and dead-end signs" (*The Bad Sister* 127),⁸ "an uninterrupted circuit without reference of circumference" (Baudrillard 6) pointing nowhere precisely because it can point anywhere at all.

In the first chapter, I establish Tennant's publishing history and analyze her reception from 1963 to the present to show that Tennant's work has been categorized as either a failed feminist correction of earlier texts, or a purely subversive articulation of marginalized experience. From here, I raise two points that will be discussed throughout this thesis. First, the positioning of subversion and perpetuation as mutually exclusive categories glosses over the necessarily ambiguous and ambivalent nature of literature that writes against but also reproduces established traditions. Second, criticism of Tennant's fiction makes problematic assumptions about the role of the rewriter, locating Tennant in a one-way dynamic of influence in

which existing traditions and texts exert authority over later writing, so that its originality and position of resistance are negated or reduced—even as the texts destabilize the very notions of originality and resistance. In overreading the texts, I argue that Tennant’s persistent figurations of writing and use of ambiguity and ambivalence function as the signature of the rewriter, dramatizing the conflicts that haunt her fiction, constructing a problematic voice of the other, and revealing hidden power structures in postmodernism.

In Chapter II, I analyze intertextual strategies in Tennant’s early work, focusing on her “poetic novels” *Wild Nights* (1979) and *Alice Fell* (1980). Using one of Tennant’s early essays on feminism as a template, I outline how the texts’ dialogism allows them to rewrite official versions of history into a narrative in which the previously marginalized or textualized female subject becomes an active and writing agent. Dialogism, however, also develops into a polyvocal text—an “intertextuality,” as Kristeva calls it—as Tennant’s rewriting of history shifts from a realist to a non-realist account. In her “final” version of this history, *Wild Nights*, Tennant destabilizes the difference between factual and fictional accounts of history, presents the female agent in an ambiguous way, and reveals ambivalence about challenging existing discourses.

In Chapter III, I examine Tennant’s *The Bad Sister* (1978) and *Two Women of London* (1989), “exact” rewritings, respectively, of James Hogg’s *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) and Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886). The chapter begins by criticizing assumptions about the gothic that have been applied to Tennant’s fiction,

and offering a definition of Tennant's gothic poetics as operating through simultaneous repetition and transformation. These texts advance what Sedgwick identifies as the gothic's primary conflict of destabilized identity (*Coherence* 12-13), and explore the loss of self-possession through play with language and simulacra. Yet, Tennant's destabilization of self and other extends beyond the existential or psychological conflict of the individual to challenge distinctions concerning oppression, resistance, and subversion. As these two novels show, while the return of the repressed and the articulation of oppressed subjects are powerfully disruptive forces, they are also deeply conflicted ones—ones whose subversions are ambivalent or ambiguous, and even regressive.

Chapter IV examines three novels of the 1980s: *Woman Beware Woman* (1983), *Black Marina* (1985), and *Faustine* (1991), all of which rewrite several primary source texts at once. I analyze Tennant's regendering of myths (and narratives with the status of myth, such as *The Tempest* (1611) and the Faust narrative) as dramatizing ambivalent and repressive responses to feminism and the ethos of postmodernity. The exile's mythologizing of origins, the return of hateful mothers and fathers, and the socio-economic forces, hidden beneath a façade of inclusion and equality, help reshape old myths into new ones with violent and chaotic conclusions.

The last chapter turns to Tennant's later work, her pastiche sequels to novels by Jane Austen and Charlotte and Emily Brontë, and her pastiche biofictions of Thomas Hardy and Henry James. I show that Tennant's use and representation of ventriloquism and plagiarism allow her to explore how literature is shaped by gender

and generational differences, commercialism, and exploitation. Tennant's pastiches play with the surface, yet also animate "speech in a dead language," destabilizing our understanding of genre and ethics, and of the "real" and "unreal" elements of representation.

Critics have primarily focused on Tennant's representations of women and her use of gothic tropes; some have mentioned her intertextuality in passing, but few have explored this aspect of her fiction in any depth. To date, there is no focused, extensive examination of Tennant's rewriting; there is also no extended general study of the fiction.⁹ This seems unusual given Tennant's prolific writing career, which spans more than three decades, and her personal and professional connections with writers such as Angela Carter, J. G. Ballard, and Ted Hughes. It is also surprising considering the unique direction of Tennant's career, which has focused on rewriting but in a variety of ways. In writing this thesis, I offer the first extended examination of the fiction. This is one reason why Chapter I establishes Tennant's publishing history and examines the texts' critical reception in detail. While later chapters offer very specific insights into Tennant's themes and strategies, my close readings also situate her work in relation to the postmodern gothic, as a literary response to feminism, and as an exploration of marginalization in postmodernism. Although I focus on one author, my discussion also develops existing arguments about intertextuality and influence. In problematizing assumptions that rewriting inherently strives toward progress or correction, I show how rewriting can dramatize the ambiguity and ambivalence that haunt acts of resistance. In advancing challenges to the idea that intertextuality functions anonymously, I argue that rewriting can return

agency to the text by offering representations of authorship that engage with literary and cultural history. These points are part of the larger, second project of this thesis: to contribute to the ongoing critical discourse on rewriting, a discourse to which Tennant herself has contributed in such “original” and intriguing ways.

¹ I use the term *postmodernist* instead of *postmodern* to highlight the texts’ self-reflexivity. Brian McHale offers a detailed survey of the self-reflexive elements of postmodernist fiction in *Postmodernist Fiction*.

² Freud describes the uncanny’s combination of familiar and unfamiliar (*heimlich* and *unheimlich*) as stemming from repressed anxieties, and he includes doubles, automata, and dead bodies as examples of the uncanny (14: 335-76).

³ Baudrillard uses Disneyland, CA to illustrate what he means by “simulation of the third order”: “Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real” (12).

⁴ Bhabha defines mimicry as a mocking, menacing strategy that uses its own ambivalence to challenge colonial discourse: mimicry “*repeats* rather than *represents*” and “problematizes the signs of racial and cultural priority, so that the ‘national’ is no longer naturalizable” (125). Mimicry is discussed in Chapter 4. Displacement and delegitimation (DuPlessis 105-22) are discussed further in Chapter 2.

⁵ See Barthes, “Theory” and “Death” and Foucault.

⁶ For a detailed overview of integrative approaches, see Clayton and Rothstein.

⁷ “To parody is not to destroy the past; in fact to parody is both to enshrine the past and to question it” (Hutcheon 126).

⁸ New York: Coward, 1978. Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁹ Tennant’s work has been discussed in two unpublished theses (Babinec, Johnson), but was not the sole focus of study.

CHAPTER I

REREADING REWRITING: TENNANT'S PUBLISHING HISTORY, CRITICAL APPROACHES TO THE TEXTS, AND READING FOR THE SIGNATURE

“Too many reviewers think in categories” (Tennant, Interview with Olga Kenyon 184)

1. TENNANT'S PUBLISHING HISTORY

THE EARLY WORK: 1964-1982

Tennant's early career was characterized by experimentation. Between 1963 and 1976, her writing could be classified as satire, science fiction, or surrealism, but from 1978, with the publication of *The Bad Sister*, her fiction has been marked by a genre-blending, intertextual style that resists categorization. With the exception of her first novel, the critically unsuccessful satire *The Colour of Rain* (1963),¹ all of her early texts were non-realist. In *The Time of the Crack* (1973), a gigantic crack splits London in two, leaving an unlikely medley of Playboy Bunnies, psychoanalysts, and feminists wandering through the wreckage.² *The Last of the Country House Murders* (1974) takes place in a future when a government-staged murder mystery unfolds into an eccentric family drama and social revolution. In *Hotel de Dream* (1976), the tenants of a seedy boarding house encounter each other as Amazons and dictators in their dreams, while a novelist struggles with characters who argue about their plot lines. All three texts use absurdist imagery and stereotypical characterization, so that their surreal landscapes operate as a satirical, misshapen reflection of social roles and mores.

These novels earned Tennant some praise for her “Lewis Carroll technique applied to H. G. Wells material” (“Great Divide” 661) and “escapist delights” (Pryce-Jones 31), but they were firmly relegated to the category of minor fiction. *The Last of the Country House Murders* was called a “minor” satire and a “farrago” offering “few insights into England as it is or may become” (Clark 102), while *The Time of the Crack* was described as “too wild to be fully effective” (Hill 14). Reviewing *Hotel de Dream*, Korn suggested: “Emma Tennant is quite explicit about the impossible blendings she describes and this explicitness robs the paradoxes of their surprise and much of their charm” (“Road” 871). Yet, later reviews singled out *Hotel de Dream* as a strong example of Tennant’s experimental style. A review of the 1978 paperback edition admired Tennant’s “true journeys into the grotesque” (Moorehead 11) and a review of the 1983 edition called the novel “an exceptionally polished and high-spirited example of off-the-ground writing” (Craig, Rev. of *Hotel de Dream* 711). Belated praise would characterize the reception of these early texts. At the time of publication, *The Time of the Crack* was described as “rather amateurishly written” (“Great Divide” 661) yet in 1985, a different review suggested that Tennant “knows how to provide the exact detail” to make the plot “readable” and “satisfactory” (Barnes 15). These reappraisals of the 1980s reflect the turnover in critical opinion resulting from Tennant’s founding of the successful literary magazine *Bananas*, which she edited from 1975-78.

Tennant declared the magazine’s agenda in the first *Bananas* anthology: “to introduce to as many readers as possible a selection of lively new writing by known and unknown writers” (*Bananas* 8). (“Known” writers included Ted Hughes and

Angela Carter; “unknown” included Sara Maitland.) The magazine was unconventional in most respects: production was erratic (ceasing completely while Tennant wrote two novels); it used an unusual red and black tabloid format; and its layout changed, variously including fake advertisements alongside contributions, artwork, poetry, fiction, interviews, and essays. Reviews were positive and granted the magazine (and two anthologies of its material) a disturbing appeal that was difficult to categorize. One reviewer described it as “radical, black, surreal, avant-garde, camp, decadent” (Ryle 156) while another wrote: “so much accomplishment, so much mere febrility. It’s unamiable, not to be ignored, and profoundly unsettling” (Korn, “Bananas Book” 13). Tennant received credit for the magazine’s success. Nye argued: “Of all the current crop of literary magazines, *Bananas*, edited by Emma Tennant, is probably doing most to ensure that the real right thing does not go unrecognised” (8). Ryle also credited Tennant for “eliciting and publishing work that might not otherwise have seen the light” (156).³ The success of Tennant’s editorial practice seemed to advance her reputation as a novelist. Long after 1978, when Tennant stopped editing the magazine, interviewers listed *Bananas* among her literary achievements. She gained publicity in major newspapers, beginning with a 1978 profile in *The Times*, “A Case of Less Bananas and More Books,” in which she discussed her experiences as an editor and writer. The profile presented her as a dedicated, hard-working novelist, and reviews of her new books corresponded with this image of serious literary endeavor. Reviews were also longer and more frequent, often identifying Tennant’s literary influences and suggesting affinities with well-regarded contemporary writers.

Tennant's next three novels, *The Bad Sister*, *Wild Nights*, and *Alice Fell*, combined fantasy with lyrical prose, symbolic imagery, and non-linear narrative structure, and emphasized sensation and impression over action. Of the three, *The Bad Sister* has the most action-driven plot. Based on James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, it begins as the "editor's" investigation of a murder case but evolves into a supernatural mystery centering on a radical feminist named Meg. Different versions of the events are revealed through the editor's collected reports, newspaper articles, and interviews. In contrast to this factual evidence is the journal of prime suspect and possible schizophrenic, Jane Wild, which gives an account of *doppelgängers* and supernatural forces. These conflicting narrative frames work to destabilize the boundary between logical and imaginary possibilities, leaving the narrative open-ended. Contemporary reviewers were confused by this: "Plain understanding is hard to come by" (Gillott, Rev. of *The Bad Sister* 10); "in the area of the supernatural, a writer cannot, as [Tennant] does, clutter the story with too many themes and preoccupations" (Redmon 41). On the other hand, Morgan felt *The Bad Sister*'s "jagged, shifting cinematic quality [. . .] is of its time" (817). Karl Miller agreed—"Emma Tennant writes about a modern fanaticism"—and noted critical bias against gothic fiction:

Critics have long been able to seem high and mighty by looking down on such Gothic things as the tempter, the captor, the escaper, or the second self [. . .]. The trick is to make out that the tradition is popular, subliterate. ("Ladies in Distress" 24-25)

While some reviewers were frustrated or discomforted by the text's unconventional and confusing mix of real and unreal, Morgan read the novel's "nightmarish ambiguities" as part of Jane's quest for a lost female power (817). As with

Tennant's earlier texts, later reviews of *The Bad Sister* were more accepting: a 2000 review of *Travesties*, which included *The Bad Sister*, suggested that audiences would "relish the shifting perspectives that give [Tennant's] writing peculiarity" (Montgomery 18).

Whereas *The Bad Sister* initially met with resistance, *Wild Nights* was immediately upheld as a work of innovative and evocative force. Told from the perspective of a child narrator, the narrative has no plot but recounts a cycle of seasons, family life, and the magical atmosphere of childhood in the Scottish Borders. Patricia Beer called the book a "witch's eye view of the world" (14) and another reviewer wrote:

this is an enchanting book that recalls both Angela Carter at her wildest and weirdest and the witty surrealism of Leonora Carrington. For Miss Tennant, one of the most original writers to emerge in recent years, it marks her second coming-of-age as a rare fantasist who writes like a witch. (Elliot 12)

The next year, *Alice Fell* was also praised for its "beautifully measured and graceful" symbolic prose" (Rumens 1250). Bernard Levin wrote of the novel: "This is language used by someone who knows what it can do, and has freed herself of the restraints imposed by a duty to the expected" (42). Like *Wild Nights*, the story does not follow a conventional plot. Instead, it employs highly symbolic and stylized narration to portray the childhood and "fall" into adolescence of Alice Paxton in the 1950s and 60s, whose family serve in the country house of the Old Man. Sutherland read *Alice Fell* as an allegory of Britain's fall from empire, a "*de casibus* theme, the fall of great men and old orders" hastened by Alice's birth on the eve of the Suez crisis (17-18). Levin compared *Alice Fell* to George Orwell's political allegory, *Animal Farm* (1949), for telling two stories: the historical account of cultural and

generational turnover in Britain, and the “poetic story of new life that forces itself into the world” against “an old world that is too set in its ways to survive the conflict” (42). Although both *Wild Nights* and *Alice Fell* were noted for their innovative style and approach to childhood, there was some uncertainty about their status as “novels.” Sutherland noted the brevity of *Alice Fell* and called it an “experimental game” “compact with virtuosity and various kinds of literary trickery. It requires an intense reading which, if protracted, would exhaust” (17-18). Rumens also wondered if Tennant’s “stylizing” and “mythicizing” cost the text the depth of character intrinsic to the conventional family saga (1250). Another reviewer felt *Wild Nights* was too whimsical and wished for “this talented writer to stop practising, and set herself some harder theme” (Duchêne 76). And yet another felt it “was ultimately unsatisfactory as a novel” (Gillott, Rev. of *Wild Nights* 10).

Queen of Stones (1982), a female version of William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* (1954), seemed to answer to these concerns by offering a clearly delineated narrative and more developed characters. As Shrimpton wrote, “this novel represents a change of style. The lyricism is carefully attributed to appropriate characters within the actions. And there is much literal, and directly apprehensible, plot” (42). *Queen of Stones* was a watershed for Tennant in two respects. First, it was a critical success. The December 1982/January 1983 issue of the *London Review of Books* featured a large photograph of Tennant on its cover when *Queen of Stones* was published. The caption inside read: “Her new book has caused some to think of Bloomsbury.” The review by Bann called the book a “curious achievement” and said “you must imagine that Virginia Woolf has rewritten *Lord of the Flies*,” referring to Tennant’s Woolfian

descriptions and interior monologues (10). Although there are arguably Woolfian elements in Tennant's previous texts, this was the first time anyone had drawn a stylistic comparison to Woolf, renowned for her experimental narrative techniques. Woolf is also regarded as a feminist, and like Tennant, prioritized female perspectives and relationships in her fiction. Bann drew attention to the feminist overtones of *Queen of Stones*, calling it a "demythologizing book" about girls, in contrast to Golding's "mythologizing" boy-centered *Lord of the Flies*. In her review, the writer Angela Carter delved deeper into the feminist aspects of the book, noting the friction between its different narrative levels:

Tennant supplies formal documentation on her main characters—psychiatric reports on one, an account of an exorcism on another. But the cool prose of these interjections of adult (often male) authority makes only the more mysterious the girls' relations with one another because, since they *are* girls, they are a mystery to themselves. (21)

In opposition to these "formal," "male" explanations, Carter identified other modes of storytelling used to narrate the girls' "perilous journey towards puberty": "an antic Greek chorus of six-year olds" and "echoes of fairy tales of danger and initiation" that culminate "murderously in historical romance." Carter interpreted the text's proliferation of generic forms and piecemeal structure as a specifically feminist mode of representation deconstructing the discourses that chart female development. This marked the second aspect of the turning point for Tennant's reputation. Carter's reading and Bann's review show that Tennant's now recognizable style—intertextual, fantastic, structurally complex—was being read as an effective narrative (feminist) strategy, rather than offhand structural devices. This contradicted earlier valuations of Tennant's "games" and "whimsy," opening her texts to new interpretations.

Reviews of *Queen of Stones* initiated a marking out of Tennant's revisionist feminist subtext and agenda of innovative representation. This was also demonstrated in the developing vocabulary used to describe Tennant's work. In her review of *Queen of Stones*, Feinstein wrote:

Emma Tennant belongs by now among that small band of novelists who are recognizably always and only themselves. But she has more than one mode: there is the visionary, child's magic of *Wild Nights*, which remains my favourite of those of her novels which run as deep and slow as poems. And then there are novels like *The Bad Sister*, which change registers from the matter-of-fact narrative voice at the book's beginning to the hypnagogic fantasies of the central figure. (8)

Shrimpton had identified Tennant's "customary manner" as the "dangerous medium of psychological poetic prose" (42). In 1980, Bernard Levin had called *Alice Fell* Tennant's "latest dream" (42). All these comments implied that Tennant's texts centered on the recesses and symbolic operations of the psyche. This is in keeping with words recurring in reviews in the early 1980s and beyond, such as *gothic*, *imaginative*, *poetic*, *evocative*, *psychological*, and numerous synonyms. Although some critics continued to object to Tennant's oblique plots, minimal characterization, and reliance on device, after 1982 these aspects of the fiction were recognized as part of Tennant's idiosyncratic style and approach to representation, allowing other critics to look beyond craft to the fiction's increasingly feminist subtext.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE FICTION 1983-1989

Tennant's output was prolific during the 1980s and 1990s. In addition to publishing seventeen novels between 1983 and 2003, she also published short stories and children's books, wrote a screenplay for BBC1, and published three memoirs. Her novels ranged from thrillers such as *Woman Beware Woman* to class satires such as

The House of Hospitalities (1987), from pastiche such as *The Adventures of Robina* (1986), written in the style of Defoe's *Roxana* (1724), to gothic novels, including *Two Women of London*. All of these novels continued the exploration of female perspective and identity central to *The Bad Sister* and *Queen of Stones*, using female narrators and focusing on female relationships, adolescence, and family roles.

Of the 1980s texts, *Two Women of London* best represents the continuation of earlier themes and the development of new ones over the decade. It is an adaptation of Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* set in Notting Hill in the 1980s. The narrative attributes the split psyche of Ms. Jekyll/Mrs. Hyde to the opposing pressures of patriarchal capitalism and feminism, while condemning Thatcherism as a throwback to Victorian values. Tennant uses her characteristic multi-media structure (video, phone messages, editor's commentary, and other documents) to offer a fractured view of the novel's events, which center on Mrs. Hyde's murder of the Notting Hill rapist. This recreates Stevenson's structure of letters, diaries, and reports. However, Tennant reverses an important aspect of Stevenson's plot. Whereas drugs transform Dr. Jekyll into his hideous alter ego, in Tennant's novel they restore Mrs. Hyde to her younger and more attractive self, Ms. Jekyll. The dilemma in Stevenson's text is located in Jekyll, who struggles to overpower a repressed and immoral aspect of his identity. *Two Women of London* relocates the conflict in Hyde, and by tracing her split identity to social conditioning, expands the moral battle of the individual into a political, sexual, and social struggle spread over an entire community. The many female characters are almost allegorical figures, standing for the division of women into distinct roles: loving mother, slattern,

sexual object, and feminist. In this way, the text represents a movement toward broader social critique, and toward more foregrounded intertextual relationships.

As a result of this move, reviews focused on the text's relationship with Stevenson's novel. Kemp called the story "smartly artificial":

The ostentatious fakery of its present-day reproduction of a Victorian model derisively parodies the phoniness of Thatcherite claims to be doing the same. In this inventive reshaping of a famous shocker, the crime the author's finger points at has been politically perpetrated. ("Suitable Job")

However, Games criticized the text as an empty imitation:

[Eliza Jekyll] is trapped, too, inside a degenerative piece of writing—fresh and original-looking on the outside in its smart Faber jacket, but continually degenerating on the inside into corruption, to be rescued only by the temporary and ever less effective elation of pastiche. Poor Eliza. Gazing out of her window, longing for the fresh air of artistic inspiration, she shudders as she senses another debilitating wave of mimicry: the Gothic spoofery, the murder mystery, the feminist romp, the common room binge [. . .] the brittle and repressed self-consciousness (Anita Brookner on acid), melodrama à la Brontë à la Thatcher. (29)

Comparisons with Stevenson cast *Two Women of London* as the inferior text: "There is none of the delicious mystery or suspense of the Stevenson novel" (Brandmark VIII). These reviews reveal continued concern about the texts' ability to stand their ground as novels. Like reviews of the earlier fiction, some reviews of *Two Women of London* imply that Tennant's explicit play with borrowing and device reduces the depth of her own plots and characters. This points to a new concern emerging in these reviews: the question of originality.

Tennant's reputation grew in the 1980s, despite persisting uncertainty about how her work should be categorized. Alongside regular reviews of each new book were interviews in literary journals and collections and reissues of her earlier books.⁴ This rise in visibility and esteem was due to a certain amount of cohesion and

innovation across her fiction, a recognizable style and collection of themes that stood out from other contemporary writing. Interviewers realized this. As early as 1983 Haffenden asked Tennant about her interest in “states of temperament and sensation” and “interweaving levels of narration and association”:

JH: It might be said that in investing so much in sense-impressions you make style the thing which alone validates the novel. The critics have rightly observed—and mostly with a good deal of appreciation—that you are meticulous in conveying feelings, and yet that such a procedure can become a mannered end in itself.

ET: I think it can't go on forever [. . .] there can be no excitement if you carried on repeating metaphors. Virtuosity for itself would go dead. (“John Haffenden Talks” 38)

Tennant used interviews to justify the unconventional aspects of her work and explain her themes. Discussing her Scottish background and the trope of the double, she told Haffenden:

The double first came into the English language through Scotland [. . .] it inspired first Hogg, then Stevenson; and since that time many other writers—including Edwin Morgan, and Karl Miller in *Cockburn's Millennium*—have written very interestingly on the split in the Scottish writer. (39)

About *The Bad Sister*, she added:

I'm looking at a situation where the male poet had a muse who's obviously female, and at Virginia Woolf's remark that it is very difficult for a woman poet or writer to co-exist with another woman—because if the muse is female then there are two unpleasantly warring women in the same breast. [. . .] Jane Wild is desperately trying to invoke a male muse, which has never existed in history. (39)

Tennant situated her work in a Scottish as well as a feminist tradition, but also presented herself as a writer challenging those traditions: “I was also trying [. . .] to write a female double, which I think has not been attempted before” (39). Despite aligning her approach with Virginia Woolf's ideas about the female artist, Tennant

took care to discourage feminist readings of her novels, drawing attention to the problematic feminism portrayed in *The Bad Sister* and insisting that *Woman Beware Woman* was “not a text to do with women in our time” (41). What she did emphasize, intentionally or not, were her widely ranging artistic interests and influences. In the Haffenden interview, she discussed Buñuel, Graham Greene, Henry James, science fiction writers Michael Moorcock and J. G. Ballard, Freud, Proust and the inspiration she found in Prosper Mérimée and Bruno Schultz. She would cite a similarly wide range of influences in later interviews, and told Kenyon in 1989: “I think my relationship with language is that I like to plunder from anywhere I can” (Interview with Olga Kenyon 176).

Although interviewers in 1986 and 1989 explored Tennant’s intertextuality and influences, they specifically framed Tennant as a “woman writer.” Yet, Tennant’s responses revealed a changing and sometimes ambivalent attitude toward feminism. In 1986, when Monteith asked about being “a woman and a writer,” Tennant was wary of “ghettoisation”:

[. . .] a kind of self-consciousness, which I think is important now, also has its bad side, and can make women closed off from other things that are happening, and from other perceptions, in the world, and closed off by men, in a bad way by identifying themselves—it seems to me—too much as being “a woman writer.” (“Women Talking” 119)

Asked the same question by Kenyon in 1989, she denied her work was feminist:

I must be the only one whose sales haven’t increased, partly by always jumping into different categories, from one genre into another. If I’d been a feminist woman writer like Angela Carter . . .

Yet, she also revealed an awareness of the feminist movement:

I think there can be no woman writer around who doesn’t feel that if it hadn’t been for the Women’s Movement, they might well find themselves in the

position of Sylvia Plath. One can use it as a help and bulwark, that's what the whole Movement is for. It supports me as an individual *and* a writer.

She even described its influence on her work:

I think one's got to try to find oneself as a woman if you want to create. I read a great many books such as *The Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Perkins Gilmore [*sic*], *The Female Malady* and lots more. They have all helped me to write by showing me how we've been classified in patriarchal society. (Interview with Olga Kenyon 184-186)

Tennant also told Kenyon that "my approach is different in every novel" (175):

I feel the point of writing *for a woman* is to take, magpie-like, anything they please from anywhere, and produce a subversive texts out of the scraps; out of *patriarchal* or any kind of material they can get in their beaks. (176, emphasis added)

Here Tennant located the subversive aspects of her texts—satirizing society through fantasy, creating a female double, questioning myths about girlhood—within a feminist agenda of revision and rewriting, even as she remained wary of being labeled a "woman writer."

When Tennant's name began appearing in literary criticism, it was under the rubric of women's writing. Randall Stevenson considered her fiction in a discussion on "New Women" writers and argued *The Bad Sister's* strength was its critical examination of "women's place" and "the divided vision which has become a frequent feature of women's writing" (160). He also described the novel as "Gothic" and an "extreme, disturbing treatment of 'two-women-in-one'" (159). In her 1989 study, *Contemporary Women Novelists*, Alexander offered a similar reading, and compared Tennant's work with that of Angela Carter (20). The same year, Palmer offered a more theoretical interpretation of *Hotel de Dream* and *Alice Fell*, developing an analysis of Tennant's feminine as "the buried 'unconscious' of the

patriarchal order” (*Contemporary Women’s Fiction* 77). While Stevenson, Alexander, and Palmer all mentioned Tennant’s intertextual forms and literary influences, their analyses focused on her images of women and use of fantasy as tools in a feminist critique of gender roles. In the next decade, reviewers and literary critics alike would further explore and question the feminist elements of Tennant’s work. The ambiguity of Tennant’s feminism, along with growing academic interest in her fiction, would bring the debate on her fiction into a more controversial arena.

NEW DEBATES 1990-PRESENT

Tennant began the 1990s with *Sisters and Strangers* (1990). Subtitled *A Moral Tale*, it relates the seven ages of woman through Eve’s appropriation of different roles, including prostitute, trophy wife, romance novelist, and astrophysicist. The narrator, Grandmother Dummer, declares her tale “a fairy story for grown-ups” (8),⁵ but her motivation in telling the story is to reveal that fairy tales are built on the “lies” men use to categorize and control women. Reviewers disagreed on the soundness of the book’s feminist ideology. One reviewer called the novel “patronising” and “the kind of book that gives women’s writing a bad name”:

The upshot of Tennant’s lengthy parable appears to be that the world run by men is a bad place and that women could [. . .] do a better job. Leaving aside the obvious fallacies in this well-worn argument, it remains to be asked who the whole thing is aimed at. Even confirmed feminists may find the book’s self-congratulatory assertion of female superiority hard to take. Others will simply be confirmed in their prejudices. (Koning)

Another also suggested the text’s politics were too simplistic:

[. . .] the ideological baggage is just too heavy for the flimsy fiction and, like a fat goose with clipped wings, it is hardly surprising that the novel fails to take off. Considering Tennant’s ready ability for irony and ingenuity, and despite the wide spacing of the text on the page, it is disappointing that there is so little to read between the lines. (Wright)

Yet Seymour praised Tennant:

The only feminist novelist who can stand comparison with the wit, lyricism and force of Angela Carter is Emma Tennant. It is no surprise that the first book to match up to the impact of Carter's extraordinary *The Passion of New Eve* [. . .] is Tennant's *Sisters and Strangers*. [. . .] Back in 1977, Carter can hardly have supposed that the feminist novelist of 1990 would not be preaching to the converted. Regrettably, it is still necessary for Emma Tennant to point out that little girls who learn to believe in Prince Charming are being given the wrong kind of ambitions.

However, Seymour also found fault with the text's too liberal "revisionist history," and its basis on a categorical demonization of men.

The rhetoric central to the grandmother's lesson recalls the radical feminist values problematized in *The Bad Sister*. In *Sisters and Strangers*, the reappearance of those values as the basis for establishing a women's history may operate to parody such extreme views (as implied by Grandmother Dummer's name, which also suggests *du mère*). The success of Tennant's irony is less important here than critics' expectations that Tennant *would* produce an ambiguous rewriting of Eve's story, a tale to read between the lines. Critics' negative reaction to the simplistic political message offered by *Sisters and Strangers* highlights the importance of Tennant's earlier *resistance* to categories and straightforward interpretation. The publication of *Sisters and Strangers* also begins to raise questions about rewriting, shifting the issue of stylistic originality into a political and moral debate: how to include marginalized viewpoints without violating historical record? What is the difference between fiction and history? When do rewriting and revision go too far?

Faustine, a female-centered version of the Faust tale, raised similar complaints. When the narrator Ella returns to England hoping to be reunited with her

grandmother Muriel, she discovers that Muriel has been transformed by Mephistopheles into the preternaturally youthful Lisa Crane: media magnate, sex symbol, and 1960s icon. Lisa's global brand of post-feminism—disguised as self-empowerment—is no more problematic than her daughter Anna's feminism. By way of a women's printing press, Anna subverts the patriarchy with which Muriel/Lisa colludes. Mother and daughter become political opponents and, eventually, romantic rivals, while Ella becomes the victim and legacy of the self-indulgent “liberating” ethos of the 1960s. Unsurprisingly, reviews of *Faustine* differed, reflecting the text's unclear political message. Barbara Hardy found the novel's “negation” of politically active women “depressing,” but conceded that “some feminists will value the book's devastating analyses of woman as commodity, reduced and reified” (21). On the other hand, Mullen felt the novel was an intentional critique of feminism: “A feminist herself, [Tennant] knows better than anyone how to debunk the loonier fringes of the sisterhood” (50). These different opinions reflect *Faustine*'s ambiguous representations of feminism. The text explores women's different desires and destabilizes which are morally right and socially progressive as sexual liberation becomes bound up with a new age founded on the devil's commercialism. Unlike *Sisters and Strangers*, *Faustine* does not endorse a feminist agenda so much as undermine and confuse several different political views at once. Reviewers' attention to this indeterminacy contributed to a developing discourse on Tennant's *rewriting*, a discourse that encompassed feminist strategies but was not only about feminist politics. As some reviews of *Faustine* show, there was a developing sense that Tennant's fiction worked to question paradigms and discourses more generally.

Craig called Tennant “among the most inventive scutinisers of myths around” (“Unmaking” 24) and A. N. Wilson wrote Tennant “has always found that myths and fairy-tales could speak for her, or rather, perhaps, after she’s shaken them up, that she could speak for them” (43).

Yet, the question of “speaking for” was central to surfacing concerns about the problems of rewriting, problems exemplified in the reception of *Tess* (1993). In *Tess*, Tess Durbeyfield’s little sister Liza-Lu finds herself speaking for all women in a revision of Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (1891). This modern-day Liza-Lu interweaves the story of a 1950s-1960s Tess with the speculative tale of Hardy’s life and the history of the Dorset landscape. From these main narratives come stories of the relationship between sisters, family secrets, Hardy’s misogyny, the potential for fiction to become myth, and, centrally, the history of women’s oppression. Liza-Lu adopts the moralizing tone of *Sisters and Strangers*, and some critics mocked *Tess*’s similar “old-fashioned, obvious feminism”:

This sort of tone might have been just the thing for the late-Seventies coffee table feminism of the stripped-pine drawing rooms of Notting Hill and Islington, but times have changed and too much of this sort of stuff only impedes the appreciation of the best of the book. (Foulkes 45)

Birch argued:

This feminist interest in viewing cultural pillars from an oblique angle and unearthing the lost tales of women that were once deemed too trivial to preserve preoccupies many women writers—Elaine Feinstein, Angela Carter, Michele Roberts—and it requires irreverence and flamboyance, rather than po-faced outrage, to carry it off. (31)

Like *Two Women of London*, *Tess* was compared unfavorably to its predecessor:

“Thomas Hardy’s *Tess*, as an example of the real thing in literature, shines through this fashionable trammeling” (Pavey 37); “It is just a pity that the strands of

Tennant's *Tess* do not come together as tightly and effectively as the strands of the noose around Tess's neck" (Foulkes 45). And some critics were outraged by

Tennant's representation of Hardy:

[Tennant] contrives to indict Hardy's misogyny for her own invented excesses. She hangs her case on a highly speculative and partial view of his infatuation with a real-life Tess, happily sliding from fact to metaphor to brazen it out. Who knows what Hardy's sins were? This is a glib piece of iconoclasm. (Matthews 62)

As with *Sisters and Strangers*, the possibility that Tennant's narrator is unreliable or presented ironically is swept aside because of the more controversial questions the text raises about literary integrity, truthful representation, and challenges to canonized texts and authors.

These issues continued to shape Tennant's reputation in the 1990s, becoming more significant with the publication of several literary sequels, the memoir *Burnt Diaries* (1999), and *The Ballad of Sylvia and Ted* (2001), a creative reconstruction of the Plath-Hughes marriage. All provoked controversy. The sequels, written in imitation of Jane Austen and Charlotte and Emily Brontë respectively,⁶ were a far cry from the complex, inventive rewritings of earlier years. One reviewer wondered why:

Tennant should be engaged in what, when it comes down to it, is nothing more than literary ventriloquism. For despite all the fancy arguments about intertextuality and knowing pastiche, the fact is that writing sequels to fabulous best-sellers represents a commercial and artistic safe bet. (Hughes 44)

Specific objections centered on Tennant's sensational plots and unrealistic characters (her representation of Austen's Emma as bisexual, for example), and her faulty reproduction of other writers' syntax and tone: "Tennant's own style is nothing like Austen's"; "Irony . . . is all but absent" (Nokes 23). More general outcry concerned

the *idea* of interfering with canonical texts. In a review of *Pemberley*, Cusk wondered “why it is that we must turn into a soap-opera something which for almost two hundred years others have been content to call a masterpiece” (19). Such objections amounted to a new construction of Tennant’s fiction. Whereas the “sequels” of the 1970s and 80s were upheld as “daring” and “ambitious,” the Austen sequels were mockingly described as “meddling” and formulaic. The reaction was often condescending: “Like previous ‘classic progressions’ by Tennant, [*Emma in Love*] confirms that nowadays the real danger to dead authors isn’t the malicious biography but the avaricious sequel” (Grylls).

“Danger to dead authors” was a motif for Tennant in the 1990s, from her portrayal of Hardy in 1993 to the kiss-and-tell contents of *Burnt Diaries* in 1999. This memoir of an affair with Ted Hughes met with acrimonious criticism, and was followed by outcry over *The Ballad of Sylvia and Ted*. In a review of the latter, Kemp denounced all of Tennant’s work:

Emma Tennant’s novels have often been parasitic, drawing sustenance from other authors’ works. Over the years, she has offered updated versions of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* [*sic*], *Lord of the Flies*, the Faust legend and James Hogg’s 19th-century [*sic*] shocker, *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. Three of her books have been extensions of novels by Jane Austen. *The Ballad of Sylvia and Ted* takes this tapeworm tendency a stage further by not merely attaching itself to other books but leeching onto real-life figures. (“Too Much”)

Many critics felt Tennant had gone too far, and labeled *Burnt Diaries* and *The Ballad of Sylvia and Ted* as an attempt to profit from Hughes’s recent death:

Emma Tennant [. . .] began as a serious novelist, turned to catchpenny ideas such as sequels to Jane Austen novels, and has now hit rock-bottom by selling her joyless memoir of her affair with Ted Hughes. [. . .] We all know by now that the lives of good writers add little to our appreciation of their work—the only possible excuse for such betrayal. But [. . .] Hughes’s wife and his two

children are still alive. That consideration is swept aside by Tennant. She convicts herself of moral shallowness in having the affair, in the way she writes about it and in writing about it at all. [*Burnt Diaries*] is a book Emma Tennant should not have published. (May)

It was testimony to the force of Hughes's reputation that at least one critic blamed Tennant for having the affair as well as writing about it. In interviews post-publication, Tennant justified *Burnt Diaries*: "There has been so much mythologising of Hughes," she said, "First he was a murderer—now he has been canonised, he's a saint. I just hope that my account is a valuable part of putting together the Ted Hughes jigsaw" ("Mistress"). At least one reviewer agreed with Tennant: "when is the appropriate time to publish unflattering portraits? The longer the images of victimhood and saintliness endure, the more savage will be their eventual and inevitable demolition" ("Seedy Twist" 5).

Artistic value, literary recycling, challenging myths, originality and imitation: these were the preoccupations shaping Tennant's publishing history and reception, particularly in the 1990s. Debate over feminism and intertextuality in the later texts, especially the controversial feminist history of *Sisters and Strangers* and *Tess* and the ventriloquism of the Austen sequels, concentrated these issues, distilling their underlying question: where are the borders? When does revision lapse into mere imitation? At what point does the challenge to existing myths and values become a violation? What is the difference between "serious" writing and literary vogues? The 1990s marked new directions in the fiction as well as changes in Tennant's reputation. Paradoxically, these changes reveal what is consistent about the reception of the work. First, there is a growing orientation, within the texts and in reviewers' assessments, toward feminist themes. Tennant has always foregrounded female

characters, and has also written about feminists and the women's movement. This is probably why early academic criticism categorized her foremost as a feminist/woman writer. Second, critics began to explore the question of originality and imitation in relation to Tennant's work. While this issue emerged most explicitly amidst the controversies of the 1990s, it is also relevant to the earlier texts. Tennant was first characterized as a minor writer, then as an experimental innovator, then as a feminist fantasist, and finally, as an innovator-turned-imitator. If reception in the 1990s blurred the boundary between innovation and imitation, it also revealed that perhaps the line was always blurred. For if the revisionist history of *Tess* can be read as Hardy pastiche, then *The Bad Sister* can also be read as pastiche of Hogg or the gothic.

There is a particular dynamic underlying the arc of Tennant's publishing history and the two issues just outlined. The positioning of Tennant's work within a debate about the originality of literary rewritings suggests that reviewers read Tennant into a specific model of influence, one in which literary predecessors exert control or authority over later writers. In this relationship the later writer is assigned a passive role of reception. Influence

presumes a source, an origin, an agency that flows into or acts upon another. At work in the concept of influence is a hierarchical, subject-object binary in which one is the actor, while the other is acted upon. Agency belongs to the originator; passive reception and transformation to the other. (Friedman 152)

Reviews reveal an assumption of this model of influence in their assessments of how successfully Tennant "carries on" particular genres, how faithfully she represents history or literary figures, and how her texts compare with the "original" texts she rewrites. The outrage provoked when Tennant's revisions "go too far" imply a belief

that she has transgressed the rules of a literary tradition or The Literary Tradition. Always, these assumed transgressions center on Tennant's "unrealistic" or "fantastic" additions to an accepted version of a text, truth, or discourse. Thus, *Tess's* demonization of Thomas Hardy is dismissed as "iconoclasm," and its revisionist history as a feminist cliché. The feminist context of Tennant's rewritings is not irrelevant here: at least one reviewer revealed a certain amount of sexism in his condemnation of Tennant, though not Hughes, for entering into an affair. Questions of taste and timing aside, it does seem that a powerful Hughes myth was in place, and resistant to the counter-version of that myth offered by *Burnt Diaries*. Although there are other elements at work here, such as craft (*Sisters and Strangers* is arguably a less inventive rewriting of the Eve story than *Faustine* is of the Faust story), it is perhaps worth considering if resistance to Tennant's rewritings on the grounds of taste and artistic merit mask a deeper, ideological resistance to rewriting in general, or to feminist revision in particular. Yet, if forces of conservatism are at work here, there is always potential for that to change. Tennant's early fiction was initially deemed technically inferior, but revalued relatively quickly. In academic criticism, at least, there has often been a more open-minded attitude toward Tennant's fiction. Such criticism reverses or challenges the positions in the model of influence outlined above. As art critic Baxandall argues:

If one says that X influenced Y it does seem that one is saying that X did something to Y rather than Y did something to X. [. . .] If we think of Y rather than X as the agent, the vocabulary is much richer and more attractively diversified: draw on, resort to [. . .] adapt, misunderstand [. . .] emulate, travesty, parody [. . .] master, subvert, perpetuate [. . .]. Most of these relations just cannot be stated the other way around—in terms of X acting on Y rather than Y acting on X. To think in terms of influence blunts thought by impoverishing the means of differentiation. (59)

A growing body of academic criticism focuses on Tennant as an active force reshaping the texts of her predecessors, and attempts to measure the scope of her rewriting through a wide variety of approaches and discourses.

2. CRITICAL DIRECTIONS

During the 1990s, the expansion of academic criticism on Tennant's fiction coincided with her rising visibility, as her fiction began to be included in literary surveys.⁷

Most critical enquiries develop ideas and questions not fully explored in the reviews discussed above, and can be divided approximately into feminist, postmodernist, gothic, and Scottish approaches. Often these approaches overlap, since they all seek to contextualize how and why Tennant rewrites. Both feminist and postmodernist interpretations assimilate Tennant's gothic tropes to a broader political or aesthetic motivation to write "new stories." Critics identifying Tennant as a modern gothic writer acknowledge the feminist and postmodern implications inherent in rewriting a genre already characterized by sexual themes and self-reflexiveness. Most of these approaches assume the texts' feminist subtext, and several of the articles discussed below distinctly place the fiction in the context of women's writing. A less clear-cut and relatively new approach, however, concerns the Scottish dimension of Tennant's work.

TENNANT AND SCOTLAND

Tennant's national status is somewhat ambiguous. She descends from Scottish aristocracy and spent her early childhood in the Borders, yet has lived in London throughout her writing career.⁸ She has rewritten texts by Scottish writers (Hogg and Stevenson), but also by English writers (Hardy, Austen, the Brontës) and Europeans

(Polish writer Schultz and French writer Mérimée). Her work has been included in both British and Scottish fiction studies, although in some Scottish studies, she has been called an “Anglo-Scot” (Alexander, “Contemporary” 630-32) or “internationalist” (Hagemann 45). Her texts clearly engage with Scotland’s literary history and landscape: *The Bad Sister*, *Wild Nights*, and *Two Women of London*, for example, all feature Scottish characters and settings. Yet, only a few critics have specified the Scottish aspects of Tennant’s work beyond a cursory identification of her literary sources and family ancestry.

In 1984, Malzahn provided a close reading of *Wild Nights* in his study of contemporary Scottish novels. He argued that Scottish fiction typically deployed an “inside/outside dichotomy:”

“Inside” on this plane refers to “the centres of authority,” a position that is reserved almost exclusively for adult males. On the “outside” are those excluded from authority, barred from the centres of power by the biological facts of their sex or age. It is significant that Scottish novelists not only show a preoccupation with conflict between figures of these respective categories, but also tend to favour the latter by making a woman or a child their fictional hero, and their consciousness the vehicle through which reality is interpreted; interpretation implying in this case frequently a fundamental challenge, a basic criticism of rules, rôles and values. (158)

In *Wild Nights*, this dichotomy is dramatized by the opposition of adult and childhood world-views. The text’s child narrator offers a fantastic counter-reality to “‘the too-restricted life’ of a Border gentry trapped in their domestic seclusion” (166).

Observing that the narrator’s “intermingling of fact and fantasy” dominates the narrative, Malzahn writes:

[. . .] the reader is never allowed to be quite certain of anything, neither if a given statement is a fact, a metaphorical interpretation of fact, or pure fancy, nor in the latter cases, whose interpretation or whose fantasy it is. [. . .] the

structural confusion created by such means leaves the reader with an ultimate lack of fixed points from which to decode the narrative. (167)

Malzahn argues that the text endorses this child's viewpoint "as anything but inferior to a normal, rational interpretation of the world; the narrator derides her father and mother for the limitations such a view imposes on their understanding" (168).

Malzahn was not the only critic to identify Tennant's emphasis on imagination as a Scottish trait. In a 1993 essay on Scottish women writers, Anderson wrote that *Wild Nights* creates "a fantastic Scotland of the mind" ("Listening" 181) and in 1997, Alexander noted that Scotland "becomes for [Tennant] a country of the mind, and a powerful source of myth" ("Contemporary Fiction" 631). Unlike Malzahn, however, both critics connected Tennant's imaginative Scotland with her representation of women. Although Malzahn discusses representations of women elsewhere in his book, he barely examines the roles women play in *Wild Nights*. Describing the narrator's witch-like Aunt Zita, he reads her magical powers as representative of "selfish extravaganza and fulfillment," and her death—she is burned at the stake by an angry mob—as the punishment for her transgressive desires (164). Yet he also negates her death, calling her "supposed killing" a "transition from a flesh-and-blood character charged with symbolical significance [. . .] to the *mere* symbolical object used in a seasonal ritual" (167, emphasis added). Reducing Zita to an untrustworthy (because childlike) fantasy of the narrator, Malzahn restores the authority of the "normal, rational interpretation of the world" he proposes the text problematizes. If Scottish novels reverse an inside/outside dichotomy, and *Wild Nights* follows this pattern by prioritizing a child's imaginative perspective and criticizing an adult's logical one, what does it mean that Zita (an outsider as a woman

and witch) is punished by being killed *into* the symbolic, becoming “a human effigy rather than a human being” (167)? If *Wild Nights* is an exception in its ultimate restoration of “inside” authority, Malzahn fails to say so. And his discussion poses another conflict. He observes that the personalities of Zita and the narrator sometimes “appear to become interchangeable” (167): in this way the text’s central characters blur the border between childhood and adulthood, disrupting the structural boundaries of Malzahn’s inside/outside dichotomy altogether. Yet Malzahn fails to address the possible (feminist) implications of this. Is Zita destroyed not for her “selfishness” and “extravagance” but for her ambiguous status between adult and child, and between real and unreal? Is her presence too disruptive to notions of a coherent, stable, linear reality? If we trust the narrator’s viewpoint, Zita’s arrival heralds physical changes in the family’s ancestral home, and the appearance of ghosts—consumptive “daughters of the house” “coughing in four-poster beds” (12).⁹

The supernatural reality that Zita initiates is frequently coded as female: Zita is associated with domestic spaces and nature, with witchcraft and highly charged female sexuality, and with the ghosts of female ancestors. Is Zita a return of the repressed—a liberated, taboo-indulging other to what Malzahn calls the family’s “Brontë-an world of stagnation and secret, unfulfilled longings” (166)? If so, her death at the stake, which marks and punishes her as a witch, is an eradication of a too disruptive, *feminine* other. Malzahn neglects these underlying gender tensions although his discussion hints at them, particularly in his awareness of the relationship with “Brontë-an” precursor texts, such as *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Wuthering Heights* (1847) that use similar gothic tropes in representing women’s experience.

Alexander and Anderson, however, directly address the connections between the texts' Scottish context and representation of gender roles. Anderson traces the Scottish quality of Tennant's fiction to its doubles:

The experience of exclusion or marginalization, and the sense of being a divided self, are strongly present in some Scottish writing. If male Scottish authors have had to contend with difficulties generated in part by a problematic relationship to national identity, language and literary tradition, for Scottish women this experience is compounded by gender. [. . .] Against this background, we may see the interest of some women writers [. . .] in the experience of social and internal conflict and in life at the margins. ("Listening" 171)

She argues that Tennant uses "Scottish scraps"—Scottish texts and tropes, and a Scottish sense of division and marginalization—to explore women's sense of displacement and fracture ("Listening" 180). Anderson explicitly aligns this kind of revision with the challenge posed by *écriture féminine* to "the idea of the 'unified self': "If doubleness is a feature of [*The Bad Sister*] it is a doubleness that splinters further, as if Tennant, like Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, is unpicking binary oppositions to reveal plurality" ("Listening" 177). Alexander also discusses marginalization as both a Scottish and female experience, observing that in interviews Tennant "reflects on the colonised condition of Scotland, and on the sense in which women's exclusion from power places them in a similarly colonised position." Approaching Tennant from this context, she argues that her texts employ Scottish dualism to dramatize "woman's tension between powerlessness and rationality" as "dangerous and destructive" ("Contemporary Fiction" 631). Anderson reads *The Bad Sister*'s Meg as a manifestation of such tension, a representative of "the subconscious, the 'world below the surface'" and the consequences for the "repression of a woman's 'wild side'—with its creative aspect." She poses Meg as an

ambiguous figure, “damaging and distortive,” but also powerful and creative, a representation of the “contradictory forces at work in the female subject” (“Listening” 178). Both critics imply that ambiguity is a central Scottish and feminist quality of the texts. Anderson aligns this “rich plurality” with a feminist rebellion against the dominant (“inside”) order of meaning and language:

According to Julia Kristeva, a woman is “an eternal dissident in relation to social and political consensus, in exile from power . . .”, and taking up Kristeva’s idea of the experimental writer as another form of “dissident”, some critics comment on the shared impetus of women and experimentalists “towards marginalization and indefiniteness; they are in a condition of ‘exile’ from a centred identity of meaning and its claims to a totalized law or truth.” (“Listening” 172)

She also notes recurring references in *The Bad Sister* to “translation” and writes:

It had been suggested that Freud used the term “Übersetzung”, or translation, to describe transposing all the hard work of the unconscious. Word play and challenging puns have their place in [*The Bad Sister*] which explores the unconscious and which is, moreover, implicitly critical of the “received” use of language [. . .]. (“Listening” 180)

Anderson’s and Alexander’s connection of Scottish and female experience with a sense of being colonized and marginalized has obvious parallels with post-colonial subjectivity. Tennant’s puns and Scottish sense of doubleness are similar to the post-colonial strategy of mimicry, which also uses ambiguity and double-voicedness to undermine colonial discourses. Although critics such as Anderson and Alexander have recognized that Tennant’s different kinds of doubleness relate to women’s condition as exiles or colonized subjects in their own culture, this recognition is typically theorized in psychoanalytic terms as a return of the repressed. Often, this return of the repressed is read as a purely subversive force, one that is either resolved/banished (as Malzahn argues), or embodies rage/otherness to achieve a

corrective critique of patriarchy (as Alexander and Anderson suggest). Although Alexander and Anderson touch on the post-colonial situation of Scottish and/or female identity, they assimilate Tennant's plurality into an unambivalent feminist critique. This means that the ambiguities in Tennant's fiction—especially as they relate to Scottish identity and to rewriting other texts—are resolved and categorized, leaving no room for political ambivalence and negating the very same plurality pointed out by Anderson. This type of approach, which suggests that Tennant uses Scotland as a trope for women's social situation, demonstrates how easily the Scottish dimension of the fiction has itself been marginalized as it becomes “colonized” by feminist interpretations. This insistence on assimilating the texts into a corrective agenda prevents critics from theorizing Tennant's ambiguity and ambivalence in relation to rewriting. In contrast, Boehnke has drawn attention to the Scottish context of Tennant's work, and to the doubleness of texts that write back to the canon:

every refraction of the canon is also in some ways a reinforcement of that canon. This aspect achieves particular relevance in the Scottish context, where the establishment of a national literary canon is still going on [. . .] so that this reinforcing element is arguably as important as the subversive one. (66)

While Boehnke's point about simultaneous reinforcing and subversive elements is useful, his argument ultimately assimilates this “double refraction” into a positive narrative about canon formation and inclusion. He concludes, “fragmentation, multiplicity and ambiguity should not be seen as something negative or destructive, but rather as positive, liberating and constructive” (67). This formulation of either/or repeats the problems discussed above, and, while moving toward a theory of

rewriting, ultimately simplifies *ambivalence* (of rewriting, of post-colonial literature) in favor of making an inclusive gesture.

FEMINIST APPROACHES

Like Anderson and Alexander, other critics tend to interpret Tennant's rewritings as feminist critiques of gender roles and images of women. The majority of Tennant criticism is directed toward dissecting these critiques. Amy Levin analyzes sisterhood and identity formation in *The Bad Sister* and Wesley discusses Tennant's constructions of female adolescent psychology. Both critics emphasize the corrective element of the texts' relationship with existing literature. Levin argues that *The Bad Sister* exposes the conflicts of female relationships repressed in realist texts (122-28) while Wesley suggests that Tennant invokes "the 'ghosts' of other stories" to show that "girls, too, have secret lives worthy of fiction" (188). Other critics believe that Tennant's critique is primarily addressed to social structures and discourses. Sellers poses a psychoanalytic interpretation of Tennant's split identities, arguing that her feminization of the double is a critique of society's abjection of the feminine. Schmid offers a similar analysis of social pressures in her article on Tennant's "Sister Hyde" (1997). Yet other critics focus on Tennant's representations of sexuality: Palmer discusses Tennant in three of her studies of representations of lesbianism¹⁰ and Patricia Juliana Smith includes Tennant in her study *Lesbian Panic* in 1999. In many of these writings, Tennant is compared to other postmodernist female writers, including Angela Carter and Fay Weldon; in an article on Tennant's narrative strategies, Birat identifies an earlier model in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928).

Although all of these critics identify the fiction's feminist subtexts and locate Tennant within a tradition of women's writing, they disagree on the success of her critiques. Birat argues that *Sisters and Strangers* undermines its political point:

[. . .] Eve will become a novelist herself. But as novelist she is unable to do anything but reproduce her own situation by writing love stories in which women play a subordinate role. Grandmother Dummer finally reveals that she herself is Eve. [. . .] The story and the moral of the story, which is that Eve can have and tell no story of her own, are essentially at odds. [. . .] Emma Tennant, while [attempting] to foreground the problem of the authority of any text, ultimately subverts this intention by refusing to allow Grandmother Dummer to establish a text of her own. (39)

Patricia Juliana Smith claims that the narrative inversions of *Two Women of London* lessen its impact as social critique:

[. . .] Mrs. Hyde is not the subversive homoerotic creation of a sexually repressed female imaginary but, rather, is a result of male heterosexual domination and interference [. . .]. In this manner, what had been an allegory for social and sexual duplicity in [Stevenson's text] (and thus open to a range of encodings) becomes ultimately a somewhat strained metaphor of multiple personality disorder emblemizing women's socioeconomic woes that effectively bars further interpretation in Tennant's revision. (167)

In 1989, Palmer voiced her first objections to *The Bad Sister*:

[Tennant's] treatment of women's community and lesbian relations contains elements which are downright prejudiced and offensive. She sensationalizes them, identifying them with a lurid world of witchcraft, violence, drugs and sado-masochism. In this respect, she does contemporary feminism a disservice, reproducing the misogynistic stereotypes of femininity popularized by a phallogocentric culture. The novel illustrates, very disturbingly, that the association of lesbianism with vampirism and violence, which is a feature of certain nineteenth- and twentieth-century novels, continues to flourish [. . .] in serious fiction (*Contemporary Women's Fiction* 143).

This was a view Palmer reiterated in 1990 and 1993. In her 1999 study, *Lesbian Gothic*, Palmer develops her argument that Tennant's gothic tropes relegate the lesbian to an abject position, although Palmer also acknowledges the text "adopts a viewpoint that is ambiguous and difficult to define" (32). In *Lesbian Panic* (1997),

Smith objects to Palmer's negative interpretations and argues that Tennant's portrayal of lesbianism is more complex than homophobic vilification:

The Bad Sister is, inevitably, implicated in the values of *The Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, an "historical form of representation" that, as [Eve] Sedgwick has observed, is [. . .] inherently and inevitably homophobic in its mechanisms. (172)

Palmer's readings overlook the potentially ironic dimension of this intertextual relationship, instead condemning *The Bad Sister* as a throwback to nineteenth-century morals. As Smith implies, however, the text's alteration of Hogg's constructions is also a means of writing back to their sexist and homophobic elements:

Palmer fails to note that there are *other* representations of lesbianism and feminism in the novel, representations that function as markers of stability in the ever-shifting dreamscape of Jane Wild's wanderings. (172)

Although Palmer's negative analyses are the exception in feminist criticism, the contradictions between her interpretations and those of Smith stage a debate about the role of the writer who rewrites. Whereas Palmer constructs Tennant as a passive, unknowing recipient through whom the mores of an earlier text and era are perpetuated, Smith defines Tennant as an active force displacing the biases inherent in Hogg's text. Palmer's view evokes a relationship of influence where the authority of an "original" writer is "passed down" to and impressed upon future generations. In this case, the second writer, Tennant, is implicated in upholding canonical forces and authority—emphasized by Palmer's suggestion that Tennant *unconsciously* promotes homophobic stereotypes, as if saturated with Hogg's biases. Here, Palmer's dynamic of influence is one-way, dependent on a linear version of literary history in which new generations are unable to change or reverse the past. Smith's view, on the other hand, both reverses and expands the relationship of influence, locating authority in

Tennant as she undermines and usurps the authority of a canonical text. The dynamic of influence in this case is two-way and multiple. It is interesting that Palmer, in arguing that Tennant perpetuates a problematic poetics of gender, reinstates some well-worn binaries of sexuality herself: that of the receptive, passive female penetrated and molded by an active male agent/artist (echoing the Muse-Artist conceit that Tennant explicitly rewrites in *The Bad Sister*), and that of the authoritative male (however objectionable his authority) and the babbling, incoherent female. These constructions are also implicit in negative reviews of Tennant's rewritings, especially reviews of *Tess* and *Burnt Diaries*. Smith's reversed dynamic of influence, in turn, displaces these stereotypes by *also* attributing authority to the rewriter, thereby placing the female author and her male predecessor on more equal terms. Thus the debate about rewriting and the perpetuation of particular stereotypes points to a broader and deeply politicized one about canon, literary history, and the authority of discourse.

POSTMODERN READINGS

Recycling literary material is part of postmodernism's own rewriting of narrative conventions and literary values. The mingling of different forms, particularly those of "high" and "low" art, is one common feature of postmodern writing. Through unexpected juxtapositions, intertextuality, and metafictional devices, postmodernist fiction often calls attention to the fictionality of the literary text, and by extension, to the fictionality of the discourses—Lyotard's master narratives—that inform the stories literature tells. In this way, postmodernist fiction is deconstructive, but ambiguously so: derivative, circuitous, yet playfully creative, it embodies both what

Barth called first a “literature of exhaustion” and then a “literature of replenishment.”

Ambiguity extends to the themes of postmodernist fiction, with its blurred distinctions between real and artifice, history and fiction, and narrative and game.

That Tennant’s fiction generates similar ambiguities is evident in reviews of her work, but it was not until the 1990s that critics became more interested in the resonances of Tennant’s particular postmodernism(s), beginning with Indiana’s thesis about Tennant’s “hyperfiction.”¹¹ Indiana argues that hyperfiction

has its true roots in the picaresque literature of the 18th [*sic*] century, which chronicles ghastly events with sardonic detachment and tends to dispense with ‘sincerity.’ Its material is often the flotsam and jetsam of popular culture, aporias of mass media, the junk of disposable civilization. Pastiche and parody are at home in the hypernovel. (204)

Feminist critics defined Tennant’s work as a corrective righting (writing) of social wrongs against women, but Indiana is less interested in didactic import than in Tennant’s freewheeling revelations:

Tennant likes distancing devices, interjections that cast doubts about the evidence presented. As a great refashioner of myths, Tennant lets us know whose filter is on the lens.

The effect is often one of observing a second reality behind the carnivalesque surface [. . .]. Tennant doesn’t want to be understood didactically, or simply, since her prodigious talents include a bemused knack for spotting the complexities in simple things, contradictions between the real and the apparent. (211)

Indiana’s metaphor of using a filtered lens to see through borders, assumptions, and surfaces attributes a special perspective to Tennant’s rewritings: sight, insight, “revision.” Widdowson, however, identifies this revisionary quality as having a political function, allowing us to “access the unknown in ‘knowable communities’, construct a history which is otherwise inarticulate” (8). He explains:

[*Two Women of London*'s] literary allusions and jokes; its constant references to philosophies of “doubleness” and “otherness”; its multiple narrators; its purported use of a video-film as one form of “trustworthy” narration; centrally, the fact that the book is [. . .] a revision of an earlier text: all must draw our attention to textuality, to narrative, and to the potent fictions they construct—fictions, for example, which define, categorise and position us as binary opposites, of profound ideological force, in “real life” too: as “respectable/evil”, “lovely/hideous”, “good citizen/bad citizen” [. . .].

Were Dr Jekyll/Mr Hyde *real*? Are Ms Jekyll/Mrs Hyde? Such is the mythic force of text and narrative that the answer must be: yes—they are as real as we are in our social, sexual, racial, ethical subject-positions: it is just easier to see *their* fictionality. (11)

Widdowson's thesis is entirely relevant to the “hidden history” of female experience *Two Women of London* superimposes onto Stevenson's model, and to the position of a writer challenging the mythic power of certain texts and stories. In his article on rewriting, Connor also argues that *Two Women of London*'s repetition and reversal of Stevenson's text enacts an unveiling: “In feminizing Stevenson's version of the split male self, Tennant actually compels attention to the ways in which the apparently absent female is in fact present in his story:”

By making the doubling [of her characters] take place between the two versions of women offered by Stevenson—the degraded and the idealized—rather than within the single person of a man, Emma Tennant makes manifest the latent anxieties about gender that are encoded within *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. (83-85)

Although Connor argues that *Two Women of London* revealed the biases of Stevenson's text, he concludes that the text failed in its revisionist efforts: “Stevenson's fear of reversion *into* the female resurfaces as a fear of reversion *in the female* into pure and unrepresentable ‘evil.’ In reversing Stevenson's premises, Tennant reverts to them” (86). Again, the debate about rewriting and perpetuation, or revision and reversion, emerges. Although these critics, like the feminist critics discussed above, posit Tennant as an active force reworking existing texts and

resisting influence and authority, the question remains whether it is a *successful* revision or a failed one. Does Connor overlook the irony of Tennant's strategies in the same way Palmer overlooks the irony of Tennant's lesbian and feminist caricatures? Given Widdowson's and Indiana's arguments about the text's revelation of hidden histories and artificial constructs, Connor is perhaps too hasty to take the text's reversion at face value as a lapse of principle. Looking more closely, we can see that the text's reversion does dramatize another hidden, and unpleasant, version of women's history: that of women's collusion in their own and others' oppression, the thin line between a monstrous, damaged woman like Jekyll/Hyde and her friend Jean Hastie, a morally upright mother and scholar who shares Jekyll/Hyde's initials, is obsessed with Jekyll and Hyde's relationship, and eventually fosters Hyde's children. It is Jean Hastie, not Eliza Jekyll or Mrs. Hyde, who closes the text, and does so by ventriloquizing Hyde. After Mrs. Hyde evades the authorities and escapes to the Continent, Jean presents Hyde's final statement, a shopping list that ends with the word "KILL." Unlike Stevenson's Mr. Hyde, who is safely banished through Jekyll's suicide, Tennant's Mrs. Hyde lingers on, both as a criminal at large and a hidden side of Jean Hastie. Connor, as Palmer does with *The Bad Sister*, neglects the text's many doubles—signposts to its double meanings and ambiguous representations.

GOTHIC TRANSFORMATIONS

Criticism of the 1980s had described Tennant's fiction as gothic, and this approach was developed in the 1990s with the inclusion of Tennant's novels in gothic fiction surveys such as Punter's *The Literature of Terror* (2: 1996), Palmer's *Lesbian Gothic* (1999), and Cavallaro's *The Gothic Vision* (2002). Punter's analysis of Tennant's

short story “Rigor Beach” identified it as an example of the “new ‘female Gothic’” and centered on Tennant’s patterns of inversion, thus calling attention to the story’s relationship with an earlier gothic tradition (159).¹² “Rigor Beach” depicts a sexual encounter transformed into a necrophilic fantasy. Protagonist Ingrid kills her lover and then decorates his body, creating a beach landscape on his corpse where she plays out her daydream of a seashore holiday. Noting the theme of blankness in modern gothic writing by women, Punter writes:

[Tennant and others] have sought [. . .] to produce an image of woman as blank, as impossible of inscription. If the only message which phallogentrism can inscribe on women is a message of hate [. . .] then the woman’s body and soul must become resistant to inscription. (*Literature of Terror* 2: 192)

“Rigor Beach” features a blank female body projected onto the canvas of her lover’s corpse:

[Ingrid] has found a body into which to inscribe her own picnic, a way of slowing the sands of time, of building sandcastles, of evading the sandman, all the tropes of sand are here used and reused, used as useless; again there can be no desire [. . .] there can be no aim because desire is transmitted direct into the suffering but dead body which is, naturally, the inner death from which the heroine has *already* suffered. (*Literature of Terror* 2: 159)

The lover’s body is redoubled, inverted terrain: the site of Ingrid’s fantasy is also the mirror of her own blankness and inner decay. Punter also argued that the “extreme brevity” of “Rigor Beach” was a “decayed” version of the gothic tale (such as Poe’s), a narrative “in which almost nothing is known by the end that has not already been known from the outset” (159). The narrative’s inverted course mimics Ingrid’s dead-end fantasy, since its conclusion offers no resolution—no progression of events or explanation for Ingrid’s act—only the corpse deteriorating into an ever more putrid state, so that the stench of its “landscape” permeates Ingrid’s home with “the smell of

the sea,” “the rotting weed” (“Rigor Beach” 238). Ingrid’s act blurs the boundary between desire and violation, evoking a gothic deterioration of life and sex into death and necrophilia. The text’s horror is two-fold, provoked first by the instance of Ingrid’s transgression/regression, and second by the text’s maintenance of a mirroring structure of degeneration. Punter’s reading thus implies that Tennant’s gothic creates a cycle in which subject *and* her narrative are locked in stasis, lost in repetition and self-reflection. This recalls Morrow and McGrath’s analysis of Poe’s borderless fiction:

In such a tale climate, landscape, architecture, genealogy, and psychology seem to bleed into one another until it is impossible to distinguish a figure from its metaphors. The coalescence of all these elements sets in motion a process of regression, decay, a collapsing back into a state of primal unity—a death. (xi)

Transgression, inversion, regression, transfiguration: the crossing of borders is a theme of modern gothic fiction, but also characterizes its relationship with earlier gothic texts. Anderson argues that the characteristics of the gothic genre make it ideal source material for revision: “that Gothic, itself arguably a parodic form, is so easy to parody also makes it attractive in an age of parody and pastiche” (“Emma Tennant” 118). She claims that Tennant’s novels:

may be seen in a Gothic fictional tradition, deliberately exploiting its potential subversiveness, yet making visible ‘the socially and politically conservative discourses coded into traditional genre conventions, self-consciously reworking Gothic to explore the construction of femininity, the importance of the visual, and the dominance of the ‘male gaze.’” (“Emma Tennant” 118)

Anderson concludes that Tennant and other modern gothic writers “use tradition yet remake it, playing seriously with Gothic” and

may be seen in the context of postmodernism, although criticising its reduction of the past to images. Their concern with power structures and with

female identity is informed, to differing degrees, by feminist ideas and theory, both using and interrogating ideas of 'sisterhood', literal and metaphoric. ("Emma Tennant" 127-8)

In this light, Tennant's "perpetuation" of problematic stereotypes, as in *The Bad Sister*, can be interpreted as a "serious" strategy of parody. Critical analysis of Tennant's rewriting of gothic conventions typically follows this pattern, finding in her gothic tropes a metaphor for contemporary social conflicts concerning women. Walker argues that "*The Bad Sister* transposes Hogg's story into the twentieth-century world of sexual politics" and claims that "the larger object of Tennant's satire is patriarchal society's fanatical worship of consumerism as Hogg's subject is fanaticism in religion" (144). Anderson writes that Tennant uses the gothic's focus on the visual, psychological, and sexual "to explore the construction of femininity, the importance of the visual, and the dominance of the 'male gaze'" and reveal modern society's "damaging attitudes to women" ("Emma Tennant" 117-18). In contrast, Palmer criticizes Tennant's texts for perpetuating the gothic's stigmatizing association of lesbians with vampirism, and for "reproducing the misogynistic stereotypes of femininity popularized by a phallogocentric culture" (*Contemporary Women's Fiction* 143). She argues: "In utilizing Gothic conventions to interrogate the phallogocentric representation of women as Other, [Tennant] falls into the trap of reproducing and re-enforcing homophobic and misogynistic stereotypes rather than challenging them" (*Lesbian Gothic* 38). Palmer's arguments, like Connor's and Patricia Juliana's Smith's reading of *Two Women of London*, implicitly compare the quality or "success" of Tennant's texts with those she rewrites. If the gothic offers negative representations of women, Tennant offers even more negative ones; if

Stevenson creates a powerful allegory of duplicity, Tennant creates a confusing and inelegant metaphor. This method of comparing Tennant's texts to her predecessors' shifts the focus to evaluations about didactic value and craft, and fails to theorize the intertextual relationship *between* texts.

All of these interpretations stem from different views of rewriting—as corrective/disruptive challenge, social critique, or imitation—but they pose the same problems. First, these approaches marginalize the many ambiguities and conflicts in Tennant's texts. Critics who read Tennant's fiction as an uncomplicated continuation of an established tradition do not attempt more than a cursory examination of the changes Tennant makes to the texts she rewrites. For instance, as Connor points out, *Two Women of London* reverses the original Jekyll-Hyde relationship. Stevenson's Jekyll is the protagonist's real personality; Tennant's Jekyll is a performance, a side effect of drug use. Of course, this reversal plays with the ambiguity surrounding the innate or original self in Stevenson's text: his Hyde is represented as the inner self "hiding" within Jekyll, an evolutionary throwback to pre-civilized origins. Similarly, in *Two Women of London*, it is never clear whether Eliza Jekyll or Mrs. Hyde is the "original" identity. But Tennant's plot change does undermine what becomes a clear-cut morality in Stevenson's novel, its division of Jekyll and Hyde into exclusive categories of conscience and depravity. In contrast, *Two Women of London* reveals that morality, motivation, and blame are frequently contingent, dependent on social circumstances. Some characters feel Eliza Jekyll's behavior is as reprehensible and dangerous as Mrs. Hyde's murderous rage. At the same time, Hyde is presented as both an irrational criminal and a victim of classism and sexism. The problem of

evil's location—in Hyde, Jekyll, or the rapist who haunts their neighborhood?—and its nature—inherent or circumstantial?—circulates through the novel but is never resolved. This lack of closure is reflected in Tennant's transformation of Stevenson's ending: Stevenson's Jekyll decides to kill himself in order to destroy Hyde, but Tennant's Hyde escapes prosecution by leaving the country. Even if the novel's mystery, the cause of Dr. Crane's death, is solved, the evil possibly represented by Hyde is never contained or reconciled. These changes to the original plot generate ambiguity reflected in other levels of the text: its imagery of overlapping spaces, characters' conflicting opinions, double meanings and word play, and the structural undermining of narrative authority and resolution—all elements which the critics discussed above fail to explore fully. To read Tennant's fiction as a straightforward repetition (or unintended perpetuation) of themes and prejudices from earlier texts is to erase these instances of difference and transformation. Meanwhile, dismissing ambiguity as a "bar to interpretation" simplifies multiplied meanings to a technical flaw, and overlooks repeated tropes of gothic obscurity and doubleness in a text that both "obscures" and "doubles" its precursor. Further, to trace "what is gothic" to the replication of authoritative generic conventions is to approach intertextual strategy as source study in a schema of one-way influence, and not as a process of transposition in Kristeva's sense, a constant shifting of meaning. This is not to say that Tennant's fiction does not relate to the issues of the debate on influence, or that we should always validate what Smith sees as flaws of execution. But to accept these rewritings at face value is to run the risk of reducing them to mere imitation. This not only strips Tennant's texts of authority, originality, and meaning before they can even

begin to destabilize such notions, but also neglects entirely the double- or multi-voiced quality of rewriting.

This leads to the second problem with the critical readings above, which is that they ignore or overlook Tennant's intertwining of gothic conventions with representations and tropes of reading and writing. For instance, both *The Bad Sister* and *Two Women of London* include mysterious, illegible manuscripts in the style of early gothic novels, where such documents often center on inheritance and family secrets. In later gothic texts, such as *Dracula* (1897) and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, this trope is used again in the form of letters, diaries, newspapers articles, and other official documents, to lend an artificial authenticity to the text. In Tennant's novels, this convention appears in updated form as videotapes, phone messages, interviews, and "expert" reports collected and presented by the texts' editors. Although each account centers on the events at hand—in both novels, a case of murder and mistaken identity—they offer conflicting information. Further, each individual account contains yet more texts. Jean Hastie's journal, for example, an important piece of testimony in the Jekyll/Hyde case, includes observations of Mrs. Hyde alongside notes for Hastie's research project, a book on theories of original sin. Similarly, Jane Wild's journal in *The Bad Sister*, central evidence in the Dalzell case, is prefaced by excerpts from Tsvetaeva's "Insomnia," refers to Conrad's novel *Chance* (1913), alludes to fairy tales, and refers throughout to signs, films, and advertisements. This story-within-a-story framework is a typical convention of the gothic novel, and is associated in Tennant's texts with the difficulties of reading—of locating and stabilizing meaning. The instance of another gothic convention, the plot

device of the dream sequence, assists the transformation of reading/interpreting/seeing into writing/creating/imposing meaning. While watching a film, Jane Wild begins to see her memories played out on the screen. The reality of the cinema is transformed into a Scottish hillside where Jane attacks her half-sister; the scene foreshadows Jane's later crime in the "real" world, determining the outcome of her text, the journal, and Tennant's text, *The Bad Sister*. Passive viewer in one theatre, author of new stories in the other: the consumption of meanings is transformed, via a gothic dream-like scene, into the writing of meanings that transform reality's landscape. In both *The Bad Sister* and *Two Women of London*, other gothic conventions, including secret passages, underground or claustrophobic spaces, *doppelgängers*, and ruinous landscapes are similarly intertwined with such transformations, and with the reading, writing, and even destruction of texts. In both novels, the shifting nature of meaning, the difficulties of interpretation and articulation, center on the question of identity and character. Who is Mrs. Hyde? Who is "the bad sister?" Who does Jane become? In both novels, the protagonist undergoes a journey to find herself; in both novels, she is accessed from a distance, through layers of texts, and it is unclear what sacrifice and endpoint this journey entails—what it means and what she, ultimately, might mean.¹³

3. AMBIGUOUS AND AMBIVALENT SIGNATURES: A MODEL FOR READING

If existing criticism does not fully account for indeterminacy in Tennant's texts, how do we read Tennant's rewriting? The texts' ambiguity is apparent in the tropes of doubleness in the texts, but also in these figurations of writing, reading, and

interpreting, which draw attention to the fictionality of *all* fiction, the textuality of text. Anderson notes: “Novelists who both use *and* criticise past art, who both work within *and* abuse convention, risk being implicated in the models they employ.

Displaying self-awareness [. . .] is one countering strategy” (“Emma Tennant” 118).

Anderson raises Irigaray’s point about women’s writing strategies. Irigaray writes:

To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. It means to resubmit herself [. . .] to ideas about herself, that are elaborated in/by a masculine logic, but so as to make ‘visible’, by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible. (124)

Anderson points out that in *Two Women of London* Hyde kills the supposed rapist with the handle of an umbrella that is decorated like a parrot’s head, “that arch-mimic” which “makes visible” the text’s “‘doubled’ and ambiguous nature” (“Emma Tennant” 119). As Anderson argues: “The real mimic is Tennant herself, whose double-voiced response to Stevenson’s ‘master-text’ is deadly serious in its gendered themes, yet shot through with satiric humour” (“Emma Tennant” 121). The parrot, like the text’s many doubles, is a signpost, the text’s signature—not of the “Author” Emma Tennant, but of a double-voiced agency which articulates Stevenson’s text again, twice, through imitation *as well as* inversion. In “Rigor Beach,” this agency surfaces in Ingrid’s “writing” of her fantasy on the body: gothic but inverted gothic, an image of herself that, as Punter argues, is also a resistance of inscription, a blank with doubled meaning. Other texts call attention to writing, interpretation, and rewriting more explicitly. *The Bad Sister*, for example, directly refers to Hogg’s text and incorporates a multiplicity of texts, centering on Jane’s journal. This is headed by the Tsvetaeva poem “copied” by Jane on the flyleaf:

In my enormous city it is night
 as from my sleeping house I go out (46)¹⁴

The blank spaces in the poem are repeated in Jane's journal as her narrative makes inexplicable leaps and turns. The journal is also marked with references to reading and writing: Jane repeatedly feels she is being "translated" and describes herself as "a new genetic pattern like a neon sign in cuneiform" (54). Jane is being "translated," "read" by the editor, who "edits" the documents to "write" a text of his own. His text counters Jane's and makes *The Bad Sister*, as one critic put it, "completely slippery" (A. Levin 31). Jane's journal remains a blank to the editor. Of the poem, he writes: "what it signified to her I don't know" (44). His uncertainty is repeated at the end of the novel, where he considers Jane's supernatural version of events, but finally substitutes a less plausible but more "logical" explanation. The implausibility of his conclusion, and the fact that it fails to solve the murder case, forces attention to the journal's blanks once more: reading between the lines, is there a second meaning?

This trickery might be coded as a gothic trope, and there are grounds for categorizing all of Tennant's texts as gothic, since many of them allude to gothic novels, employ conventional gothic tropes, and impel the destabilization of borders that is the gothic's hallmark. But even if the texts' ambiguity can be reduced to a gothic trait, it also applies *to* the gothic genre: as Anderson and Punter show, Tennant's revisions interrogate traditional gothic paradigms. So Tennant's texts are gothic *and* anti-gothic. In this way, her gothic is not merely an updating of themes, but a strategy. Gothic texts do not pass through an anonymous writer, such as Barthes's scriptor ("Death" 145), but are actively selected and transformed, and transformed in a specific historical, cultural, gendered, and embodied way. The

ambiguity of the texts, theorized in gothic and Scottish readings as a specific literary strategy, and at least implied as such in feminist and postmodernist interpretations, points to an *agency* manipulating intertextuality rather than an anonymous pawn in an endless field of texts, or a passive recipient subject to the influence of predecessors.

If the texts resist models of influence as well as poststructuralist theories of anonymous intertextuality, how do we read Tennant's revisions? Friedman supplies a useful model for reading in her adaptation of Nancy K. Miller's method of overreading. Friedman concurs with Miller:

The writer is not just a figure, a trope as ideological construct. A "subject" already exists before he or she is reconstituted (again) in a text. That subject sets in motion and plays some part in the textual process of his or her own re-making. (147)

Neither critic debates the central tenets of Barthes's and Kristeva's formulations of intertextuality: both Friedman and Miller agree that the death of the author, as authoritarian and sole source of the text's meaning, is "long overdue" (Miller, "Arachnologies" 271). Both also agree "there are always other words in a word, other texts in a text" (Friedman 147). What they problematize is the erasure of the subject who writes with agency, and the imposition of anonymity as an essential quality of all writing.

The postmodernist decision that the Author is Dead and the subject along with him does not [. . .] necessarily hold for women, and prematurely forecloses the question of agency for them. Because women have not had the same historical relation of identity to origin, institution, production that men have had, they have not, I think, (collectively) felt burdened by *too much* Self, Ego, Cogito, etc. Because the female subject has juridically been excluded from the polis, hence decentered, "disoriginated," deinstitutionalized, etc., her relation to integrity and textuality, desire and authority, displays structurally important differences from that universal position. (Miller, *Subject* 106)

Using a metaphor of web (text) and spider (writer), Miller poses her model of arachnology that combines connotations of influence with those of intertextuality:

By arachnology, then, I mean a critical positioning which reads *against* the weave of indifferentiation to discover the embodiment in writing of a gendered subjectivity; to recover within representation the emblems of its construction.

[. . .] Arachnologies, thus, involve more broadly the interpretation and reappropriation of a story, like many in the history of Western literature that deploys the interwoven structures of power, gender, and identity inherent in the production of mimetic art. (“Arachnologies” 272)

Miller’s practice of overreading is one of “reading for the signature”: “to put one’s finger—figuratively—on the place of production that marks the spinner’s attachment to her web” (“Arachnologies” 288). Miller defines the “representation of writing” loosely: in her analysis of the Arachne myth in “Arachnologies,” she examines weaving as an act of writing and signature, and women’s tapestries as texts.

Overreading *Two Women of London*, we find a metaphor of writing in Jekyll’s parrot, which functions as a signature of doubleness in the text and points to a network (a “web”) of figurations of writing and intertextuality, but an intertextuality that is, as Clayton and Rothstein put it, “an activity, one centered in an embodied and gendered agent, not a shifting field of references” (29).

Outlining the “the ‘death’ and ‘(re)birth’ of the ‘author’” in critical debates, Friedman hypothesizes that:

Psychoanalysis would suggest that the suppression of the author in poststructuralist discourse of intertextuality would lead to a return of the repressed. The debate about intertextuality, in other words, may have a ‘political unconscious’ [. . .] a narrative about the repression and insistent return of agency and the author within and through language. (161)

Friedman does not seek to restore the author as “Author,” but rather to point to “the return of the signature and *historically specific subject* into the discourse of

intertextuality” (173, emphasis added). In this way, she expands the applications of Miller’s theory:

For Miller, women writers and readers are gendered subjects in history who partake of this ‘deliberately oblique’ political intertextuality.

Miller’s “political intertextuality” offers a model, I want to argue, for reading the political in the textual and the intertextual not only in women’s writing, but also in men’s writing; not only in white writing, but also in the writing by people of color; not only in “first world,” but also in “second world” and “third world” writing. (Friedman 159)

Although Miller’s “arachnology” can be problematic, as I discuss in the next chapter, her method of overreading, especially when expanded beyond the context of women’s writing, as Friedman has done, has useful applications for the interpretation of rewriting. The chronology of Tennant’s reception reveals that her texts have been underread—both in the sense of not read thoroughly and in Miller’s and Friedman’s sense of not read for the signature. The remaining chapters of this thesis overread Tennant’s rewriting in a way that returns the signature to her texts, but that also accommodates and more fully explores the texts’ ambiguous and ambivalent agency.

¹ Published under the pseudonym Catherine Aydy. Submitted for the Formentor Prize in 1964, but denounced by judge Albert Moravia as “a symbol of the decadence of British writing today” (“Emma Tennant” 422-23).

² Titled in later editions as *The Crack*.

³ Not all reviews were positive. Ryle also felt the magazine lacked “editorial coherence” and another review called the *Bananas* anthology “dispiriting” (“Short List Memoirs” 40).

⁴ Faber issued paperback editions of *The Crack* in 1985, *The Last of the Country House Murders* and *Hotel de Dream* in 1986, *The Colour of Rain* in 1988 and *The Bad Sister* and *Woman Beware Woman/Wild Nights* in 1989. There have been two recent anthologies of Tennant’s work: *Travesties* (1995) and *The Bad Sister: An Emma Tennant Omnibus* in 2000. Both included *The Bad Sister* and *Two Women of London*.

⁵ London: Grafton-Paladin, 1991. Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁶ The Austen sequels include *Pemberley: the Sequel to Pride and Prejudice* (1993), *An Unequal Marriage: Pride and Prejudice Continued* (1994) *Emma in Love: Jane Austen's Emma Continued* (1996), and *Elinor and Marianne: A Sequel to Sense and Sensibility* (1996). The Brontë sequels are *Adèle: Jane Eyre's Hidden Story* (2002) and *Heathcliff's Tale* (2005), a sequel to *Wuthering Heights*. I consider these texts alongside *Felony: The Private History of The Aspern Papers* (2002) and *Tess* (1993) in Chapter 5.

⁷ See for example Bradbury 388, 444; Hagemann 36-46; and L. Sage 618-19.

⁸ Tennant's first autobiography, *Strangers: A Family Romance* (1998) describes her childhood in the Borders and the Tennant family's mock gothic home.

⁹ New York: Harcourt, 1979, 12. Subsequent references are to this edition.

¹⁰ "Contemporary Lesbian Feminist Fiction," *Contemporary Lesbian Writing*, and *Lesbian Gothic*.

¹¹ Tennant was mentioned briefly in Patricia Waugh's 1989 study, *Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern* (24).

¹² "Rigor Beach" first appeared in *Bananas* 1 (Jan/Feb 1975): 15-16 and in 1991 was anthologized in *Revenge* (Saunders) and *The New Gothic* (Morrow). Subsequent references are to Morrow.

¹³ I explore these questions further in Chapter 3.

¹⁴ The lines Jane copies out are from Marina Tsvetaeva's "Insomnia," first published in 1923 and translated into English in 1971 by Tennant's friend and *Bananas* colleague Elaine Feinstein (Tsvetaeva 16).

CHAPTER II

EMERGENT SIGNATURES: TENNANT'S FEMINIST HISTORIES

“Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for woman, is more than a search for identity: it is part of her refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society.” (Rich 18)

“[. . .] a longing for escape, and a terror of it [. . .]” (Tennant, “Rise of Capitalism” 178)

For Nancy K. Miller, Rich, and other feminist critics, writing is linked to the survival of the self-determining subject, and especially of the woman writer: the very act of writing establishes or reclaims agency. As Miller suggests, this is especially true for those who are “decentered, ‘disoriginated,’ deinstitutionalized, etc.,” such as women, for whom the postmodern transcendence or loss of history and power does not necessarily apply. When texts represent “the so-called crisis of the subject,” Miller argues, “that performance must then be recomplicated by the historical, political, and figurative body of the woman writer” (Miller, *Subject* 107). But what happens when one writer “borrows” from another writer’s text(s)? Is subjectivity then doubly complicated? I would argue that in the situation of rewriting, it is not the crisis of subjectivity, but rather the question of agency and its relationship to writing that becomes foregrounded and recomplicated. This can be read in the double-voicedness of Tennant’s texts, which transforms itself over her work into an unstable multiplicity of meaning and a poetics of ambiguity and ambivalence.

Miller’s approach suggests a certain parallel with narratives that refocus attention on the marginalized to offer a different version of events, as in Jean Rhys’s

Wide Sargasso Sea (1966) or Angela Carter's rewritten fairy tales in *The Bloody Chamber* (1979). In her discussion of women's rewriting of myths, DuPlessis names this strategy "displacement:" a shift in attention "to the other side of the story" that keeps the original tale intact, but replaces its representations of women with new, more positive ones (108). Miller's arachnology, like Rich's "re-vision," has a similar effect. Like displacement, overreading and revision guarantee a narrative of emergence or triumph, since by definition they bring to light what has been hidden and articulate what has been silenced. Both strategies restore agency where it has previously been denied, or at the very least, act as a mouthpiece for those who cannot speak. In this way, the new stories produced by rereading and rewriting are assimilated into a recovery project wherein the very acts of reading and writing again are identified as a positive, corrective outcome. This overarching narrative of progress (the fight for "survival") leaves little room for ambiguity and uncertainty, and perhaps even less, for the ambivalent subjectivity of the subjects being spoken for or recovered.

In her discussion of rewritings of myth, Purkiss points out that recovering female viewpoints to create more positive role models or narratives within existing discourses fails to truly challenge those discourses. In terms of feminism, this can mean succumbing to the reverse sexism that Tennant parodies in her depictions of delusional, rhetoric-driven radicals, and to the dangerous "ghettoisation"-by-gender she discusses in interview ("Women Talking" 119). Purkiss argues that rewriting can instead "extend to complex engagements with the very place of myth in literature" and myth's status "as a buried truth of culture" (445). DuPlessis argues that rewriting

as “delegitimation,” in contrast to displacement, achieves an “active rupture of a narrative order” informed by and emphasizing the recognition that “stories are ideologies that shape our sense of reality—indeed, that stories themselves can colonize” (112). An effective delegitimation of discourses would problematize their status by revealing the contingency of their truth and power, rather than simply shifting truth and power to “the other side of the story.”¹ But displacement is more complex than it seems: it does not merely replace one narrative with another, but obscures (represses) the fact that it upholds exactly what it seeks to dispel. Delegitimation, therefore, acknowledges its own double-voicedness in a way that displacement (although it *is* double-voiced) does not. I labor over these differences not to reinforce Purkiss’s hierarchy of rewriting strategies in which delegitimation is understood to be “more subversive” and therefore “more progressive” than displacement (such a hierarchy misses the point of delegitimation and collapses the two strategies into a matter of degree), but to point to the double-voicedness of *both* strategies.

While Tennant’s fiction undeniably focuses on women’s experience and criticizes patriarchal oppression, her narratives do not always restore agency to female figures or offer a positive counter-narrative to problematic stories. More significantly, they challenge notions of progress and recovery, not least in their chronological confusion, which suggests a traumatic collapse of past and present, and in their lack of narrative closure, which refuses a teleological endpoint. Tennant frequently ironizes whatever counter-stories her text offers, transforming displacement into a delegitimation of *all* discourses. If we approach Tennant’s

rewritings as a delegitimation of patriarchal discourses, we should not ignore the way they also destabilize their own (feminist) subversions. If we approach the texts as displacements, we should not interpret their outrage and anger entirely at face value, but understand they are also a mask concealing (thus pointing to) a range of anxieties and political ambivalence. In undoing one repression, displacement effects another.

In this way, Tennant's rewritings foreground and play with what Bakhtin calls dialogism and Kristeva renames intertextuality. Dialogism is "the epistemological mode of a world dominated by heteroglossia" (the multiplicity and interaction of discourses), where "one's own words" are at least double-voiced, "half-ours and half-someone else's":

[. . .] not so much interpreted by us as it is further, that is, freely, developed, applied to new material, new conditions [. . .]. More than that, it enters into an intense interaction, a *struggle* with other internally persuasive discourses. [. . .] The semantic structure of an internally persuasive discourse is *not finite*, it is *open*; in each of the new contexts that dialogize it, this discourse is able to reveal ever newer *ways to mean*. (Bakhtin 345-6)

According to Bakhtin, this is especially true of the novel, which is structurally and functionally a dialogic genre. Characterized within by heteroglossia, it also acts as a centrifugal force dispersing or "decrowning" existing official discourses.² The novel is "hybrid":

an utterance that belongs, by its grammatical (syntactic) and compositional markers, to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two "languages," two semantic and axiological belief systems. (305)

In her reworking of Bakhtinian dialogism, Kristeva emphasizes that Bakhtin poses a relational model in which "literary structure does not simply *exist* but is generated in relation to *another* structure." This model is based, Kristeva argues, on Bakhtin's

“conception of the ‘literary word’ as an *intersection of textual surfaces* rather than a *point* (a fixed meaning), as a dialogue among several writings” (*Desire* 64-65).

“Literature,” or “the novel,” becomes “the literary word” (Kristeva sometimes uses “the poetic word”) while “dialogue” is renamed “writing:”

Bakhtin [. . .] does not see dialogue only as language assumed by a subject; he sees it, rather, as a *writing* where one reads the *other* (with no allusion to Freud). Bakhtinian dialogism identifies writing as both subjectivity and communication, or better, as intertextuality. (*Desire* 68)

Dialogue, or “writing,” is always bound up with reading, in a process Kristeva names “intertextuality:”

The *text* is therefore a *productivity* [. . .] it is a permutation of texts, and intertextuality: in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another. (*Desire* 36).

Kristeva’s theory of intertextuality maintains Bakhtin’s concept of the novel as a site of converging discourses, but subtly alters the meaning of some of his terms. Thus, Bakhtin’s centripetal and centrifugal forces become, respectively, “monological” and “dialogical.” The presence of both “dialogical space and monological space” in the novel lends it its “ambivalence.” The dialogic novel becomes the “poetic word” that is “polyvalent and multidetermined” and, like Bakhtin’s “decrowning” novel, “adheres to a logic exceeding that of codified discourse and fully comes into being only in the margins of recognized culture” (*Desire* 65).

With rewriting, the dialogic interaction of discourses, or the ambivalence of texts, is foregrounded because the dialogue between two texts/authors is foregrounded, and because the text that rewrites is itself double-voiced (explicitly parodic, ironic, punning, or mimicking, and/or implicitly ambiguous, haunted by meanings it seeks to repress). Rewriting, at least for Tennant, is not as

straightforward as displacement, but that is because displacement is not as straightforward as it pretends to be. Bakhtin's dialogism and Kristeva's intertextuality inform my approach in this chapter, and allow me to find in Tennant's texts a different story about emergence, progress, and empowerment from those identified by earlier reviews and criticism. It also allows me to illustrate that Tennant's rewriting operates through simultaneity and contradiction, and through the ambiguity and ambivalence I call her signature. Thus, while I follow Miller and Friedman's method in tracing the emergence of a (subversive, female) writing agent in "The Rise of Capitalism and the Fall of Woman" (1971), *Wild Nights*, and *Alice Fell*, I do so to emphasize the ambiguity and ambivalence of this emergence, rather than reading it as a positive, progressive process of recovery.

The first section of this chapter establishes how Tennant uses intertextual strategies in an early essay, "The Rise of Capitalism and the Fall of Woman," to displace and delegitimize a patriarchal version of history. I show how Tennant offers a countering feminist narrative, but finally destabilizes the efficacy its corrective, revisionist agenda through the emergence of a writing agent with an ambiguous voice. In the second section, I examine Tennant's representation of the female subject in her novels *Wild Nights* and *Alice Fell* to show how these texts repeat the story told in "The Rise of Capitalism and the Fall of Woman," yet advance and/or complicate it through contradictory representations of emergence and repression. Finally, reading these three texts together, I uncover a composite narrative that rewrites historical progress and individual self-determination through a poetics of ambiguity and ambivalence.

1. INTERTEXTUAL STRATEGIES

DIALOGIZING HISTORY IN “THE RISE OF CAPITALISM AND THE FALL OF WOMAN”

Mingling autobiography, historical account, and fiction, Tennant’s essay posits the “Family Business” as an analogy for the rise and fall of “Capitalism.” Rereading nineteenth- and early twentieth-century primary sources, Tennant investigates the growth of a patriarchal consumerist society. She quotes John Tennant’s description of the family’s eighteenth-century Glasgow home:

The dining room was large [. . .]. Solidity had been the aim of the decorator, and *he* had made a bull’s eye. The mahogany tables, the pillars [. . .] and the mantelpiece betrayed no weakness, no infirmity of delicacy anywhere. [. . .] The only other room which was used was the smoking room. [. . .] This small room retained an unmistakable odour of stale cigar smoke [. . .]. (174, emphasis added)

She looks at the family tree, and notes its exclusion of women:

The all-male family tree starts with the apparently celibate John Tennant, born in 1725, and continues, like the ghosts who appeared on the Heath to Macbeth, in single file; presumably we are meant to sketch in the woman [*sic*] as best we can. (175)

A 1906 letter to *The Times* after Charles Tennant’s death also makes no mention of wife or daughters: “*He* created in turn a fortune, a family, and a country home” (175, emphasis added). Tennant finds an apt symbol for the intertwining of patriarchy and capitalism further in “Tennant’s Stalk”, the factory smokestack erected in 1841. She reproduces the *Mirror*’s description of that year:

. . . when completed it will be elevated upwards of six hundred feet above high water level [. . .] and will be an object of magnificent simplicity. It will present to the traveller a landmark of colossal dimensions. The Stalk will be about the height of the great Pyramid of Egypt. (176)

Twenty years later, the 1861 *Official Illustrated Guide* to Glasgow describes the Stalk’s continuing domination of the city landscape:

In looking to the south-west we take in Langside, where Queen Mary lost her kingdom, and the ruin of Crookston Castle, beneath whose walls she rested in feverish anxiety while her sad fate was being sealed. Turning our eyes to the north-east, we are confronted with the mammoth Stalk. This huge monster is continually pouring *his* sooty treasures into the region of the clouds. (176, emphasis added)

The Stalk, as Tennant notes, “remained one of the chief landmarks of the City for the next eighty years,” a symbol, like the masculine design of the family dining room and the all-male family tree, of centralized male power: “Seldom can man have celebrated the omnipotence of his phallus with such gusto” (176).

Tennant’s main purpose is to discover why, in the mid-twentieth century, a daughter of the family remained ignorant of the family business’s workings: “Brothers and male cousins grew up and became ‘tired after the office.’ I still knew nothing; and had to go back a century to find out why” (173). Tennant’s investigation of her family’s history develops into a broader evaluation of capitalist institutions and the gender roles imposed by them. The factory, which employs more women but pays them less than men, and its school, which teaches boys and girls “to go into the world very differently prepared to perform their parts on its stage” (177), limits working women’s opportunities:

Had the education [at the factory school] enabled the girls to escape their future as women labourers, they would have had either to become industrialists themselves or to disappear, like the women of the middle classes, into a limbo of silent dependence. It goes without saying that neither course was open to them. (177)

The only female name Tennant finds in the family records is that of a factory worker, Robina Arrol, who was also John Tennant’s mistress. John Tennant’s mother forbade their marriage: “it was only for that—there is no record of Robina distinguishing herself in any way, or even of having any control over the factory—that she is

remembered” (177). The institution of the middle-class family, such as that of the factory owner, dictates the alternative of “silent dependence” for the non-working woman, an existence characterized by degrees of helplessness:

Her only interest was what accrued from the shares invested in by her husband; and her only power over it was to spend it on dresses and smelling salts. Fainting fits became *de rigueur* [. . .] vapours and hysteria were only to be expected. (178)

In evaluating these institutions, Tennant uncovers another account of capitalism, a narrative of *female* power and desire in an economy of repression and marginalization. The historical texts that write the rise of capitalism into a narrative of social progress are written by and about men, and link male power inextricably to the forward march of history. But Tennant inserts into this history women-centered commentary. She notes that in 1861, John Duguid Milne wrote about the listlessness of middle-class women:

[. . .] there is something far from satisfactory in the position of women in the middle ranks. [. . .] there is entailed upon her a constant sense of alienation from society, and the still more oppressive sense of a purposeless existence: [There has] arisen an estrangement of the mind and character of the sexes [. . .]. (178)

Tennant retorts:

anxious though he was that the women of the middle classes should join in Industry, because Industry was Progress [. . .] Milne was unable to see that it was Industry itself that was the cause of their troubles. (178)

Tennant notes William Acton’s comments in his *Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs*: “the majority of women (happily for them) are not very much troubled with sexual feeling of any kind” (185). Tennant observes that this is Acton’s only examination of female sexuality; the rest of his study is devoted to men. She draws out the ramifications of this centralization of male sexuality: women are

divided into good wives “happily” lacking sexual feelings and “indefatigably sexy courtesans” serving men (185). The lure of financial security and the shame attached to excess sexuality prevent the “good” women from seeking a potentially freer life as a mistress or courtesan: “They allowed themselves to be categorized as ‘good’ women, and in return for a smell of the mounting capital [. . .] they died in childbirth, suffered from the vapours and were bored” (185). But the good women are not what they seem: their only power linked to capital, they use it to gain a foothold in the system:

So the “good” women stayed at home, and became tyrants there. There was no other way out; and no woman has described the process so well as Ivy Compton-Burnett. Her ancient matriarchs, at the time they appear in her books at the end of the nineteenth century, are as old as the Industrial Revolution itself, and having been dehumanized by it proceed to practise the most subtle sadism on their families and dependants. They may have owned shares; but they have had no share in life in the outside world. Their creative instincts have turned to petty tyranny; the distributing and withholding of inherited capital their only power. (186)

Thus, the good wives become both victims and “Monsters [the industrialists] had created in their homes” (186). Thus, Tennant’s commentary runs, women are split into good and bad: “The good woman became increasingly a consumer: her home stuffed with useless gew-gaws and whatnots [. . .]. The bad woman, although she managed to squeeze jewels and carriages out of her protector, became commodity” (187). But this system means all women are both consumer and commodity. They must participate as consumers for any kind of happiness or security by “buying” it—bargaining with “protectors,” filling their homes with goods. Yet they can only obtain such forms of happiness from men who “protect” and essentially control them. In this way, Tennant’s counter-narrative shows how capitalism, while facilitating

progress for the (wealthy) male, turns women into powerless objects, owned goods providing the industrialist with his needs for happiness: a wife to run his household and bear children, a mistress for sexual pleasure, and cheap labor for his factories. The counterpoint of the two voices in the essay—pro- and anti-capitalism—form a dialogue of different worldviews. This dialogism broadly characterizes the essay: the tension between the two tones provides its plot and themes.

Tennant's use of a dialogic structure to displace the discourse of "Capitalism" also incorporates a delegitimation of generic categories assumed to be factual or reliable, such as historical or biographical accounts and primary sources, that shape history ("History") into a "truthful" discourse. Tennant's "essay," like many of her novels, contains traces of different texts. Some of these traces are specific and explicit, such as Tennant's quoting of newspaper articles, novels, personal accounts, letters, and travel guides. Others emerge from the essay in less explicit ways. It is a biographical and historical text, but it is also fictional, shaping history into a plot, historical figures into characters, and locations and events into tropes. Alongside the presentation of actual historical documents, we find fictionalized representations of history. Writing about the all-male family tree, Tennant attempts to fill in the blanks:

[. . .] we can dole out some shameful vices as well as a little intelligence here and there, or skill with the needle. There might be a mad first wife in an upper room, like Mrs. Rochester. Or a deformed male firstborn child, a threat to primogeniture, kept fed and cleaned in a sealed-off wing by distracted and numberless daughters. (175)

Describing the great Victorian homes, Tennant offers a different view from that of her ancestor, John Tennant:

By the late Victorian age houses [. . .] were known as Shangri La and Balmoral. Goblins and other figures of nightmare fantasy started to appear on

the front lawns, reflecting the half-child, half-fairy existence of the woman who lurked behind the lace curtains. Architectural adornments suggested Indian palaces, elephants' feet marched into the hall to hold the umbrellas. The man returning from the office would find himself in an outpost of the British Empire; what his wife thought as she co-habited with the tiger's head and dusted the Assegai has never been recorded. Like a slave in Rome, she watched the spoils of the subjugated countries in silence. Her status was nearer theirs than her master's. (181)

Tennant also alludes to books by and for women:

Travel books for women of the mid-nineteenth century reflect a longing for escape, and a terror of it: the most surreal, written by the only woman to penetrate to the heart of Mount Athos, begins, 'First I cut off my breasts, then was rolled from head to foot in a rug.' (178)

She quotes Mary Shelley's account of the dream that inspired *Frankenstein* (1818), in which Shelley sees a "student of unhallowed arts" bring a corpse to life and then fear his creation—a monster Tennant calls this "terrible Machine" (183). Shelley's dream about the anxiety of creation paradoxically takes creative form in *Frankenstein*. In that novel, Frankenstein does not destroy his monster, but the monster destroys Frankenstein's wife. Tennant calls Shelley's description of her body—"lifeless and inanimate, thrown across the bed"—a "prophetic vision of woman's struggle to exist in the Machine Age; and her death at its hands"; sixteen years after Shelley's dream, "the Monster had come to life: the Industrial Revolution was under way" (184).

Tennant's inclusion of these fictional texts creates a dialogic element in the essay between a discourse of historical truth and a discourse of the imagination. This binary is associated with other oppositions: between real (verifiable, tangible) and unreal (unseen, suggested at), acknowledged and repressed, high and low, male and female. Her inclusion of fictional texts creates a female counter-narrative of

subjugation, regression, and repression that displaces the male narrative of self-assertion and progress.

TRANSPOSITIONS: FROM HEROINE TO WRITER

It is significant that this fictional, low, female counter-narrative is specifically coded as gothic. Alongside Tennant's Stalk, protruding into the skyline, we see "Langside, where Queen Mary lost her kingdom, and the ruin of Crookston Castle, beneath whose walls she rested in feverish anxiety while her sad fate was being sealed" (176). The image, taken from a guide to Glasgow, juxtaposes the modern industrial world with the old feudal one. In the context of Tennant's essay, the juxtaposition becomes a literal one of construction and ruin, protrusion and burial: healthful, progressive male industry contrasted with the "feverish" female facing death. The image of Queen Mary is a gothic one: "feverish anxiety" has connotations of madness and/or disease (dis-ease), and the "ruins" "beneath" which her fate is "sealed" recall a tomb. Tennant's description of the Victorian house with its "figures of nightmare fantasy" reflecting the life of the woman within is an image of the gothic domestic space, with its baroque, emphasized surfaces concealing a repressed and horrifying reality. In her imaginings about the family tree, Tennant alludes directly to Mrs. Rochester, Brontë's gothic madwoman in the attic, and describes "numberless daughters" caring for a deformed infant in a "sealed-off wing." Enclosed and/or secret spaces are gothic tropes, as are secrets centering on taboos such as incest, deformity, and madness. Tennant's reference to Compton Burnett's "ancient matriarchs," like the reference to Mrs. Rochester, is an allusion to deformed femininity in particular, and to gothic novels' association of deformed physiognomy with evil. Tennant's quotation of

significant passages from *Frankenstein* draws out its classic gothic themes of transgression and violence, particularly violence to women. The excerpt from a women's travel guide, depicting a woman mutilating herself in order to reach Mount Athos, again suggests transgression (traveling where women are not allowed) and the violent punishment that may accompany it. The travel guide, Tennant argues, reflects women's "longing for escape, and a terror of it," invoking the gothic, which generates terror through the mix of fear and awe that is the sublime.³

Miller's point about the "body of the woman writer" is pertinent here. It is, after all, because of Tennant's subject position as a woman that she "knows nothing," and therefore begins rereading and finally rewriting history. The essay's dialogism is harnessed to this gendered context, and becomes a narrative of emergent female agency achieved through rewriting. At the center of Tennant's new history of capitalism is "Woman," the "heroine" of the essay, transformed from textualized blank (the daughter who knows nothing, a nameless space in the family tree) to *retextualized* heroine (the madwoman in the attic, the victim of Frankenstein's monster), to the novelist who engenders such transformations (Shelley, Brontë, Compton Burnett), and finally to the agent taking over the narrative and her own subjectivity: Tennant, who goes from knowing nothing to writing everything, from heroine to writer. But this positive counter-narrative is strewn with other female bodies, too: interred, decaying bodies, confined bodies, deformed bodies, *gothic* bodies. These gothic tropes code the text's displacement as a "low" counter-narrative to official histories: Tennant's counter-version of history is not factual but imaginary, not told through reliable primary sources but through the conventions of fiction, and

popular, women's fiction at that. This other story is symbolized by trite, fantastical décor and organic (even rotting) natural landscapes, not by solid classical architecture and technological machinery of "colossal" proportions. Yet, these tropes, particularly the gothic ones, also point to the hybridity and dialogism inherent even in Tennant's countering narrative. The woman in the travel guide is key to this, since her mutilated body concentrates the gothic's mingling and juxtaposition of opposing emotions (fear and awe, "terror" and "longing"), and manifests the grotesque that Stallybrass and White identify as the "transcoding" of those "[p]oints of antagonism, overlap and intersection between the high and low" that "provide some of the richest and most powerful symbolic dissonances" in a given culture (24-5). The grotesque reveals that the underside of repulsion and horror is desire: "These low domains, apparently expelled as 'Other,' return as the object of nostalgia, longing and fascination" (191). The proliferation of tropes and figures of the "low" in Tennant's text illustrate how "what is *socially* peripheral is so frequently *symbolically* central" (Stallybrass and White 5): the phallic symbol of Tennant's Stalk, the tokens of imperialism at the heart of the industrialist's home, and many gothic female bodies dominate this historical/cultural landscape, showing that progress *is also* conquest and subjugation of sexual and racial others.

Tennant's dialogizing of the history of capitalism thus foregrounds the "contradictory nature of symbolic hierarchies" (Stallybrass and White 4). This complicates the essay's narrative of displacement as a means to agency, since that narrative *also* becomes double-voiced, as seen in the essay's conclusion: if the high and the central is intertwined with the low and the marginalized, the reverse is also

true. Tennant's final image depicts capitalism transformed from the "March of Progress" into an illogical and self-defeating cycle:

But the race can get out of hand. Woman-as-consumer is told by men what she must consume. Men race against each other to sell it to her. And a moment comes—the circle is complete—when the salary of the man just won't stretch. He is selling her the goods and providing the money to buy them at the same time. What can the woman do? Of course: we can see the answer in Godard's film of suburban Paris, *Une ou Deux Choses que Je Sais d'Elle* [sic]. She can take up part-time prostitution! And the husband, returning to his modern flat in the evening, will gaze wonderingly at the new stereo . . . can another man have spent some of HIS salary on that? (188)⁴

This final vision of "Capitalism" is one of regression, of a system falling apart. It opposes earlier images in the essay: the Tennant mantelpiece which "betrayed no weakness" and the industrialist-as-God with his massive machinery. But it is also ambivalent. If "Capitalism" is clear about its own victories, and the central role of male creative prowess in its success, Tennant's conclusion is undecided about where triumph lies. Has the woman in this scenario outwitted her husband, finding an advantage in her double role as mistress and wife? Or is she doubly perpetuating the ownership of women? Does her husband assert himself, imposing "HIS" authority as the Final Word? Or has the system already engineered his downfall, with the woman's lover usurping his place? The narrative voice mockingly ventriloquizes the husband, but the unclear message destabilizes even that mocking voice. Is this parodic, or does a patriarchal voice really close this text, silencing/repressing a female-centered gothic narrative as it is supplanted by another male text claiming to know a thing or two about women? Here, dialogic double-voicedness becomes something more complicated: ambiguity and ambivalence that overflow tone and structure to shape the essay's final plot turn of plot, the outcome of history itself.

Ultimately, “The Rise of Capitalism and the Fall of Woman” is not a narrative about capitalism but a narrative about the way narratives get written. Tennant’s explicit agenda is to reread the story of capitalism: she “had to go back a century to find out why” she knew nothing. In the course of rereading, she uncovers a gendered dialogic tension and by outlining this dialogue of masculinist and feminist history, she begins herself to *rewrite* the story: not only countering the “truths” of “Capitalism” with other meanings, but countering ways of telling and knowing meaning with other ways. This revisionist project would work as a simple juxtaposition of “male” and “female” history and language were it not for its final ambiguities, which ultimately defer meaning and closure and suspend the text in the process of transformation (transposition). In the end, *her* story is not about (or not only about) a feminist gothic counterpoint to masculinist history, but about the way one language, narrative, or text can overtake another, how sign systems are endlessly transposed into different ones.

2. REPRESSION AND REWRITING IN *WILD NIGHTS* AND *ALICE FELL*

Although taking very different form from Tennant’s “historical” and “biographical” essay, *Alice Fell* and *Wild Nights* are also about history. *Alice Fell* is set in a country house during the 1960s. Alice Paxton’s birth in 1957, on the night the Suez Crisis is announced, initiates a new life in the house of the Old Man, one marked by seasonal cycles, power struggles between genders and generations, and Alice’s series of “falls” from infancy to childhood and adolescence. These falls into new phases replicate Alice’s fall into Wonderland and her journey through the looking glass in Lewis Carroll’s stories (as discussed below, *Alice Fell* also represents a mirror scene), but also allude to “low” genres, such as children’s stories, fairy tales, and nursery rhymes

to create a counter-narrative to “high” artistic, philosophical, and psychological discourses that tell the official version of history.⁵ *Wild Nights* is also set in a country house, isolated in a northern valley at mid-century, where an unnamed child narrator chronicles the tension between the adults around her. The child’s viewpoint attributes a magical quality to everything, so that animosity between relatives is played out as the tempestuous shift of seasons, and the powerful personality of her Aunt Zita creates fantastical, physical changes in the house. Here, as in *Alice Fell* and “The Rise of Capitalism and the Fall of Woman,” ghosts from the past haunt neglected rooms, and the landscape takes on symbolic resonance, playing out repressed events and emotions. The passion conveyed in Dickinson’s poem “Wild Nights” (1891) erupts through Zita’s magic, disrupting the repressive, ordered world of the North.⁶ But, as discussed below, *Wild Nights* also recreates the hesitancy in Dickinson’s poem: the lines “*Were* I with thee” and “*Might* I but moor” (emphasis added) suggest intense desire *and* its frustrating deferral. As in Schulz’s *The Street of Crocodiles* (1934), which inspires *Wild Nights*,⁷ this weird, wonderful, magical world has a dark underside that prevents fulfillment and joy. “At the heart of the malevolent,” Cynthia Ozick writes in an essay on Schulz, “crouches the father” (225). The same father, though his malevolence is less obvious and less personal, crouches at the heart of *Wild Nights*.

At the center of both novels is the heroine emerging from the ways of the past into self-awareness and self-assertion: in Alice’s case, she struggles against a future predetermined by the old order, while in *Wild Nights*, the narrator’s magical Aunt Zita counters the repressive life of the north with excessive, uninhibited flights of the

imagination and the unconscious. Although writing does not figure as explicitly in these texts as it does in “The Rise of Capitalism and the Fall of Woman,” allusion, reading, weaving, fantasizing, acting, and other tropes do represent the “texts” that haunt these novels’ houses, and the possibility for their revision. In *Alice Fell*, for instance, the Old Man repeatedly finds comfort in a tapestry depicting his female ancestors:

The Blue Women had been such a time without freedom that their faces and limbs, once sewn in supple lines, had grown stiff and brittle. A group of young women they had been once [. . .] who had sung at the piano downstairs and been worshipped from afar, and even then the freedom of their age taken from them and the tapestry closing round, the exact place allotted mercilessly in the *petit point*, with live children and dying children in bright colours [. . .]. There was no way of knowing [. . .] whether the Blue Women could feel the shock of a birth of a child in the house. (23)⁸

The Old Man wants “nothing to disturb the silence and calm of the Blue Women” and for the new life embodied in Alice to remain on the other side of the house. But the presence of the child *does* have an effect on the tapestry, on the way the women “feel” and on the way the Old Man “reads” it. When Alice’s toy woolen ball rolls into the room, the women look at it with knowledge of Eve’s fall, and with their own desire for temptation:

[The ball] hung innocently above them, in the shape of an apple. But they already knew that it brought trouble—from the other side of the house, from the new womanhood that had burst out there—and the women stirred, uneasy in the embroidered glade. They had been there too long, and had fulfilled too many expectations: of langour, repressed desire, and maternal devotion; and they reached out their hands to the woven fruit, as if they wished it would fall to them, and reveal new knowledge. (25)

When the Old Man witnesses Alice’s “first fall”—into an underground bomb shelter that locates her childhood in the context of a paranoid post-war reality—he finally

accepts “the reality of her being in the world,” and names her Persephone. This instigates his new understanding, figured through a rewritten landscape:

[He was] made thoughtful by the great confusion of things around him all happening at the same time: the cater-wauling on the downs that was birth-shriek to the new age, the end of him and the end of the line ushered in by a child that was female and, despite the changes he could see coming so clearly, unlikely to have any other choice than that of falling. (32)

Acknowledging Alice’s also existence causes him to reread the tapestry. Where before he had seen only “silence and calm,” now there is loss and repression:

He no longer knew if the women in the tapestry [. . .] had also fallen, from lack of fulfillment, lack of love or ambitions realised, into their attitudes of woven despair. (33)

Where before the Old Man had disassociated the daughters of the Blue Women, his relatives Molly and Pam, from the tapestry, now he sees the generations of women as being connected:

He saw [. . .] that Molly and Pam had fallen too in their effort to be independent, to be new. Their faces were hollow with children refused. Under the bright shingle, their mothers’ minds raced, and tossed them against the cliffs of insecurity, domestic catastrophe, divorce. And on their slim legs, as they danced, and fell, and drank and smoked, the tides of the years’ fashions went up and down, in hemlines that had more meaning than their lives. (33)

Alice’s birth affects the meaning of even this woven depiction of the old world: like the spring landscape outside, it reflects a new story for women, for good or bad—and a story that *includes* women. In *Wild Nights*, the house itself serves as a kind of changing text, “written on” and reshaped differently by its inhabitants, and read by the narrator as a story of the dark past and its hold over life in the north. Although these figurations of reading, writing, and textuality differ, and vary widely even within each text, Tennant’s two novels can be overread as different versions of the

story told in “The Rise of Capitalism and the Fall of Woman.” In all three texts, Tennant uncovers a dialogue of patriarchal and feminist histories, a past where women’s desires are repressed and their lives shaped by prescribed roles, and a possible future where the repressed can return to free desire and allow women to write their own stories.

THE RETURN OF THE REPRESSED I

In both *Alice Fell* and *Wild Nights*, the heroine figures the return of the repressed. In *Alice Fell*, the Old Man wants to ignore Alice’s birth but cannot:

The Old Man, despite his efforts to sit in distant rooms or to forget the coming of the child altogether, was caught by it in the end. For the moon, in going into Mrs Paxton’s room, and down into the fork of the ash tree, was reflected that night into the Old Man’s bedroom window. Before he could wake properly and stop it, he saw the film the Moon played: in light conducted from the ash tree, the spool of the birth was played relentlessly [. . .]. (18)

Just as Alice’s presence forces a rereading of the Blue Women tapestry, it also restores a previously repressed female order to the house, upsetting patriarchal domination. The Old Man’s dominance is first upset by the midwife, who ignores his pleas for service and displays seemingly magical forms of power while helping Mrs. Paxton give birth:

Mrs Grogan laughed when she was asked to produce ice. She was doing different things with water: drawing hot clouds from the kettle which turned to tears on the walls, pressing towels damped with the precious hot water, folding newspapers that took a sudden boldness at the water’s touch. [. . .] Mrs Grogan flung open the kitchen door before leaving.
“Go and get it for yourself,” she said. (10-11)

Mr. Paxton’s role is also diminished. As Mrs. Paxton gives birth, Mr. Paxton paces by the river and feels “his absolute lack of necessity” (15). The landscape becomes a changed text he cannot read:

Mist took away the borders of the river and changed it to sea.

Mr Paxton looked out in expectation. [. . .] He was the last man who could read the writing of the old world. Mud under his feet changed to sand, and the reeds, dipped in the ink-black sea, wrote for him on the white sand. The floating strands of mist took the messages out over the water again, and still Mr Paxton peered, hand over his eyes, a man lost at sea in the mist. (15-16)

He is locked out of the bond, forged in childbirth, that physically and psychically connects mother and daughter so they seem to be one:

Mrs Paxton saw a fairy feast, tightly enclosed behind her red, throbbing eyes. [. . .] In the clasp of her body, she felt feet tramp through halls where the roof was pulled down and down. Soon the roof would come right down on the tables, and crush the metal spoons, and then she would be shot out, like a woman from a cannon, into the void. (13)

This new world, centered on Alice, is an all-female one shaped by Mrs. Paxton's body and its own order of time. Alice's waving fingers "couldn't even move in time with Mrs. Paxton's clock, which measured a day completely at odds with the child's" (19). Her eyes follow the woolen ball hanging on her cot, "the white sun which rose in the east at the last bar of the cot, and set behind Mrs Paxton" (19). She "woke every hour to new days, and dreamed through them, and then plunged into night again, making a calendar with whole months that would never be recalled, and anniversaries between each suck at the breast" (24). This new time marks both the new maternal order of the house, and the new culture burgeoning outside it:

At this time, when England was trying to hold on, to keep what remained to it of the imperial dignity of the past, the first beat of a new sound came over the downs and the Old Man stood aghast at the window. He heard wailing, and a totemic beat, as the first sound of men brought up not to fight came in its loud lamentation from the woods. (26)

The ghosts of the house, remnants of the old order, are edged out. "The immortals," preserved in the Old Man's childhood scrapbook, "rose" and "transformed the house,

just as they had formed the new age into which they had been born” (38). Freud, Lenin, Joyce, Picasso, and others

walked in the house, and the shadows from the ash tree outside came in the first rays of sun of the new spring and made libraries and laboratories, and orchestras in the creaking of the old house and the tossing of leaves on the ash tree outside, as they grew and unfurled in the sun. (38)

The “immortals” go immediately to Alice and stare “in great perplexity into the crib.”

But when the Old Man stops reading his scrapbook, they disappear into history again:

They might never have been heard of by the Paxtons, and certainly there was no mention of them in the paper Mr Paxton brought his wife [. . .]. They might have been a figment of the Old Man’s imagination—but the house was nervous with them when they walked in it—and it seemed they had a fear that the child would destroy the world they had made around them. (39)

As spring arrives, Mrs. Paxton and Mrs. Grogan’s daughter Ella clean the house, dismissing “Freud’s pinstripe trousers” and Picasso’s “mass of angles” (49), and making a “great round nest of the house. Mrs. Paxton made the nest by pressing herself against the walls as she scrubbed [. . .] and with her breasts pushing and battering the obdurate corners into shape” (51).

But the men in the house cannot tolerate this female-dominated atmosphere.

Mr. Paxton dislikes “all this circularity”: “[h]e felt he would never escape the roundness,” the swollen, overflowing river, and “the house like a balloon” (52). In this rounded, female, spring world, Mr. Paxton comforts himself with visions of linearity:

He knew the long ridges of cloud in the sky would in the end curve, and that the world was a sphere, but he preferred to deceive himself, to imagine those long strands of cloud going on into infinity, parallel lines which would march him far from the maternal order, the terrible roundness of life in his ruined house. (52)

He decides to obtain “the child he deserved and had expected, a twelve-year old son” (45). He hires a boy named William, and together they build a “fortress,” a platform for pageants and plays, in the garden. This construction work undoes Mrs. Paxton’s power over the house: “[w]ith every nail that went in to the scaffolding, she heard the grim, square ending of the house she had tried to build” (58). The round nest for mother and daughter is transformed back into straight lines, into a “fortress” containing Alice. This allows the Old Man and Mr. Paxton to envision the wedding of Alice and William, the Old Man’s “likely successor” (59). To pass the time until the wedding can occur, the time during which Alice will grow up, the Old Man builds a dollhouse with effigies of the future couple. This impending reality of Alice’s marriage changes the world created by the mother-daughter bond:

[Mrs. Paxton], too [. . .] looked forward to the wedding of William and Alice. Her own nest, which she had tried to stick from earth and saliva, and the glutinous tears from her eyes, had failed completely. At that time, all she wanted was to see her daughter grow up and go away. And she, too, tried to dispose of this time—by looking into the pages of magazines for brides, and trying to forget the failure of her nest [. . .]. (60)

The father’s triumph coincides with Alice’s final glimpse of her mother’s power:

[. . .] she watched a line of sunlight come into the scrap of mirror [. . .] and fall on Mrs Paxton, distant and minute by the boiling kettle. The sun moved on to the mother, a strong yellow beam [. . .]. Then it went altogether [. . .] and Alice’s mouth still gaped open at her mother standing there: at the power of the woman with the phallus of the sun between her legs; the woman who had carried two deaths in her, her own and the child’s. (64)

As soon as Alice recognizes power (the phallus), Mrs. Paxton’s rule ends; her power dissipates and both she and Ella become “like funerary statues set to stare out over water at sand” (65).⁹

Over the early years of Alice's childhood, both the Old Man and Mr. Paxton fight to contain and control her. The Old Man invites his cousin George to stay. Puppeteer, toymaker, and designer of *trompe-l'oeil* patterns, George imposes complex decorations and "elegant emblems" (72) over the house. He draws Alice into a world of elaborate games, where she is spellbound by his powers:

In the days of later summer, George had almost completely triumphed over the house and the progress of the child, and there was a sense of waiting for the scream, for some sound from her, to show she was still more than one of the automata constructed by George [. . .]. (73)

Ella watches Alice to see if she will play messy games and break plates as she used to, if she will "read the broken china pages, the blue scrolls and leaves in utter innocence of what she had done," but

whether she was in or out, she appeared hardly to know the difference. She had been taught to walk with care, and nothing broke as she went past. [. . .] Alice obeyed each law that had been set out for her. (73-74)

George

began to take precautions to ensure that Alice would never change, would never be able to go into the next stage of life. He laid out her days in a hopscotch, with whole squares vanishing as she hopped over them, and nights coming up in a black dust on the chalk. [. . .] She didn't know that she might never leave George's clasp and that she would try to do so. And that was his battle, his determination to keep her forever in his rules. New wonders were invented—and she took to them with delight. (74)

Unable to return her to a messy, bodily infancy, Mrs. Grogan instead attempts to "drag her into maturity, away from the Egyptian games that sprang up in every room" by educating her about sex (83). But it is the turn of summer to autumn that brings Alice out of George's control and into a growing awareness of her (soon-to-be sexualized) physicality. As the nights grow longer, the shadows of George's puppets

joined together—until they were all one, and every jerking limb or pointing shoe had sunk in altogether—in a mass grave of shadows, the night coming up in the earth from the other side of the world. Alice took her mother's hand and went indoors. (86)

As winter approaches, George's games take on gothic, predatory undertones: "On these sudden dark evenings, with the wind moaning in the passages, [Alice] was afraid to run alone in the Old Man's part of the house" (86). Angry at being abandoned, George punishes Alice by jumping out at her from dark corners to

chase her until the screams brought Mr Paxton running with a broom. Perhaps the Old Man's cousin knew what he was doing when he entered into the wind and came moaning after her in the passages. Or he may have thought one game as good as another. But when he caught her, she screamed. (87)

Once George's spell is broken, Alice becomes disobedient, in the first sign of adolescence. She pierces her ears, sneaks into town, and gives William "long glances" (93). Mr. Paxton disapproves of this new, sexually aware Alice. He catches Alice and Ella dancing to music from the radio, but

there was nothing he could do about the secret, alien dancing. Nor could he stop his daughter from smiling at him with red lips, lips as red as the holly berries Mrs Paxton saw as she slept, dreaming of the childhoods of winter. Mr Paxton saw a face in snow-white powder, and red, red lips. He scowled back at her [. . .]. (95)

Meanwhile, no one can hold back the changes outside the house:

New ideas and sciences kept the Great Men at a distance. [. . .] they thought they might be properly dead now, overtaken by this new age they would never be able to understand. Mrs Grogan frowned at tales of cloned people and infants that would spring from test-tubes. Even babies would no longer be delivered in the usual way. She walked less firmly than before, for she too was unsure if the world would have a name for her, in a few years' time. (96)

Mrs. Paxton falls asleep by the road one day, and soon

her vision of the old Christmas in the house as it had always been, since the Old Man's father and mother lived there [. . .] soon faded and was gone. The guitars that could be heard when the wind was in the north were plugged in

now. [. . .] Beautiful, moving pictures gave a fashion display of war, suffering and pain that Mr Paxton could summon [. . .] with a prod of his finger. He liked the TV pictures—but he had no wish that his daughter should dance to the new music. (94)

A hedge of thorn grows around the house, which Mr. Paxton cannot cut down. Like a fairy tale princess in a tower, Alice watches from the attic for a sports car. Five years later, it arrives and Alice leaves with the driver, Joe, for the “magnetic circle of Soho” (177). Colored in vivid red that contrasts with the blue of the old family tapestry, troped through low fairy-tale imagery that displaces the high discourses of the house’s Victorian and modernist ghosts, Alice’s desire emerges against the forces that wish to make her another daughter of the house. Like that other Alice’s fall into a topsy-turvy Wonderland, the falls in Tennant’s novel situate her protagonist within different systems of logic, rules, and power while simultaneously symbolizing *their* fall as the world outside the house changes.

In *Wild Nights*, the return of the repressed is embodied in Aunt Zita. When Zita visits at the end of summer, “there were changes everywhere”:

The days outside, which were long and white at that time of year, closed and turned like a shutter, a sharp blue night coming on sudden and unexpected as a finger caught in a hinge. The house shrank; the walls seemed to lean inwards [. . .]. (9)

Zita sends autumn leaves flying everywhere, “leaves like scraps of torn cloth on the floors at Aunt Zita’s feet, aisles and pews of the cathedrals choked with them, as if the roof had blown off and they had settled in the ruin” (26). Her presence is marked by the “power of wind,” which “choked the burns with leaves and silenced the dynamo” that provides electricity to the house (47). The narrator’s mother cannot understand why the lights dim:

My poor mother! She still lived in the age of cause and consequence, of foreshadowings and outcomes, and she couldn't see the connections between Aunt Zita and the fading lights. (15)

She is also blind to the fire that surrounds Zita—"as she was continually consumed and resurrected by the flames she lived bloodlessly amongst them" (14): "Her fire was like one of those natural but magical phenomena, the wandering flame on a march. But my mother and father [. . .] fetching paraffin lamps, saw nothing at all" (15). Zita brings a different order to the house, rewriting the landscape and "pull[ing] back the past" (21): the sibling bonds and rivalries of previous generations, old family scandals, and hints of paganism and witchcraft rise to the surface of life in the valley. This creates an atmosphere oscillating in time between the post-war years, the Victorian era, and a more ancient age. Autumn becomes a season of fantastic, midnight entertainment as ghostly maids dress Zita in gowns while "the north wind waited outside her window, as fat as a full pillowcase, a broad, icy back which would take her to every country, to every ball and café, to anywhere she could stave off her boredom" (20). At these balls are "follies and the ruins of temples and a wild glade where Aunt Zita could summon up the fire spirits if she felt in the mood" (27). In the valley, Zita writes new boundaries and marks, blurring the border between the world of the living and dead:

Already the mists were coming down, first in thin furls separated by purple strips of heather, so that the base of the mountain seemed to be detached from the ground and to have become a great tapestry, a menacing wall-hanging striped with flares of dim purple. Beyond this fabric was the land where Aunt Zita's family lived. (35)

She speaks with her dead relatives in "vowels and inflections" that are "far away and incomprehensible" to the narrator (34), reviving the "clubs" she once formed with her

deceased elder brother, where they liked to “speak in secret languages” (42). She changes the landscape from a summer setting to an autumn one, with storms that leave “the stones on the square grey houses clearly demarcated, as if a child had gone over them in the night with a white pencil” (46).

Meanwhile, the narrator’s Uncle Ralph, an engineer and scientist building a device to make the house rotate, avoids Zita: “He feared the effect she could have on his machines, with her casual, wonderful powers, and he had run from her room once [. . .] in terror at her methods” (19). He refuses to eat the food brought to him, claiming Zita

had turned it to frogs when he had taken it in, and he had had to throw it out again. Of all things, Uncle Ralph most hated metamorphosis. He believed only in science—so did my father—and the two of them would spend days on end in Uncle Ralph’s ticking room. (20)¹⁰

Zita usurps the mother’s power in the household, bringing her own childhood back to life:

Already, as they ate [. . .] her old playmates, were arranging themselves in the house in her schemes and patterns [. . .]. Some of the rooms, which had seemed boundless to Aunt Zita as a child, were now taking on gigantic proportions and were filling with the animals and several-headed monsters of her early dreams. My mother was no longer in control of her own home, of the house she had been told was her home since her marriage to my father. (16)

She also brings back the history of the family’s ancestors. On her arrival,

[p]ale women, known only to Aunt Zita, would be found coughing in four-poster beds [. . .]. The money that had built the great revolving house, and the iron dust in the air, and the thick curtains and sinuous drapery which had more vigour than the women who lived among them, had killed the daughters of the house. (12)

The dimmed rooms bring back

the tedium of the long evenings of the nineteenth century. Caught in their unchanging lives, the daughters of the house played the piano, and coughed, and read poetry aloud in dying voices. Nothing could ever happen to them. Boredom tapped at the window. (17)

Just as Alice's birth highlights the Blue Women's boredom and uncovers their secret desires, so too does Zita's presence allow forgotten or repressed realities to proliferate. Going to the nursery, she summons her older brother, killed in World War I, from the design in the wallpaper. Defying the religious scene above the mantelpiece, and the photograph of her saintly sister Thelma, she seduces him, consummating her illicit adolescent desire for him. In the surrounding hallways, "the women of earlier centuries shifted and creaked in their silk dresses and pinioned hats" (43), as if disturbed, or perhaps stirred with desire themselves.

Embodying the repressions of the past, both Zita and Alice "write" the unconscious of the house over the landscape, weaving a tapestry that reveals the limited lives of its daughters, brings the dead back to life, and revives secret languages and desires. As in "The Rise of Capitalism and the Fall of Woman," the return of the repressed is also staged in the texts' emphasis on the magical, the personal, and the domestic as a counter-story to history measured by large-scale cultural events: history is compressed into these rambling, haunted country houses, where it can be rewritten. *Wild Nights* repeats the story of "The Rise of Capitalism and the Fall of Woman," the shift of one age into another, but continues the arc beyond the Victorian age and into the post-war years. *Alice Fell* takes the story even further, beginning with the end of the British Empire during the Suez Crisis and forecasting the massive cultural upheaval of the 1960s and 1970s. In this way, the three texts progress chronologically, and with increasing focus on the development of

the female subject and her psychology, so that *Wild Nights* looks back at Zita's childhood and influences, while *Alice Fell* depicts every stage of Alice's identity formation. Yet the texts do not operate teleologically in this order: as an endpoint, *Alice Fell* portrays a less developed subject, with much less agency, than *Wild Nights* does. Alice more passively *embodies* rather than enacts change. Her growing sexual and awareness symbolizes the changing world around her. Zita, on the other hand, is presented as actively uncovering what has been repressed, much like the writer in "The Rise of Capitalism and the Fall of Woman." In fact, *Wild Nights* often adopts the critical tone of Tennant's essay, and is set in a mock-gothic Victorian house similarly embellished with gargoyles and sumptuous furnishings, and decorated with "the stone guns and flying buttresses of mid-nineteenth-century capitalism" (11).

Strangers to the region

heard the machinery, the turning wheels of my uncle's latest invention as he strove, year after year, to turn the whole edifice around so that it would dance on a pivot like an elephant on a ball. [. . .] But the strangers saw only a great monument to the Industrial Revolution. My uncle's invention had no more strength than a sewing machine, and a good deal more frivolity. (11-12)

But in a significant way, the story told across all three texts resists closure. All three narratives, while suggesting that the heroine has achieved or is on her way to achieving agency, the power to write her own text upon the world, also posit ambiguous endings. In returning the repressed, both Zita and Alice instigate another repression, one that qualifies the texts' narrative of an emerging subversive and self-determined female subject.

THE RETURN OF THE REPRESSED II

Zita's power over the house is temporary and inconsistent. Throughout her stay, she is challenged by the narrator's mother and her sister Thelma. When Aunt Thelma comes, the two sisters fight over the house and valley: "In the stern clouds, grey as fuselage, I saw shreds of nights, brought on early by Aunt Zita's impatience to leave the house, get away from Aunt Thelma, and visit the ball" (60); "Aunt Thelma had shrunk the lake already, and squeezed the valley in her iron fist" (61). Thelma undermines the validity of Zita's magic, transforming it into child's play, while at the same time reinforcing the Victorian atmosphere Zita seeks to dispel:

At these times of strain, when half the house had a pious, austere air, and the William Morris printed curtains and carpets glowed with Aunt Thelma's sanctity, and the chairs grew tall-backed and uncomfortable and pressed in with admonishing arms, Aunt Zita's domain took on a tatty, theatrical look, like a child's cardboard theatre. The hall, with its christening scenes and the stained glass windows [. . .] took on a more delicate appearance, as if the Gothic were true Gothic and the stone masons and sculptors, as they wrought the thin arches and crusader knights, had been true believers. The clumsy imitation that my father's grandfather had put up, the travesties of purity and faith in the coy, Victorian gargoyles, were transformed by Aunt Thelma. (61)

When the family ghosts appear, the narrator's mother uses them against Zita:

My mother looked around the room, and [. . .] puckered her lips and assumed a saintly expression. These people—whom even my father must have sensed vaguely, because he moved restlessly in his chair [. . .] came only when it was time to welcome Aunt Zita. But my mother knew them well enough by now. In her way, she could be as strong in her martyrdom, and her sense of virtue, as Aunt Zita with her wilfulness and her fire. My mother took up her sewing. This always infuriated Aunt Zita, who was made nervous by the number of pale, unresisting women in the room, and who wanted my mother to talk to her, to prostrate herself before her greater power. (18)

Later, the mother traps Zita in a vision of her older brother's baptism. The ghosts of old aunts with "yellow curls and white faces, chaste, swooning in suppressed desire in

the mock medieval castle of their dragon father” resent and envy Zita: “They were as enclosed as Zita now, but envying her journeys to the ends of the earth they looked at her without love or understanding” (30). Zita is “disturbed by having her family handed to her like this. The horrible limitations of her childhood returned to her, and she squirmed on the hard bench, narrow as a coffin lid, under the family coat of arms” (30). Towards the end of Zita’s visit, as her power wanes with the changing season, other ghosts appear: the narrator sees her great-grandfather entering the locked room next to Zita’s, where he had imprisoned his daughter Louisa for falling in love with a shepherd. Louisa becomes insane in this room where the “flowers on the wallpaper, with their round, curly heads, were frightening and oppressive” (75-6). The proximity of this room to Zita’s suggests that the dominating forces of her childhood, forces she seeks to escape, are not far off, and could also lock *her* away. The allusion to Gilman’s *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892) also suggests madness induced by containment, or at least the danger of being labeled mad for transgressing family rules. And Zita *does* meet censure as a witch as winter approaches. Her transformation of the valley makes the villagers nervous and resentful:

Dark came in now like an unexpected blow before the beginning of a fight, knocking the looming house, and the village and greenhouses above, the chicken-run below and the school half-escaping out of the valley, into an obscurity that wasn’t even relieved by stars. And the wind, enormous in the rightness of its time [. . .] seized and tussled with the gaping clouds, banged them against each other until they groaned, dived through them in eddies which danced the tiles from the roof of farm buildings, and sent splinters of pure cold along the corridors, reminding Aunt Zita to get her ball-dress ready and her jewels out from their box.

This time, though Aunt Zita couldn’t feel it, the resentment was there and growing. [. . .] [The villagers] were looking for someone to blame. (46-47)

As Zita prepares for her ball, Maurice, a boy from the village, reveals “the extent of the growing rage and obstinacy in the village” (51), showing the narrator what is happening in the “bumpy wood which grew over the buried eighth-century village”:

It was as if the two villages, the old with its position near the entrance to the valley, its strategic height on the mid-slope of a hill—and the new, built by my father’s grandfather, were diametrically opposed to each other, in space, in time, in attitudes of dependence and isolation. It was from this buried village, though, that people were walking. From the trees, and mounds of brick that had sunk in a millennium into the leaf mould, and from the skeleton houses, thick with earth, walls strangled by the probing roots of old trees, the people of the village advanced on the house. (52-53)

Although Maurice rings the house alarm bell, dispersing these ghosts, the villagers continue to plot against Zita. Again, the figure of Louisa surfaces. Flying through the night, Zita and the narrator see Louisa dancing in the valley:

Aunt Zita knew, from her demented dancing, that Louisa foretold calamities, and the night would end badly. [. . .] Her dance, now far beneath us, was an omen that wrote itself on the flat crest of the hill. (78)

On Hallowe’en, the villagers prepare a bonfire:

They made a toppling swan’s nest, which on the night would let out an egg of fire. For all the authenticity of the victim, with Minnie’s knitted hat on, and a thick body of crackling hay, and legs pressed in Peg’s old lisle stockings, it was Aunt Zita they were going to burn. (85)

In their fear of impending winter, and in their long resentment of their feudal relationship with the Big House, the villagers find a victim in Zita. They leave the narrator’s father in peace, and focus their attention on the woman who writes autumn over the valley, drags up old tensions between the village and the house, and revels in the extravagance of Victorian upper-class life. *They* sacrifice Zita, writing her into the text of seasonal rituals she evokes:

the village made ready to burn her . . . and the snow, hiding behind Pacific stars, prepared its blinding, annihilating descent. Aunt Thelma was coming.

Louisa, emblem of carnal love denied, wove her mad patterns among the stones. Persecution and injustice rose with pitchforks, and marched on Aunt Zita as she danced. (99)

The ritual transforms Zita into an effigy, a trope. At the village dinner before the bonfire, Zita “looked more and more like a doll, ready to be thrown on the lighted sticks” (97). She is “burned quickly as paper”:

Aunt Zita’s face hangs for a while in the air, after the flames had eaten her. She looked suddenly like one of her imaginary companions—like a white paper mask, a moon-shaped kite with the night coming in the slits, for eyes. (99)

She is transformed from flesh into text: textualized, and destroyed. This fate is predetermined, already written into a larger text:

All of recorded time [. . .] lay in the lines of the valley. In the Roman camp [. . .] centurions had sat in their interminable tedium, gazing out at the hills. Below the camp [. . .] the bones of animals preserved a million years made leaf patterns in the rock. In the village under the school, men long freed from the Romans armed themselves against the coming of the Hammer of the Scots. Steam from the first train went up into the clouds above our valley. And my father, locked in the soaring buttresses of his grandfather’s dream, paces the confines of his land, from the stone effigies of the men who had fought to take it from each other, to the Romans yawning at their unprofitable empire, and back again to the castle of material gain. The world and history lay obediently within its bounds. (98)

For a while, Zita has taken over this world, borrowing from its maps and from the scent of imported spices in the village store to create (write) the details of her nightly journeys to exotic places (97). In this way, Zita possibly represents a fully realized female subject. After all, she seems to accept, and even welcome, her fate.

Hallowe’en is “the night of bad omens, the night for which Aunt Zita had waited with such impatience” (98). The night of her death is also the night of rebirth:

[On Hallowe’en] we flew the breadth of the world, and the world we had known at our first awakening opened up to us. In its fears, the night of storms took us to the hour of our birth. In the calm, ordered mansion where Aunt

Zita danced in the tropical air, we knew the caress of infancy, the stately unchangeable march of the days. (98)

The first mob that comes to kill her comes from the ruins of the ancient village, like ghosts: has Zita summoned them as she has summoned her other ghosts? Does she seek her death in the same way she seeks to be “obliterated” by her older brother when she seduces him and he gives her “the punishment she craved” (43-44)? Surrounded by flames like a phoenix, will she rise again next autumn, in an irrepressible cycle of life and death? Forever oscillating between text and writer of texts in the same way she moves between the living and the dead, Zita resists inscription just as she resists the stifling patriarchal order of the house. But in the end, her ritual destruction and magical landscape are subsumed by that order as the tradition of primogeniture entails. Zita’s power is thus qualified, or at least rendered ambiguous. Although the text hints she will return again—as the repressed always does—it also suggests that her return is controlled by the “unchangeable march of days” that is finally dictated by the big house. It is significant that Zita, not the narrator’s father or the house itself, is subjected to the villagers’ anger. The ritual of her destruction provides a controlled outlet for the outrage of the *other* group ruled and oppressed by the big house. As Stallybrass and White point out, when the low invades the high, as with carnival, it sometimes effects “displaced abjection” in an act of “licensed complicity” with the very powers it seeks to overturn (19).¹¹ At least for now, Zita’s death at the stake protects the big house from insurrection, and upholds the “world and history” that lies “obediently in its bounds.”

Or perhaps the answers to these questions hinge on the narrator who takes Zita as her role model, and who “reads” and “translates” her text for us. As Malzahn

observes, the two characters often seem identified with each other, and the narrator's tone sometimes takes on a more mature (and retrospective) attitude that recalls Tennant's observations in "The Rise of Capitalism and the Fall of Woman." Unlike the aspiring girl writer that Rich depicts in "When We Dead Awaken," who only finds images of passive heroines, perhaps Tennant's narrator finds a different, more resistant model in Zita. Does Zita teach her to read the world in different ways, enabling her to grow up and write this text? This passing on of knowledge from Zita to the next generation is hinted at in the text's conclusion. In the latter half of *Wild Nights*, the family goes "South," where Uncle Rainbow lives. Here, the weight of the past and of ancestors is ignored in favor of the present. Spring arrives, bringing light, rebirth, and its own kind of magic—magic associated not with the dark, ancient nature of the valley, but with the fresh, green nature of Uncle Rainbow's forest, where his companion Letty is reborn in the springs. In this "harmony of the south," "flags of all colours waved together" and "[h]ot and yellow, the sun lay all day in Letty's arms" (134). Letty asks the family to stay all summer, and "[t]he brightness of the light crept into my father's mind and made him think of the future of the world" (134). But the North pulls at him:

But he chose the dark. We drove to the station, and waited for the train that would take us to the dark again.

In the north, spring had hardly touched the trees and hills. It had come in pale, uneven waves, and then receded, leaving a faint wash over larch and elder. The dark came down in the evenings as if it would never give way to spring. (134)

These are the narrator's observations: Zita has long since disappeared from the text. In the way the narrator sees the worlds of the North and the South, "painting" colors and tones over their landscapes, does the narrator convey an understanding, learned

from Zita, about the repressive, isolated life of the North, and a desire for a different future? Or is she resigned to her father's realm of darkness?

Like Zita, Alice's fate is similarly taken out of her hands and subsumed by pre-existing narratives that overarch her small childhood rebellions. Her fall into prostitution in London is foreshadowed by her figuration, in infancy, as Eve: as she grows up, she is written into the myth of Persephone and the underworld. When the Old Man witnesses her first fall, he names her "Persephone" (32), and later Alice tells Ella "everything had happened to her [. . .] was written in the book of the underworld; and now she knew that world and could live in it, and she leaned back on the banquette like a queen of the shades" (117). Like Demeter, Mrs. Paxton seeks but cannot find her daughter: like Persephone, Alice has been taken into Hades. When Mr. Paxton finally brings her home, it is a temporary reunion, like Persephone's season on earth. At her wedding to William, Alice and Ella know she will leave for the underworld again:

In the window, Alice's life played [. . .]. She saw summers in the Old Man's house, and William and her mother, and [. . .] the winter months, ruby streets where she would be drawn to live at the time the ground by the river was as hard and grey as stone. And she turned to Ella. There was nothing to say. [. . .] They both knew, with the ending of summer, that Alice would soon be gone. (124)

This, too, has been predetermined. Waiting for Joe to fulfill his promise and take her away, "Alice sat a long time on the upper floor, watching the swallows leave and arrive, go in and out under the roof, like needles in a frame" (104). Alice, too, will "leave and arrive," as she has done with her mother all her life, at times close, at other times unreachable. She is being "stitched in" to Persephone's text. On the night of her birth, her father even foresaw Joe, the man "who would come to claim her" (17).

He tries to protect her from this, which is also an attempt to protect her from a “fall” into sexuality, into being a “bad” woman. But the alternative he offers is marriage to William, the opportunity to be a “good” wife, a daughter of the house. Thus, Alice is forever suspended between two texts and two prescribed lives, of “bad” and “good” womanhood. As in *Wild Nights*, the trope of seasonal cycles suggests liberation and progress, but also the inevitable reach and return of older power structures. *Alice Fell* and *Wild Nights* tell the story of an emerging female subject, like “The Rise of Capitalism and the Fall of Woman,” yet these novels also explore how the chronological and teleological progression of history is bound up with, and built upon, cycles of regression and repression.

In both texts, the house is developed as the site of converging and changing worldviews or discourses that Kristeva would term *texts*. There, all texts can be rewritten, like the Blue Woman tapestry, or the wallpaper that Zita weaves from menacing design into sexual fantasy. At the center of these converging texts is Tennant’s heroine, who struggles to emerge as *her own* text. Alice must fight against the narrative that has been written for her: the Blue Women woven into a life limited to maternal and wifely duties, Persephone’s cyclical separation from Demeter and descent into Hades. Like Persephone, Alice dictates the change of seasons and passage of time, but they are also dictated *for* her: Persephone was taken by Hades just as Alice is “taken” in turns by George, Joe, and Mr. Paxton. Her summer is spent at home, after her rescue; but her fate dictates she will fall again, into the underworld that is the new London, into an allegory that aligns the fall of old Britain with the fall

of woman. In *Wild Nights*, Zita tries to escape and rewrite the old narratives—to be free, unlike the consumptive daughters of the house. Her imagination literally takes over the house of intertextuality, making it her own: but even she cannot escape the text that has already written her into a witch, erased her magical transgressions of space, time, real, and symbolic, and killed her off into an effigy, into scraps of material that cannot take shape and materialize, but dissipate into the past, into legend and myth.

But there are ambiguities, as in “The Rise of Capitalism and the Fall of Woman,” concerning the texts’ final word. Alice and Zita are subsumed into myths and rituals of sacrifice. But the narrative of their loss of agency—like the feminist history Tennant poses in her essay, coded as gothic and imaginative—is *interwoven with* the narrative of “History” and acts to displace and delegitimize it. Changing the order of the three texts once more, we see that from the essay to *Alice Fell* to *Wild Nights*, “History” is gradually phased out. Both “The Rise of Capitalism and the Fall of Woman” and *Alice Fell* depict the events of the world outside Tennant’s female counter-narrative. But in *Wild Nights*, the only references to the outside world are a description of a German bomber plane wrecked in the hills, and the goods brought into the village store. Read in this order, with *Wild Nights* as the ultimate version of the composite text, the narrative shifts further away from a realist setting and into the ever-shifting, borderless world Zita creates in *Wild Nights*. If *Wild Nights* develops the previous texts, then we see that the perspective also shifts, from “realist” first-person narrative to the stylized, image-oriented, omniscient third-person narration of *Alice Fell* to the even more stylized, lyrical *first-person* narration of *Wild Nights*. As

the conceit of the external author (first “Tennant” herself and then the omniscient third-person narrator of *Alice Fell*) drops away in this composite text, we see the evolution of—or disintegration into (progress and regression are qualified here just as they are shown to be intertwined)—a poetics of ambiguity and ambivalence that increasingly resists positive narratives, closure, and stabilized meaning.

¹ As discussed in Chapter 4, delegitimation does not ensure the upset of power structures, either. In delegitimizing myths, Tennant’s texts also show that awareness and subversion can be ineffective weapons against narratives whose “truthfulness” and force are deeply ingrained in a culture.

² Bakhtin argues that centrifugal (separating, dispersing) and centripetal (unifying, hierarchizing) forces interact with one another. Authoritative or official discourse is a “unitary language” and strives towards stability. It is always “opposed to the realities of heteroglossia” (270). Centrifugal forces promote ongoing heteroglossia: “alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward” (272).

³ Burke writes that “whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, is a source of the *sublime*” (36).

⁴ The actual title of Godard’s film is *Deux or trois choses que je said d’elle* (1967).

⁵ The title also alludes to Wordsworth’s poem “Alice Fell, or Poverty” (1807), in which the orphaned Alice Fell loses her cloak and is given a new one by the speaker. *Alice Fell* recreates this narrative to the extent that Alice is similarly cared for by (a series of) protective male figures, although Tennant stresses the theme of dress/undress over pity, especially when Alice “falls” into the hands of a London pimp. Tennant also alludes to a nursery rhyme about an old woman who falls asleep and wakes up to find her skirts cut off at the knee. In her interview with Monteith, Tennant explains that this nursery rhyme terrified her as a child (“Women Talking” 146). In *Alice Fell*, when Mrs. Paxton falls asleep by the road, she wakes into a state of bewilderment at the changes around her (94).

⁶ Wild Nights—Wild Nights!

Were I with thee
Wild Nights should be
Our luxury!

Futile—the Winds—
To a Heart in port—

Done with the Compass—
Done with the Chart!

Rowing in Eden—
Ah, the Sea!

Might I but moor—Tonight—
In Thee! (Dickinson 114)

⁷ Tennant acknowledges this: “His *Street of Crocodiles* is one of the most extraordinary novels, which to me seem [*sic*] more extraordinary than Kafka. Great germs, great seeds for my books *Wild Nights* and *Alice Fell*” (Interview with Olga Kenyon 181).

⁸ London: Picador, 1982. Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁹ These scenes prompt a Lacanian reading of Alice’s entry through the mirror stage into the imaginary order, where she recognizes the powerful phallic mother. Her later location in the symbolic order under the name-of-the-father is represented by George’s games with their rules and symbols: “It is in the *name of the father* that we must recognize the support of the symbolic function which [. . .] has identified his person with the figure of the law” (Lacan, *Écrits* 74). This is, of course, a patriarchal symbolic order, with different consequences for men and women: “The girl has quickly learned that she does not have the phallus, nor the power it signifies. She comes to accept, not without resistance, her socially designated role as subordinate to the possessor of the phallus, and through her acceptance, she comes to occupy the passive, dependent position expected of women in patriarchy” (Grosz 69).

¹⁰ Uncle Ralph is similar to the narrator’s father in *The Street of Crocodiles*: both are eccentrics and collectors. Favoring machines over people, Ralph detests Zita’s passion that is “Done with the Compass— / Done with the Chart!”

¹¹ Stallybrass and White acknowledge that “carnival often violently abuses and demonizes *weaker*, not stronger, social groups—women, ethnic and religious minorities, those who ‘don’t belong’—in a process of *displaced abjection*” (19) but also argue that transgressions of high/low like carnival and Zita’s ritualistic death are more ambiguous than this: “for long periods carnival may be a stable and cyclical ritual with no noticeable politically transformative effects but [. . .] given the presence of sharpened political antagonism, it may often act as *catalyst* and *site of actual and symbolic struggle*” (14).

CHAPTER III

REPETITIONS AND INTERRUPTIONS: TENNANT'S GOTHIC POETICS OF REWRITING

“The most interesting thing [the film maker Luis Buñuel] said about his work was that it consisted of nothing but repetitions and interruptions [. . .] I do think that a lack of a feeling of a linear life, plus a desire to rid myself of nightmares—have together produced my writing.” (Tennant, “John Haffenden Talks” 39)

That which is written over, or written again, is not eradicated but remains in some form, surfacing as a return of the repressed, or more generally as the double-voicedness of rewriting that both reinforces and subverts its source texts (Boehnke 66). The question of what remains is one of the relationship between “repetition” and “interruption,” and of the trace that indicates indeterminacy: “not a presence but the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates itself, displaces itself, refers itself, it properly has no site” (Derrida, *Margins* 24). In this sense, the trace of earlier texts heightens or points to the ambiguity of origins and meaning, to a “hauntology” of “[r]epetition *and* first time [. . .] the question of the event as question of the ghost” (Derrida, *Specters* 10), and to the spectrality of rewriting:

To speak of the spectral, the ghostly, of haunting in general is to come face to face with that which plays on the very question of interpretation and identification, which appears, as it were, at the very limit to which interpretation can go. (Wolfreys x-xi)¹

The previous chapter showed how Tennant’s double-voicedness collapses binary distinctions, resulting in ambiguous and ambivalent new narratives. This chapter turns to the gothic poetics of rewriting to examine how Tennant’s texts are haunted by the conflicts, anxieties, plots, and tropes she rewrites—particularly in her rewritings of gothic texts. As Wolfreys argues, the gothic did not die out in the early nineteenth

century, but, “always already excessive, grotesque, overflowing its own boundaries and limits” (8), haunts its own afterlife “as a number of apparitional traces and fragments in discourses of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries” (7). This spectrality is what haunts the gothic’s new forms and makes them terrifying, rather than a recourse to the supernatural or sublime: “Escaping from the tomb and the castle, the monastery and the mansion, the gothic arguably becomes more potentially terrifying because of its ability to manifest itself and variations of itself anywhere” (Wolfreys 9). How does the terror of spectrality, with its implications of contagion and the uncanny, translate into a postmodern context, wherein texts and genres are infinitely recycled and the instability of meaning is so frequently a source of play? How, exactly, are Tennant’s texts haunted? What makes rewriting “gothic”?

Allan Lloyd Smith introduces two modes of the gothic’s manifestation in postmodernism: “the stylised flat repetition of Gothic narrative structures” and “the more momentary incursions of the Gothic into novels by broadly non-Gothic writers” (13). Becker outlines a similar twofold system in her evaluation of contemporary gothic writing by women: one of “continuity: an ongoing elaboration of the large web of women’s Gothic intertextualisations” versus “deconstruction: a challenge to the limits of Gothic form” (“Postmodern” 72). Such divisions underlie critical analyses of Tennant’s and other postmodern gothic fiction, and point to the problems of defining a postmodern gothic. The disjunction between these definitions illustrates two different understandings: the view that the gothic persists as a unified genre into the twentieth century and beyond, and the view that the gothic has eroded into a set of conventions to be used selectively in the pastiche manner of postmodernism’s

“literature of replenishment.”² Correspondingly, the function and meaning of the gothic are assigned to opposing categories. On the one hand, the gothic is understood as a parallel tradition and read as a counter-mode to a discourse of progressive postmodernism. As such, it narrates “the underside of culture [that] is blood, torture, death, and terror” (Jameson, “Logic” 5), explores the profane in a rejection of institutionalized values (Neumeier 141), and/or exposes postmodernism’s veiled status as central worldview (or master narrative). As D’haen argues:

the fantastic postmodern expresses the fears of this [postmodern] society for, and the pressures exerted upon it by, those it has traditionally excluded from participation or has made subservient to the interest of making its “central” character into its present shape. [. . .]

It is in this framework, then, that the postmodern Gothic needs to be read. (“Postmodern Gothic” 292)

As postmodernism’s counter-narrative, the gothic is essentialized as purely subversive, corrective, and uncanny, and also as other: locally, as a racial, gendered, sexual, or cultural, other, but more generally, as a refusal of meaning, a mode in which interpretation and signification operate *other-wise*. On the other hand, the gothic is assimilated into the (central) discourse of postmodernism: its attention to the slipperiness of language, surfaces, and shifting boundaries between the knowable and the supernatural are put to service as signifiers of the artifice, superficiality, and lack of the real that characterize the postmodern world. In this latter approach, the gothic’s spectrality ceases to be readable or meaningful, as the gothic is called up as a simulacrum of itself and as an empty image of the (literary) past: the implication is that rewritings of the gothic are a “literature of exhaustion” and have no depth or meaning beyond pastiche.

I argue that the gothic is not as simple as one or the other. The gothic has never been a discrete or unified genre, but a generic hybrid, a merging of “two kinds of Romance, the ancient and the modern,” as Walpole described it (7), while also drawing on a range of other generic sources.³ It is more useful and accurate to approach the gothic “as a mode that exceeds genre and categories” since “the diffusion of Gothic features across texts and historical periods distinguishes the Gothic as a hybrid literary form, incorporating and transforming other literary forms as well as developing and changing its own conventions” (Botting 14). It is important to approach gothic texts in this context, and, as James Watt urges, to look beyond the homogenizing critical label “Gothic” (1). Acknowledging that the gothic “feeds upon and mixes” (Kilgour 3) different source texts allows us to examine how this tendency is employed (or transformed) in a postmodern context where the distinctions between text, source text, reality, and fiction are often destabilized.

Addressing these points might seem unnecessary, and I am far from alone in arguing that the gothic continues to transform itself into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Punter, *Literature of Terror 2*; Sage and Smith). But I raise these points in order to develop more explicitly and fully their implications. If the gothic is always evolving—we might say, is endlessly rewriting itself—then it is facile to assume that gothic tropes appearing in postmodern fiction are devoid of the nexus of anxieties the gothic has always signified and the fear it has always worked to provoke. In other words, if the gothic and postmodernism meet at the juncture of artifice, self-conscious language, and narrative play, then the gothic imbues these qualities with contemporary anxieties—about the uncanny, about power, about the nature of reality,

and especially about language itself. As critics such as Sedgwick, Halberstam, and Spooner have pointed out, much of the gothic's energy—its spectrality, as Wolfreys defines it—lies in its surfaces:

Gothic texts do not necessarily privilege surface but rather consistently foreground it in order to interrogate the surface-depth relationship. The metaphors of masking and disguise seem to indicate an “authentic” self hidden beneath, but in Gothic texts they consistently work to problematise that authenticity. (Spooner 5)

This has been overlooked in criticism of Tennant's gothic that glosses over her play with shifting signifiers, artifice, and the superficial in order to read her texts' relationship with the gothic as a correction/subversion of its representations of the other (women, foreigners, the lower class, for example). The possibility that the postmodern gothic is both continuous with and a break from earlier gothic traditions, and that this ambiguous and ambivalent stance might itself stand for and generate other anxieties, has not been fully explored.

In this sense, definitions of the postmodern gothic applied to Tennant's writing have certain parallels with definitions of women's rewriting (discussed in Chapter 2) that insist on interpreting continuity and disruption as separate tactics. These approaches to Tennant's gothic also promote a narrow mode of literary criticism reliant on trope identification. As Howard has noted, “cataloguing and codifying the literary conventions perceived to be common to the [gothic] form” is “ahistorical and homogenizing,” and compels “a ‘monologic’ structure or closure—that is, a single ‘authoritative’ reading which disallows a text's semantic richness and suppresses alternative ways of speaking” (130-14). Another result of this approach is a failure to theorize repetitive gestures across texts and time: to

ignore the dialogic, inter-textual nature of literature and of the gothic, which is especially foregrounded in rewriting. In this chapter, I address these problems by establishing Tennant's gothic poetics of repetition as both a continuation (more specifically, a repetition and amplification) of gothic anxieties and conventions, and a break from (a transformation and distortion of) them. I draw on Sedgwick's thesis about the gothic's structural, thematic, and linguistic correspondences (explained below) to show how repetition/distortion operates both *within* Tennant's texts, and *between* her texts and her source texts. I establish how Tennant dramatizes the return of repressed anxieties about origins and contamination in Hogg's and Stevenson's narratives, and how this is both an act of correction giving a voice to the other *and* an amplification of those same conflicts. Finally, I trace the texts' signature through gothic anxieties about language and representation to show how Tennant constructs a problematic voice of the other.

1. TENNANT'S GOTHIC POETICS

The Bad Sister is a female-centered version of Hogg's *Confessions* set in London and the Scottish Borders in the 1970s and 80s. Like Hogg's text, it is composed of competing narratives, all centered on the murder of Scottish laird Michael Dalzell and his daughter Ishbel. The central document, playing counterpart to Robert Wringhim's paranoia-ridden "confession" of sibling rivalry and an evil *doppelgänger* named Gil-martin, is the diary of Dalzell's illegitimate daughter, Jane Wild. Characterized by lyrical prose, vivid images, and multiple realities, it describes Jane's paranoid rivalry with a series of real and imagined "bad sisters"—her half-sister Ishbel, her boyfriend Tony's ex-girlfriend Miranda, and Tony's mother Mrs. Marten. Her diary also details

strange, supernatural visions sent by a radical feminist named Meg Gilmartin, who raised Jane alongside a commune of “Wild” sisters on the outskirts of the Dalzell estate, and later in London. Meg wants to destroy Dalzell because he is the “incarnation of capitalism” (40) and orders Jane to kill her “bad sister.” In exchange, she promises to give Jane “Gilmartin,” Jane’s lost male half.⁴ While this strange transaction is in keeping with Meg’s feminist rhetoric about the divided female self, it also alludes to Wringhim’s *doppelgänger*. In Hogg’s text, Gil-martin manipulates Calvinist rhetoric to convince Wringhim he is one of the elect and to goad him into ever-greater acts of evil. But Tennant’s Gilmartin is an elusive figure who appears only in the visions Meg sends Jane; in contrast to Wringhim’s devil-like double, he radiates a positive male energy to which Jane is powerfully drawn. It is Meg who takes the place of Wringhim’s tormentor, generating Jane’s paranoia and convincing her to commit murderous acts. Like Wringhim’s confession, this narrative is framed by the rationalizing account of an editor. The editor is researching the Dalzell murders for a television program, and his commentary presents conflicting evidence in the murder case: Jane’s diary, interviews with witnesses, photographs, and psychiatric reports. Like Hogg’s text, *The Bad Sister* concludes with the exhumation of a dead body that shows signs of being buried alive, and with the editor’s final dismissal of any supernatural explanation for the events described in the primary account.

Two Women of London is set in Nightingale Crescent in London in the 1980s, a fashionable neighborhood inhabited by attractive gallery manager Eliza Jekyll and an assortment of female stereotypes: maternal gossip Robina, who hosts salons where

the neighborhood women discuss politics and feminism; her niece, the young, impressionable Tilda; feminist activist and artist Mara; practical Scottish lawyer Jean Hastie, who is investigating Jekyll's relationship with a certain Mrs. Hyde; and others. Nightingale Crescent abuts the poorer area of Ladbroke Grove, where Jekyll's alter-ego, single mother Mrs. Hyde, ekes out an impoverished existence and whose violent temper is encouraged by Mara. The story apparently centers on the murder of the local magistrate, the Honourable Jeremy Toller, but soon delves into the relationships between the women, especially the connections between Hastie, Jekyll, Hyde, and Mara. Like Stevenson's novel, the text is composed of different documents, each offering information about Jekyll's puzzling wish to sign her flat over to Mrs. Hyde, and about Hyde's involvement in the Toller murder. There are also equivalents to Utterson and Dr. Lanyon in, respectively, Jean Hastie and Dr. Crane, although Jekyll's butler Poole becomes "Grace Poole," Eliza Jekyll's maid (who of course recalls Bertha Mason's "keeper" in *Jane Eyre*). Several of the seminal moments from Stevenson's text are repeated: Hyde's murder of a magistrate, Jekyll's horrified reaction when she sees Hyde's hand in place of her own, and Dr. Crane's death-by-terror when she witnesses the transformation of one personality of Jekyll/Hyde into the other. The most significant change to Stevenson's plot, which some critics have observed, is Tennant's reversal of the Jekyll-Hyde transformation. In Stevenson, the upstanding Dr. Jekyll takes drugs to bring out a physically and morally repugnant double; in Tennant, Mrs. Hyde takes drugs to transform herself from a poor, unattractive single mother *back* into a former, more attractive and successful version of herself.⁵

These seemingly superficial changes point to the way the gothic trope of doubling or division is repeated *with a difference* in Tennant's rewritings, so that they conform to what Sedgwick identifies as the gothic's structural formula: "X within and X without" (*Coherence* 34):

In the Gothic novel the dream, the imprisonment, the suppression of language become potent by a relation of correspondence to a reality outside the dream, the life surrounding the prison, the same word present in other minds. "Correspondence" is distinguished from direct communication, which is seen as impossible; instead it moves by a relation of counterparts and doubles, and is subject to dangerous distortions and interferences. (40)

These correspondences operate on structural, thematic, and linguistic levels of the text: thus, the trope of the unspeakable finds form in stuttering narrators or moments of horrified speechlessness, but also in the gothic's indecipherable manuscripts and tortuous plots, its "despair about any direct use of language" (Sedgwick, *Coherence* 14). For Sedgwick, the collapse or breaching of "originally arbitrary" boundaries between corresponding spaces, plots, and characters, or the transgression of taboos, is what generates the gothic's terror (22). Within the corresponding textual spaces that Tennant creates when she rewrites Hogg and Stevenson, the gothic's barrier problem extends from the conflict of divided identity, troped through the *doppelgänger*, to an explicit problematization of representation itself. Duality gives rise to plurality, and division to diffusion, in a way that undermines narrative authority and the stability of the signifier, transforming Tennant's literary landscape into one of shifting surfaces.

Both texts recreate their predecessors' structure of multiple narrative frameworks. The contradictions of these different narratives render the "case histories" largely illegible for editor and reader alike. The editor's commentary and presentation of evidence further complicate interpretation. In *Two Women of London*,

the editor quotes directly from multiple sources and inserts his own evaluations, so that several conversations from different time frames seem to occur simultaneously. This happens when the editor describes one of Mara's videos along with Mara's tape-recorded comments on the film. Suddenly, there are three narrators at once: Mara's voiceover in the film, Mara speaking in the recorded interview, and the editor framing both contexts with his own comments. Since all are speaking in the first person, the narrative "I" becomes multiplied and dispersed over several chronologies, texts, and persons. Narrative stability and coherence are also destabilized by the text's blurring of voices. At one point in *Two Women of London*, reluctant to reproduce Jean Hastie's "long—overlong—account of her days in the British Library" (44), the editor summarizes her journal entries. Describing *her* description of an afternoon spent following Hyde, he writes:

Something seemed to press Jean Hastie to go on. She was not the sort of person, as we have seen, who would admit to instinct or premonition as a guiding force; but her entry for Wednesday the eleventh does own to a kind of "drivenness," making her walk [. . .]. (46)⁶

He continues:

Imagine the scene . . . a turning down a crumbling street leads Jean Hastie to a bridge . . . a bridge with two pathways, as if those crossing over must return by the other way . . . and on the far side of the low, humped metal bridge, is a great red-brick warehouse [. . .]. (47)

The editor moves from paraphrase (of Hastie's "drivenness") to an imaginative reconstruction punctuated by ellipses. Later, the editor alternates between direct and free indirect discourse, literally filling the gaps in the reconstruction of Hastie's day:

What was she to say to this woman, whom she had seen only once, after all, in the gardens and late at night? (It's odd here, as Jean remarks, that she was so sure the woman was Mrs Hyde [. . .]). The very thought of stopping such a

pathetic creature—or undeserving no-hoper, depending on how one saw these things—was repellent to the solicitor and mother of two. (49)

It is no longer clear who is speaking, whether the editor is paraphrasing or quoting Jean Hastie, or if he is describing his own impression. The narration of this particular event is distorted further when the editor splices Hastie's diary account with an interview with Robina:

[Hastie] wasn't sure, as she records in her diary, what decided her, in the end: it was the possible frustration, very likely, of losing Mrs Hyde again; and of waiting, unrewarded, on a corner of Ladbroke Grove while her interviewee vanished from the face of the earth (not, as Jean told Robina Sandel [. . .] that that, or something very like it, hadn't taken place in front of her own eyes [. . .]). But at least she's got some picture of her—and here Jean shuddered again and took the hot toddy proffered by Robina gratefully. We must regret this, for the rest of the entries for that afternoon's encounter are short and stumbling, dwindling to silence after only a paragraph or two.

Mrs Hyde, apparently, had won some money on a horse, McCubbin, the day before. (All this as related by Robina, as told her by Jean [. . .].) (49-50)

The effect here and throughout of the editor's narrative method is not only to blur the voices of the characters (with each other's and with his own), but also to confuse accounts and chronology, and factual with speculative evidence. Clues become red herrings, as the allusion to "McGuffin" ("McCubbin") suggests.⁷ The reader can never be certain about who is addressing whom, or when, or to what extent the editor's account is fictionalized. There is an element of artifice from the very beginning, when the editor provides a "cast list" for this "perverse drama" and admits he has "'described' events [. . .] as a writer (presumably) would" (5-8). Even these initial qualifications—the admission to creative reconstruction, the quotation marks around "described," and the editor's "presumption" of a writerly style—indicate "a kind of despair about any direct use of language."

The Bad Sister's editor also fictionalizes and speculates, including, omitting, and disputing information where he deems necessary. He reads only part of a letter from a friend of the Dalzell family (16-19), and manipulates an interview with Jane's friend Stephen, cutting him off when he talks about Meg's politics, hoping "to steer the conversation away from this unprofitable area" (43). His introduction of the "strange" journal offers a precursory evaluation: "I will make no comment on the pages to follow, except to say there can seldom have been so forceful an example of the effect a fanatical mind can have on an impressionable one" (44). Despite the editor's pretense of objectivity, he appends and argues against a partial psychiatric report that claims "Jane is a schizophrenic with paranoid delusions" (215):

The psychiatrists went on at some length about the nature of Jane's illness—I have omitted to print this [section] as I feel the combination of recent discoveries, with the fact the psychiatrists showed little interest in the "political" factor involved in her conversion (or coercion), largely invalidates the report. (216)

He also includes a newspaper article detailing mysterious disturbances in a wood where Jane's body is later found. Although this would seem to support a supernatural explanation of the events, the editor refutes his own ideas along these lines as "the over-tired and agitated wanderings of my mind" after a long day (222). The effect here is not so much the dispersion of a narrative "I" as the destabilization of all narrative authority. The editor's presentation of different explanations (supernatural, scientific, political) writes over Jane's text, invalidating her viewpoint. The selective nature of this presentation is obvious, but so too is the editor's own inability to extract unitary meaning from the evidence: to solve the mystery of Jane Wild. In the end, he

is torn between rational and irrational conclusions. He rejects the possibility of the involvement of Hogg's Gil-martin in favor of the psychological explanation:

For a time I was so taken in by Jane's jealous descriptions of Miranda [. . .] that I felt the woman who had written this could in no way have been describing her half-sister. The psychiatrists say, though, that this type of transference is perfectly common in such cases. (222)

On a later visit to the Martens, however, he wonders:

Perhaps by then I was becoming superstitious and irrational myself. But as I turned to leave, [Mrs. Marten] came with me to the gate and waved goodbye. She was wearing a small white petal hat, and as it was windy outside, the petals ruffled in the breeze. I don't know why, but I couldn't help remembering Stephen's description of his visit to Meg, and the white petals blowing in from the window onto her hair. (223)

Ultimately, even the editor's authority is undermined because he is finally "of two minds" about the case. In *Two Women of London*, the editor insidiously and subtly dominates the narrative, but his objective status and authority, too, are undercut: all along he reveals biases and prejudices concerning the characters, and tellingly, the text's "Afterword" is written by Jean Hastie, who closes the text not with her own words but with a quotation of Hyde's. In both novels, every account is contradicted by and implicated in several others. The repetition of stories effects a distortion of them.

This process by which repetition becomes transformation is also reflected in the novels' settings and surfaces, which appear to suggest two sides locked in a binary opposition, but eventually multiply so that difference itself collapses. *The Bad Sister* takes place on a semi-feudal estate in the Scottish Borders, and in modern London. At the same time, Jane depicts two realities in her journal: the mundane life she shares with Tony, and the visionary life she shares with Meg. On the one hand,

she inhabits a shifting world of fantasies and memories, enraptured by magical transcendence in one moment, and trapped by childhood horrors in the next. On the other hand, she maintains an unhappy relationship and career, and traverses a dreary urban topography that itself contains a “mixture of misfits” (51). *Two Women of London* also employs a Scotland-London divide: Jean Hastie condemns the “frenetic” (36) city and the “combination of emotional insecurity and extreme aggression” (34) among its female inhabitants, favoring instead the “calm, sane atmosphere of the countryside” in Scotland (36). The novel’s main setting, London, is itself doubled and unstable (one character calls the city “a quick-change artist” (82) in “an age of rapid change, demolition and reconstruction” (55). There are the opposing but connected neighborhoods of Nightingale Crescent and Ladbroke Grove, but also traces of a Victorian city overlaid by a modern one. Mixed diction suggests sepia-toned pictures of Victoriana alongside the stark, weird images of postmodern science fiction: “Chandeliers snap out, like dead stars” (1) among trees “in crinolines of wire netting” (2) and

[y]ellow diggers and dumpers moved like giant crabs in a sludge of churned earth and mud, their feelers reaching higher than the uppermost windows of the houses. Lamp-posts, facsimiles of the Victorian originals [. . .] stood marooned on their islands of concrete as the road-widening exercise took place. (53)

The 1880s and the 1980s sit side-by-side in the text’s landscape, testimony to the country’s “new Victorian values” (121). If these surfaces signify a blurring of different eras and places, they also point to a lack of substance. Mara describes the décor of the Shade Gallery as “all Heritage stuff:”

Looks as if it’s been there forever, doesn’t it? But you could unclip that fireplace off the wall and stick it up in the hallway in any one of the new

‘period’ developments [. . .]. Underneath . . . there’s just a hole in the wall.
(12)

Often surfaces that project images outward also conceal other surfaces and images within: Jekyll’s mirrored hallway hides secret doors and cabinets, and the designer décor and “trick paintings” of her flat disguise the real walls. In the same way, specific images are also repeated and refashioned throughout both texts. Mara’s artwork features collages of the rapist’s victims, cut apart and refashioned into an image of trauma that looms over the gallery:

no single woman has those cheeks, that Cyclops eye, the turned-up nose that adds a note of macabre humour to the Face of Revenge. And the unknown woman is herself spread over multi-panels so that a portion of her brooding, bruised face looks out with sudden ferocity from a corner of the gallery—or, again, a curtain of gold-silk hair with a gash of red torn flesh for a mouth looms from a suspended raft. (14-15)

When a mob of women storms the gallery, they repeat the already-repeated vision of rape created by Mara’s artwork:

While the lens [. . .] wanders over the faces of the women, it’s possible to make out a feature here, a turn of the head there, an incline of the neck, which seem suddenly recognizable. [. . .] “That’s right, “ [Mara] says. “That was the Face of Revenge” (16).

Repetition also confuses original and reproduction, as Mara reveals that the women are “each one a part of her composite portrait” (16). In *The Bad Sister*, reality itself is a concealing surface:

There are no signs of the street around me. I feel the block of flats at my back slip away [. . .]. Grass at my feet. Fields. Little flowers, yellow and white, which also look more invented or remembered than real—they are too neat, somehow, too well placed. I might be in a painting, or in a housewife’s embroidered tea towel of the ‘thirties [. . .] [and this landscape] gives an impression of such opacity it is in fact threadbare in places: there are tiny suggestions, as if the tea towel had got wet, worn thin, of the street where I live in London. [. . .] traces come through of the familiar pavements where I

had gone in my jeans to seek the girl. Sometimes, underfoot, there is a fleeting glimpse of tarmac, a hardness [. . .] of broken concrete. (99-101)

What appears to be tangible takes on the qualities of a created or artificial image.

The distortive effect of repetition and doubling also characterizes the texts' representations of language (characters' attitudes towards language, and the texts' many figurations of writing) as well as in their linguistic structures (puns and wordplay, metonymy and metaphor). Sedgwick argues that "written language 'is' Gothic" because it "recreate[s] parallel representations at a distance from the original, subject to more or less frightening distortions" (*Coherence* 63). She notes that this correspondence is concentrated in the image of the palimpsest: "metonymy is the very essence of the palimpsest image; the palimpsest is a history of the contingent" (89). A palimpsest layers texts and languages: as in Tennant's novels, or Jane's "tea towel" landscape, entities that are normally separate (texts, signs, worlds) occur simultaneously and in a disruptive way, alongside and within one another. Tennant's editors are surrounded by signs in the form of clues, but have difficulty writing and reading texts because their evidence comes from a system of meaning with shifting and disappearing boundaries. Characters are also surrounded by signs—advertisements, images, literature, spoken words, documents, etc.—and are often alert to the transparency of their "meaning," their hidden agenda. Anderson has observed that

Tennant is acute in her observation of the tired social uses of words to mask realities, as when, for instance, Jane thinks: "an IUD like a computer gadget lay inside me, with a thin cord for removal if I 'decided to start a family.'" ("Listening" 180)

Jane's mockery of jargon shows an awareness of its hypocrisy, its "stern lack of mystery" (*The Bad Sister* 55). This is frequently a reaction to language or signs targeting women and/as consumers, the "fluorescent reds and yellows, the prayers and exhortations to eat and sleep and breathe for the sake of the manufacturers alone" (56). As she walks past her local supermarket, Jane puns on the solipsistic circling of signifiers and the "self-absorption" of consumers who fall for marketing tricks:

Tonight there are only representations of these women in the supermarket, for the supermarket is closed. Cardboard women, shown to be beautiful for their sojourn there, and in their cardboard surrounds, at least, bathed in colour. Some of them hold boxes of objects to eat, others boxes of objects which will absorb their blood, some hold a pink drink [. . .] unlike me they are locked in with the darkened goods. They can contemplate the shelves. They love the boxes, they gaze at them in total self-absorption. (56)

Jane reads through the sales pitch to its actual signified, emptiness: "the box lies open and shallow. It has revealed nothing at all" (56). Political discourse is also a target: Jane's friend Gala insists that "No-one could believe [Nixon's] language, the language of Watergate!" (157). The characters' attention to discourse is encompassed by an awareness of their sign-riddled worlds. The proliferation of signifiers extends beyond the obvious, commercialized surface of advertisements, store signs, façades, and décor to the mundane substance of daily life and landscape. Meg shows Jane "further signs of her power" (47); there are "all the signs in the flat of Tony and [Jane] having gone out [. . .] in a bad mood" (48); the sheep in Scotland have "faces oddly patterned as if with their markings they could signal something each other" (71). In the idioms of Scottish English, even errands are coded as a kind of linguistic task: "Mrs Hyde had some messages to get—as Jean Hastie puts it" (48). Some of *these* signs suggest double meanings, like the advertisements in the supermarket that

make promises to consumers while also commoditizing them. Meg's Chelsea neighborhood, "a system of one-way and dead-end signs more potent than a written language" (127), is both meaningless and palpable with meaning. As a supernatural androgyne, Jane is "ancient and known" yet "infinitely strange," "a new genetic pattern like a neon sign in cuneiform" (54). Hastie receives a letter from Mrs. Hyde promising she will leave Jekyll alone. But Robina, a calligraphy expert, knows the letter's handwriting is a "disguised form of Eliza's writing" (76). The letter "means" two things: that Hyde will leave Jekyll alone, and that she will not. The texts' language, in its many forms, is often double in this way: untrustworthy, contradictory, and elusive.

The slipperiness of language is also dramatized in the texts' use of metaphor, wordplay, and figurative language. Metaphors and figures of speech often have a double significance or foreshadowing function, such as references to being "of two minds" about something. Self-consciously figurative language, such as idiomatic expressions or metaphors, can take on literal meaning. In *The Bad Sister*, Jane is following Ishbel/Miranda when she loses sight of her because "a man came between us" (87). This offhand description becomes a literalized figure of speech, because a man *also* comes between them in a figurative sense. Tony divides Jane and Miranda by prompting rivalry between them, as Michael Dalzell more actively separates Jane and Ishbel by rejecting the one daughter and accepting the other. In the same way, Tony's comment that "Jane isn't herself" (188) is also "true," and more meaningful (more literal and important) than its usage as a figure of speech would suggest. Metonymy, and especially synecdoche, also plays a role in suggesting different

meanings. This is explicit in Mara's collages, in which images of women's body parts stand for the whole woman who has been reduced to a nameless, faceless body by the rapist, and in Jean Hastie's initials, which associate her with Jekyll/Hyde. In *The Bad Sister*, names perform a similar metonymic function. Meg's surname, Gilmartin, links her with the overbearing Mrs. Marten, and when Jane looks through Tony's address book for Miranda's contact information, multiple meanings and identities move under the sign of the same letter:

M . . . why should she be in under her first name anyway? But I have a feeling she is. M for mother, for murder, for Meg. M for her. She made me a shadow, discarded by Tony before he had even met me. I am in Meg now, for Meg has my blood, and soon, M, you will be. We'll both be there. Together again! (149)

Meg is blurred with Miranda, with "mother," with Mrs. Marten—and Jane, too, is blurred with her enemy, since she also moves under M, being "in Meg's blood." These associations are reinforced when the editor visits Mrs. Marten after Jane's death and wonders about the petals in her hair. This image closes *The Bad Sister*, undermining the editor's rationalizing interpretations of Jane's story, but also showing that meaning continues to move through indirect associations and correspondences, to shift and be deferred, even to the very end of the text. This is why the texts are cases waiting to be solved, and why the editor cannot complete his job: it is finally impossible to interpret information by stabilizing and finalizing meaning. There is no conclusive resolution to the case.

These repetitions and doubles are never straightforward reproductions. Just as a mirrored image is never an exact reflection but an inverse copy of the original, Tennant's many repetitions are inexact replications. The original (image, event, text)

is always moving “by a relation of counterparts and doubles [. . .] subject to dangerous distortions and interferences” toward a transformed form. At the same time, surfaces and signs do not simply reflect or signify, but are revealed to be sites of intersection where difference no longer holds. This gothic poetics of repetition is imbued with tropes of decay, inversion, and deformity, but these tropes always point to the text’s underlying source of anxiety and terror: the broken, deferred, and spectral relationship between signifier and signified that is itself bound up with the conflict of identity.

The texts repeatedly point to a spreading identity conflict stemming from the protagonist’s initial personality split. This conflict is suggested, perhaps, by the repeated call of the owl—“who, who”—in *Two Women of London*:

The cry of the owl, feared by [. . .] wives—feared by young, single women who live in basements of elegant mansions—feared by old women in unheated rooms—is no sweet rural dream here. It is the cry of the prowler, as he makes his way through trees and shrubs to his next victim. (2)

Sedgwick identifies the conflict of identity as the primary source of the gothic’s anxieties:

It is the position of the self to be massively blocked off from something to which it ought normally to have access. This something can be its own past, the details of its family history; it can be the free air [. . .]. Typically, however, there is both something going on inside the isolation [. . .] and something intensely relevant going on impossibly out of reach. [. . .] The self and whatever it is that is outside have a proper, natural, necessary connection to each other, but one that the self is suddenly incapable of making. The inside life and the outside life have to continue separately, becoming counterparts rather than partners, the relationship between them one of parallels and correspondences rather than communication. This [. . .] is a fundamental reorganization, creating a doubleness where singleness should be. And the lengths there are to go to reintegrate the sundered elements—finally, the impossibility of restoring them to their original oneness—are the most characteristic energies of the Gothic novel. (*Coherence* 12-13)

The question of “who”—who murdered whom? who is speaking? who am I?—is the major crisis of Tennant’s two novels, the dilemma of the self at the center of a series of “corresponding and parallel” but “separate” spaces, realities, and narratives. *The Bad Sister* and *Two Women of London* foreground this conflict through the tropes of the *doppelgänger*, but there are many modes of identity division in the texts. Some of these concern the split between a genuine self and an artificially constructed one.

Jane Wild sees herself as a false or empty image, or in terms of preconceived tropes:

I am the double, now it’s me who’s become the shadow. Where I was haunted, now I will pursue. And the world will try to stamp me out, as I run like a grey replica of my vanished self—evil, unwanted, voracious in my needs. I will be outcast, dogging the steps of stronger women, fastening myself onto them at nights, trailing as their lying shadow in the day. Unless . . . bringing the world to rights . . . bringing Meg’s red altar the essential sacrifice . . . I am restored to life and greenness and in tearing out the simulacrum need no longer live as one myself. (148)

Like the advertisements she sees around her, Jane’s persona is constructed as a surface signifying nothing: a “replica” of a “vanished” self, an insubstantial “shadow,” a “simulacra.” She is a vampire who must feed off others’ substance to sustain her own, and a double lacking uniqueness. Jane’s inability to construct an identity for herself that is neither empty nor formed from preconceived notions is related to another mode of identity division in the texts: self-alienation. On the night of her transformation, Jane looks into a mirror and thinks:

Women and mirrors; mirrors and women. My face seemed to have grown much smaller and my eyes were round and rimmed with exhaustion, black as the underside of a moth. My hair stood in tufts all over my head. I would have smiled but my mouth, which looked thinner, was clamped together. I wondered if my teeth were different underneath. (52)

Again, Jane's thoughts call up preconceived notions of selfhood. "Women" and "Jane" are identified with "mirrors," and in turn, with all that mirrors imply: substance is reduced to surface, superficiality, and image. (This is why Jane's mouth is "clamped together": women are looked at, but do not speak.) Jane has internalized the formula "women and mirrors"/women as mirrors, but, as she undergoes a transformation directed by Meg, she becomes separated from this formula, and alienated from herself. Jane's reflection shows someone else; her appearance has been defamiliarized and divorced from the subject looking at it. This same event occurs in *Two Women of London* as it replays the moment when Dr. Jekyll sees Mr. Hyde's hand in place of his own. Eliza Jekyll wakes up to find "a hand lying on the pillow next to me" (112). The hand is both hers and not hers:

The hand was grey and wrinkled, and it was like a dead person's hand, limp and a darkish purple where the grey skin wasn't puckered by the join of finger and thumb. And—of course, it was my own ageing, defeated, accusing hand.

I couldn't bear it. [. . .] I woke each time to the sight of this lame, dead piece of tissue and bone—which seemed more and more to stand for all of me, to be none of me but clearly what I had become [. . .]. (112)

In Stevenson's text, this moment marks Jekyll's loss of control over Hyde, and the merging of his two opposing identities that creates the novel's terror. In *Two Women of London*, however, Tennant's Jekyll/Hyde is divorced from her own body, a body that has itself become an unstable signifier, as Jekyll's tortuous statement suggests. The hand that "seems" to signify does not signify, because it points to an identity that is equally unstable: "all" of her and "none" of her, something she has become but does not recognize.

2. GOTHIC INTERTEXTUALITY: IDENTITY, ORIGINS, CONTAMINATION

In both texts, then, the foregrounded doubleness of rewriting becomes spectrality, the indeterminacy of meaning, that returns again and again in the form of gothic tropes. The effect of this is two-fold: on the one hand, it “corrects” Hogg’s and Stevenson’s texts by returning what they repress and allowing marginalized, othered subjects to articulate their experience, while on the other hand, it repeats and amplifies their conflicts, and in doing so creates a problematic voice of the other. In Hogg and Stevenson, the problem of identity is bound up with anxieties about origins and contamination. These interrelated conflicts are replayed through Tennant’s narratives, but in a way that generates new anxieties about representation, signification, and retelling stories. The poetics of repetition-as-transformation that characterizes the internal operations of the texts also characterizes the relationship between texts.

THE BAD SISTER AND CONFESSIONS OF A JUSTIFIED SINNER

Origins and authenticity, specifically cultural origins and authenticity, are at stake in Hogg’s novel, and troped through the *doppelgänger*.⁸ *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* is a specifically Scottish transformation of the English gothic, but also a critique of English cultural dominance. Duncan (“Upright Corpse,” “Walter Scott”) and Pittock have argued that Hogg renders the indigenous peasant culture of the Scottish Borders uncanny, in a parodic but critical repetition of the way an English discourse of rationalism and agenda of colonization do the same. Yet, Duncan argues that this is also a response to a burgeoning branch of *Scottish*

literature—more specifically, that this is a rewriting of Walter Scott’s Anglicized Scottish gothic. Scott, Duncan notes:

tends to rationalise the Gothic with the resort to historical allegory, making it represent the reactionary force of outcast, ancient cultural identities that must be reabsorbed into the nation as purely aesthetic influences for a modern domestic settlement to be complete.

Duncan adds that although Hogg was “a Scott protégé,” his fiction and his persona as the Ettrick Shepherd evoked the superstitions and folklore of the Borders tradition as a counter to the assimilation represented by Scott’s fiction (“Walter Scott” 76).

Scott’s gothic recovers an indigenous Scottish identity, but only to relegate it to a pre-modern past, confirming its status as both aesthetic object and as other. As Duncan points out, Wringhim’s exhumed corpse signifies this exploitation as “the resurrection of a buried and dismembered national identity”: “a material corpse that now falls to pieces as the literati rifle it for commodities and souvenirs” (“Upright” 48). Hogg’s rewriting of gothic conventions thus achieves two effects: first, it forges an “other” Scottish gothic that subverts “the late Enlightenment project of romance revival, in which the reanimation of traditional forms is botched or transgressive” (Duncan, “Walter Scott” 71); and second, it “reaffirms the potency of traditional rural culture [and its] irreducibility to outside terms of explanation, [its] final, opaque otherness” (76).

Yet, Hogg’s rewriting is not a simple correction or reversal. The text repeats a problematic representation and displaces it with an alternative that would seem to undermine the first. These are coded as two documents, the editor’s narrative and the sinner’s confession. However, as in *The Bad Sister*, neither document is granted ultimate narrative authority: the editor’s rationalizing account fails to explain

evidence supporting Wringhim's tale, but the possibility of Wringhim's madness qualifies the reliability of his confession. If the confession seems to dominate the story—by rendering the entire text “irreducible to outside explanation”—it does so only by embracing its status *as* other. Of course, Hogg's narrative dramatizes the disastrous consequences of such assignations, but the text nonetheless insists that Scottish identity and Scottish literature must resist denigration as other, and yet derive power by internalizing otherness. This double gesture is both a gothic and a post-colonial tactic, signified by Robert's inability to find safe haven in the Borders, and by his transformation there into the *unheimlich* corpse: he is not at home in Scotland, body, or mind.⁹

This same doubleness characterizes Robert's other *doppelgänger*: not Gil-martin but the “author” himself. Both Hogg and the Ettrick Shepherd appear at the end of *The Confessions*, in the editor's narrative. The editor presents a letter about the suicide's grave, signed by Hogg and actually printed in *Blackwood's Magazine* the year before the novel was published. In seeking out the grave himself, the editor asks the Ettrick Shepherd to lead him there, but the Shepherd refuses. Superstitious, and speaking with a thick accent, this persona poses a sharp contrast to the literary Hogg of the *Blackwood's* letter, who knows all about the grave, and even possesses clothing taken from it. Hogg's appearance returns the repressed author to his text, but in this doubled, uncanny form. First of all, we do not expect to see the author in the narrative, especially in a novel first published anonymously. The pretense is that the confession is a real document, discovered and presented by the editor; Hogg is hidden behind this pretense, and his appearance in the narrative plays with the text's

origins—the question of who really wrote the story—and with the “originality” of the confession (both an “original” primary source, and an “original” product of the imagination). Second, both of Hogg’s appearances precede the final unburial of the corpse, and recall its description in Hogg’s letter. Hogg admires the blue bonnet found in the grave but says he “durst not have worn that one” (234).¹⁰ Yet, when the editor encounters Hogg as the Ettrick Shepherd, he is wearing one just like it. In this way, complicated authorial origins, represented by Hogg’s uncanny appearance, are bound up with the problem of national origins embodied in the corpse. Like Robert and the text itself, the figure of the author is double: haunting and dismissing himself from the text; its origin and a repudiation of origins; speaking but also unspeakable. This raises questions about the ability to articulate an authentic national literature at all, since the author is not at home in his text. And neither, as it turns out, is the author at home in hers over a century later. Tennant “unburies” many of the hidden anxieties in Hogg’s text, but in *The Bad Sister* the uncanny appearance of the author does not suggest that national origins and Scottish agency have been compromised. Instead, the texts dramatizes that *all* origins, from ancestor to homeland, from literary predecessor to the meaning behind the signifier, can only be simulated. Consequently, language and text are both a means of resistance and subversion, and sites of dangerous and terrifying manipulations.

Wringhim’s ordeal stems from a division in his family that results in male sibling rivalry and problematic father-son relationships. Women have a marginal, though problematic, presence.¹¹ Wringhim’s mother Rabina is merely currency in the marriage market, and enters into an ill-fated union with Lord Dalcastle, who rapes her

on their wedding night. When she later turns to the Reverend Wringhim for spiritual advice, she is condemned by her husband, and her second son Robert is disowned as a bastard (although Dalcastle is also unfaithful to Rabina). Rabina's supposed infidelity, and Robert Wringhim's uncertain paternity, is the cause of the family feud that helps instigate Wringhim's terrifying ordeal. In rewriting this plot as a story about female relationships, *The Bad Sister* returns women to Hogg's narrative, and problematizes the father in order to highlight the same women's oppressions represented in his story. Jane Wild is kept from her rightful place and name in the Dalzell family because she is illegitimate. As a child attending Christmas parties at the Dalzell household, she is excised from the alphabet. The Dalzells call out the children by last name, in alphabetical order, to receive gifts:

Where did I come "alphabetically" in the list of names this time? Some years my father avoided the embarrassment of my namelessness by calling me last as if I were an afterthought, or a guest, or someone who had turned up at the party by mistake—sometimes he got it over by summoning me first, before the children had settled and taken in what was going on. (175)

Jane is, in fact, rendered nameless before birth, when her father casts off her mother Mary. Her identity is both anonymous and ambiguous; her first name recalls the anonymity of the Jane Doe she later becomes, and we never learn her "true" moniker, her mother's surname, because she is renamed "Wild" like all Meg's followers (just as we never learn Rabina's maiden name in Hogg's *Confessions*, since Dalcastle insists on calling her by her married name). Even her identity as "Jane" is unstable: she is "Jeanne" at the Aldridge estate; "Deuter Jane" in her wanderings; Gilmartin's "other half"; Miranda's "shadow"; an androgynous and nameless figure haunting seaside pubs; a dead girl in the costume of Mrs. Marten's deceased sister; and finally,

a real “Jane Doe” in the novel’s penultimate scene, when her unidentified corpse is discovered. The barrier that keeps Jane from her own name, and from the Dalzell wealth that gives Ishbel a privileged upbringing and a stable place in society, is arbitrary rather than natural, and based on her father’s refusal to acknowledge her. This refusal is motivated by classism and sexism: the stigma attached to illegitimate children and inter-class relationships, and social endorsement for the mistreatment of women and the working class. The belief system behind these motivations is the target of Meg’s feminist terrorism: she tells Stephen that “Mr Dalzell was a symbol of the father of all women,” and an “incarnation of patriarchal capitalism” (40).

The borders, restrictions, and taboos imposed by patriarchal society go unheeded in the world Meg creates around Jane: incest, the supernatural, and extreme violence are allowed. But it is the transgression of such barriers that leads to the novel’s most violent atrocities: not only Jane’s dramatic self-division, but also the hate-fueled Dalzell murders, the imaginary or remembered slaughter of the Aldridge family in Jane’s visions, and the strange, unnatural death of Jane herself. These transgressions extend to language itself. Metaphors of doubles and vampires spring to life, taking literal form. These moments of metamorphosis into the supernatural, the inexplicable, and/or the grotesque promote a critique of the social circumstances driving women to desperate measures or madness, while also embodying an *écriture féminine*: erratic, hysterical, or “schizophrenic” narratives that counter the masculine-coded empiricism of the editor’s account. But they are also terrifying, and enact a violence of their own. The empty boxes in Jane’s supermarket depict the emptiness and artificiality of advertising language, but also make women *into* signifiers—literal

cardboard signs—that reflect the world beyond. Just outside, a woman knits in the battered women’s shelter:

Her options were closed. She had copulated with the wrong man. She has been sterilised now, as a punishment for her mistakes, and she sat quietly, drawn to the artificial light below, its stern lack of mystery resembling hers. Her eyes were empty and black, like a moonless sky. (55)

The world outside is as sterile, empty, closed, and artificial as the world inside the store: the woman’s womb and eyes are as empty as the boxes, her life as flat and void as the cardboard cutouts. This indeterminacy of language is often a dangerous thing, precisely because it enables language to be a weapon. Nowhere is this more clear than in Meg’s declaration that:

Mr Dalzell was a symbol of the father of all women. [. . .] His assassination was symbolic [. . .]. It was a ritual killing. The left hand performs the act figuratively, the right hand performs it literally. There is no difference between the two. He was the incarnation of capitalism. We have incarnated our disapproval of him. (40)

Here, as in Hogg’s *Confessions*, discourse only simulates a liberating ethic while manipulating the figurative into the literal to “justify” violence. The slippage of morals, rather than Wringhim’s acts of violence *per se*, creates an indeterminacy in Hogg’s *Confessions* that generates its terror. And as Sedgwick argues, this terror always relates back to the conflict of identity. Gil-martin terrifies precisely because he is “too close” to Wringhim; his presence destabilizes the borders of the self. This is also true of *The Bad Sister*. In her journal, Jane describes a visit to Meg’s house, where Meg drinks Jane’s blood and Jane takes on the guilt of an uncommitted crime she promises to execute. Vampirism is the code for this transformation: Meg’s hatred and evil is transmitted to Jane, as one vampire contaminates and makes another, so that the prey becomes the predator. This change occurs again, coded differently, in

another room, during another coupling with another sister. Jeanne and Marie suffer physical abuse and denigration at the hands of the Aldridges: “[Mrs. Aldridge] looked down at me in complete contempt. She was tired today, there would be no floggings. But she leaned down with the secateurs and nipped my ear. I let out a scream” (104).

As an escape from this abuse, the sisters take comfort in sex:

Marie and I are in the one bed now, and our black dresses, which we never take off, even to sleep, are up around our waists. With our fingers we give each other comfort. We are kissing and biting. Her black hair is in my mouth. I will die, float, never let her out of my sight again. (105)

The sequence repeats the vampiric union with Meg, transforming it into a more explicitly sexual (and incestuous) scene. In both cases, the victim, Jane/Jeanne, is drawn into a problematic, too-close relationship with a predatory figure who appears, at first, to be another victim. Vampiric union with Meg, who poses as both fellow victim of patriarchy and its matriarchal opponent, leads to the violent murder of the Dalzells:

I [the editor] open the file and turned to the photographs of the body of the daughter of Michael Dalzell. They were a horrible sight. She was lying partly under a sheet but you could see her neck was badly torn. Her eyes [. . .] were closed. (41)

Sexual union with her sister Marie, who would seem equally a victim of the Aldridges, precedes the violent murder of the family:

[Marie] was the strong one now. I have never seen such hatred in anyone. She turned to me and her eyes told me to follow her. [. . .] I felt my hands going up [. . .] and my hands were on Mrs Aldridge’s daughter’s throat, twisting, unscrewing, squeezing the porcelain neck. Marie had pulled out her mistress’s eyes! [. . .] generations of cruel mothers in rich corridors fell under our blows.
[. . .] Well, we had the women so close they couldn’t make a sound, except for a choking fighting for breath [. . .]. (190-192)

For I saw now [. . .] that Marie has put scissors in her pocket [. . .] and a length of piping [. . .]. The piping was thrust into my hand. How did I follow suit and hack them to pieces like that? The blood began to flow quite freely [. . .] leaving erratic stains which leapt in front of my eyes as I struggled with my prey. [. . .] And I had the daughter's eyes out too: I threw them down the passage with a shout that brought the men running. But Marie had never been so close to me. (193)

In each relationship, Jane/Jeanne is “so close” to her “sister” that they become one: she perpetrates the crime her predatory sister desires, so that victim and victimizer are hardly distinguishable. In this way, the victim becomes a deformed version of herself, an unnatural vampire or incestuous lover, a “bad sister.”

This confusion about blurred, repeated, or false identities centers, however, on the question of *who controls* the operations of language. As Tennant displaces Hogg's narrative to “the other side of the story,” the voice telling that story becomes problematic. Acts of representation and the seizure of agency allow marginalized subjects to speak out, but these acts are themselves subject to dangerous and unexpected distortions. Increasingly, Jane's paranoia centers on the question of who controls language, and to what end. She thinks:

[Meg] was reversing science, translating the known into the unknown. With her power, the old magic that people had known would pour back into the world again. Because she believed so completely in her words, what she believed would come true. (114)

Jane's friend Gala, one of Meg's followers, has a house covered with writing:

There was no inch that she hadn't protectively covered with reminders of her worldly, and other-worldly identity: letters from solicitors, poems, childhood journals in different-colored inks. (110)

Jane becomes paranoid about Meg and Gala's power over language, and over her. She realizes that “[Gala] and Meg together had *translated* me into this new zone and for them it was my sole existence” (155), and wonders:

How did [Gala] know about [Ishbel], if Meg hadn't described what was going on? Or had she been there, watching me and Ishbel from behind a tree, *shaping words* out of our violence to one another? (91, emphasis added).

However, Meg's motivations regarding Jane are ultimately unimportant because they are unreadable to Jane herself. Jane's world is, in her words, "a system of one-way and dead-end signs more potent than a written language" (127). It is through this "dead-end" world that Jane travels, seeking her male half and "original" self. Transformed by Meg into a supernatural androgyne, Jane becomes "a new genetic pattern like a neon sign in cuneiform" (54). Yet, this is not a transcendence of the dead-end circuit of signifiers, but her absorption therein. Her text ends when she kills her sister, is reunited with Gilmartin, and sets off on a journey through the Scottish hills. She is not progressing ahead along a teleological path to a new present/future, but returning to the Borders, to her own deeply problematic beginning: to an origin/end—a meaning, a unification, "a ridding of nightmares"—we know cannot be grasped:

it is precisely in Gothic [*sic*] that the whole issue of catharsis becomes focused to its most intense point, where the possibility of being "healed" by surviving atrocious experience is perpetually challenged by the alternative possibility of being overwhelmed by that experience and swept off, like so many Gothic heroes, into the abyss, far away from any available map or compass. (Punter, "Introduction" 7)

The text brings us inevitably to this conclusion that is a return (which is not a conclusion, which is not a return) to Jane's "origins." And going back to the beginning of the text itself, we find an epigraph, a stanza from Wordsworth's "Yarrow Unvisited" (1807), which reads:

Let beeves and home-bred kine partake
The sweets of Burn-mill meadow;
The swan on still St Mary's Lake
Float double, swan and shadow!

This is not included by the editor, the self-defined authority of the text, but by some other, unknown author. The poem points to an origin: the double swan and St Mary's Lake in the Borders recall Tennant's literary double and *The Bad Sister's* origins in Hogg and Scotland. But, as it turns out, the return to these origins fails to yield any meaning. As in Hogg's novel, the body that should but does not explain the story is found in the Borders—in fact, in the very Ettrick Forest where Hogg was a shepherd, and where Tennant herself spent her childhood. On viewing the body, the editor admits to “a sudden realisation of the uncanny.” He writes:

There was no way [. . .] in which it was possible tell the sex of the corpse. There was something completely hermaphroditic about it, but I can't explain what that quality was. The face was completely blank and smooth, and the eyes closed. (220)

If the corpse and this moment of unburial are unspeakable, so too is the editor, who momentarily “can't explain.” The body is uncanny because it stands for Jane and for her text, which will not be repressed or buried, submerged in the editor's discourse, but will also not be read: they are “blank” and “closed,” refusing to yield to interpretation. The search for the ultimate origin—the meaning behind the signifier—is forever deferred. In this postmodernist world of shifting language, the return to origins is always impossible, or, like Jane's reunion with Gilmartin, impossible to read.

TWO WOMEN OF LONDON AND THE STRANGE CASE OF DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE

Origins and identity are also a source of anxiety in Stevenson's text, but are more explicitly bound up with paranoia about contamination. The atavistic Mr. Hyde summons fears of primitive origins:

[Jekyll] had now seen the full deformity of that creature that shared with him some of the phenomena of consciousness, and was co-heir with him to death: and beyond these links of community, which in themselves made the most poignant part of his distress, he thought of Hyde, for all his energy of life, as of something not only hellish but inorganic. This was the shocking thing; that the slime of the pit seemed to utter cries and voices; that the amorphous dust gesticulated and sinned; that what was dead, and had no shape, should usurp the offices of life. (69)¹²

But, as so often happens in the gothic, one anxiety corresponds to another. Atavism is sexually coded. Showalter (*Sexual Anarchy*) has shown how Hyde raises anxieties about homosexuality, while Shaw has argued that the feminine-coded “perverse Darwinian sublime” threatened by Hyde is also “the point where not only sexual properties disappear but meaning itself collapses” (91). The marginal role of women in Stevenson’s text signals their association with this point: “If the shadows of women flicker in the margins of *The Strange Case*, they do so not as a source of moral evil but as a threatened indeterminacy of meaning which confession seeks to expel” (Shaw 96-7). Jekyll’s secrets—whatever they may be—threaten to contaminate both his socially acceptable persona and his circle of acquaintances. As Hyde slips from Jekyll’s control, each instance of his return draws Jekyll’s circle ever closer to the mystery, and to Hyde himself. The dangers of such proximity are exemplified when Dr. Lanyon witnesses the transformation of one identity into the other, and dies of terror. Once the unspeakable Hyde becomes an irrepressible part of Jekyll, Jekyll himself becomes unspeakable:

This is not just a story of the exposure of a hypocrite or an account of the explosive return of a repressed past. It enacts the withdrawal of the articulating self from the text—the disappearance of the author. By the end of the narrative, Jekyll can only speak of another, no longer himself: “He, I say—I cannot say.” He cannot take authority for his own actions or even for his own words. (Thomas 75)

Utterson is left with Jekyll's account of the strange case, although Jekyll's suicide ensures Hyde's banishment—at least in body, at least for Jekyll.¹³ That Utterson almost witnesses the terrible transformation, and is left with Hyde's corpse and Jekyll's final statement, suggests that the indeterminacy represented by Hyde, and all the anxieties incorporated therein, are not necessarily resolved for the readers, Utterson included, of Jekyll's unspeakable story.

As with *The Bad Sister* and *Confessions*, *Two Women of London's* relationship with Stevenson's text is characterized by the gothic poetics that also shape the text internally. Tennant's rewriting repeats Stevenson's coding of the other through tropes of lesbian panic (P. J. Smith), the primitive, and the threatening indecipherable feminine, but in a way that restores these others to the center, and gives them a voice. *Two Women of London's* Notting Hill is haunted by a serial rapist; the same crime that has been repeated over the last five years returns and literalizes, several times over, the "rape fantasies" that Utterson has about Jekyll and Hyde (Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy* 110). Here, however, sexual fantasies become acts of violence toward women that recall Hyde's trampling of the little girl in Stevenson's text. The violence of rape is literalized/repeated and inverted—perpetuated *backward* against the rapist—in Hyde's murder of Toller. Surrounding this central repeated act are images of rape and attack that haunt the novel. This is most clear in Mara's collages, which depict the marks of the rapist's violence—"bruised face," "gash of red torn flesh" (15)—many times over. The repetitiveness and anonymity of Mara's artwork also re-enact the serial rapist's gaze, which reduces many women to one, his victim. In recreating that gaze, Mara inverts

it, just as Hyde's hateful gaze reduces all men to one, the rapist. Mara makes parts of the women (appropriately taken from images) into an anonymous whole; the final complete entity is not the rapist's victim, but the Face of Revenge that gazes back at the rapist with fury. This inverted gaze is recreated again when the victims themselves appear. Their attack on the gallery restages the physical trauma of the rapes, and is captured on Mara's video:

A flash; the sight of a plate-glass window smashing silently. Shards on the floor, large and bright like the tears frozen on the cheeks of Mara's "Madonna of the Gardens." Chaos: a waitress drops a tray. Triangles of ham and smoked trout lie like skin debris after a bomb attack.

Then there's a burst of sound. [. . .] and as the camera is wobbling all over the place by now, the screams of the guests make the scene all the more disturbing. (15-16)

The scene of rape as reconstructed by Mara is repeated but again transformed. The video's audio begins working, and the figurative, silent (unspeakable) Face of Revenge becomes a mob (another gothic trope) of actual, screaming women. Sedgwick argues that the transgression of borders is always attended by violence: here, the protest marks a movement from art to life, the crossing of the border that separates figurative from literal. This "transgression" is paralleled in the violent breaching of other borders: the shattered windows of the gallery, and the "burst of sound" breaking into the silent videotape. The mode of transgression is altered from an act of rape to an act of articulation.

Although this movement seems progressive, suggesting the liberation of victims of violence, it is paralleled by a corresponding movement toward deterioration and regression, for the scene of rape is revisited in other ways in the novel. There are repeated depictions of debris-strewn rooms that suggest intrusion

and violation. Robina's niece Tilda, seeing "a pile of old clothes in a tangle on the floor," thinks the rapist has broken into her basement room. But she has actually been frightened by Hyde and by Mara's warnings:

It was that Mrs Hyde who had frightened her. And the other woman, too—Mara Kaletsky, with her wild talk of revenge and her gruesome depictions of the methods of the rapist. She said Mrs Hyde was going to kill the man. It would be soon, Mara said. At the time of his next attack. She has told Tilda to be very careful. "But even if you're not in he cuts up your things," Tilda sobbed. "Your photos . . . your underwear . . . everything."
(27)

Here the violence associated with the rapist is linked with Hyde, who will duplicate the attack. Violence is also associated with Mara, whose "wild talk of revenge" doubles Hyde's, and who, like the rapist, also "cuts things up"—specifically, images of women. Mara and Hyde are as threatening to Tilda as the rapist himself. Later, Hyde is more clearly linked to the rapist. Her unkempt flat overflows into Jekyll's: "Squalor needs no describing: what was worse were the evident signs of struggle, pointing almost inevitably to an attack—not dissimilar to the rapist's, as Carol Hill remarked with a grimace of strong distaste as she relived her own ordeal" (97). This invasion of one space by another is no coincidence: Hyde's violence, like the rapist's, always involves some form of unwanted entry, some act of penetration. First, there is the breaking of the Shade Gallery windows by the mob of women probably incited by Hyde. Then, there is Hyde's vampiric attack on Dr. Crane. Dr. Crane recalls: "Before I could pull away from her she was on me. Her teeth went into my neck" (104). This piercing with teeth recalls Bertha Mason's attack on her brother in *Jane Eyre*, and foreshadows Hyde's bludgeoning and stabbing of Toller with Jekyll's umbrella:

She caught the man round the neck with her left arm. She'd come up behind him, as if she were about to overtake and wham! she'd hooked him with the left while the right brought this instrument down on the man's head. The spotlight had shown up, in its unblinking white light, the blood of the man as it spurted on the grass by the side of the path.

And the instrument [. . .] was one of those umbrellas you can get in the posh shops [. . .]. An umbrella with a long, elegant handle and a parrot's head. (72)

Hyde's violence escalates, like her state of physical and moral deformity. We see her first as a shadowy figure running from the Shade Gallery, then as a half-naked madwoman in the gardens, and finally as something not unlike a vampire, and very like the rapist. Hyde's transformation into the barely human—into “a creature,” as she is so often called—corresponds with rage against patriarchal oppression and an urgent sense of agency that increasingly look like madness, and yet are endorsed by the feminist Mara. If the violence of rape reverberates throughout this novel, it is a violence that changes shape, becoming increasingly distorted and horrifying. It is also a violence that moves, changing site as it is persistently located in a new, more terrifying source: the rapist's potential victims.

As in *The Bad Sister*, the spread of violence and madness is framed by an external doubleness (tropes of sisters, twins, *doppelgängers*) that contaminates by eventually moving *inside*, and destabilizing the difference between separate identities and opposing categories, such as sane and insane, victim and victimizer, and activist and murderer. In *Two Women of London*, Hyde's deterioration proves contagious, reappearing most dramatically in Dr. Crane, whose breakdown renders her appearance “lined” and aged (88), just like Hyde. Upon seeing Hyde's video confession, the editor wonders:

What is it, other than the mesh of lines which seems, by catching her face so tight in its grasp, to have shrunk her head like a pygmy's head kept by a collector or hunter; and infinitely decayed, as she could at any time disintegrate altogether, leaving on Mara's screen a pure, blank roomscape. Or is it just the reality of life's hard writing on her that makes her, seen through the eyes of guilt, so alien? (110)

After seeing Dr. Lanyon, Hastie reports: "She was . . . well, she was obviously dying [. . .]. She couldn't speak. She was white—and lined—and her hair [. . .] was half-way grey so she looked—well, she didn't look like herself at all!" (87-88).

The threat of contagion is what most unnerves Hastie. Her disgust for Hyde is less about her physical appearance, violent behavior, and possible blackmailing of Jekyll, than about the closeness between the two women:

No woman, however "down on her luck," has the right to demand of another what Mrs Hyde was clearly extorting from her friend and neighbour. Neighbour! That was where the closeness came in, and it riled Jean Hastie to confess to the bad night she suffered after her visit to Ms Jekyll's flat. (58)

After an encounter with Grace Poole at Jekyll's home, Hastie wonders in her journal:

whether Mrs Poole knew something of what was going on between the two women . . . two women who live so close, as I thought with a sinking of the heart, that it's very likely they can hear each other through the wall, or, even, have a communicating door. Not for the first time [. . .] I felt that this proximity must force me away from the whole matter. (59)

Hastie is so disgusted by "the very thought of having a woman such as Mrs. Hyde so appallingly close" (59) that she suspects—with what Patricia Juliana Smith calls "lesbian panic"¹⁴—a sexual affair between the women. She writes:

By the time I got round to asking about "the other woman" (as I feel Mrs Hyde must be, in some way, in Eliza's sexual past—unless she's an ex-employee . . . or a member of the family who's in trouble? Hardly, no) Mrs Poole was, in the politest way possible, showing me to the door. (60)

Hastie's feelings echo Dr. Jekyll's description of the horror Mr. Hyde provokes in him, which is also stimulated by proximity and what Sedgwick calls "homosexual panic" (*Between Men*):

And this again, that that insurgent horror was knit to him closer than a wife, closer than an eye; lay caged in his flesh, where he heard it mutter and felt it struggle to be born; and at every hour of weakness, and in the confidence of slumber, prevailed against him, and deposed him out of life. (69)

The intensity and inappropriateness of the closeness between Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde is coded as an unnatural sexual and physical union: Hyde is Jekyll's "wife," but "knit closer" even than that; he is an infant inside him struggling "to be born," but taking grotesque shape. Hyde is dead and alive, shapeless and animated; he inhabits the border between categories that should be mutually exclusive. That such a thing resides *within* Jekyll, more part of him "than an eye," threatens the borders and shape of his very identity, and his self-possession. Jekyll's horror of Hyde necessarily spills over into horror of himself.

Hastie's horror of the relationship between Jekyll and Hyde also compels horror of the self, because aspects of Hyde and Jekyll exist side by side in Hastie's own character. On her first sighting of Hyde, the night when Hyde appears in the garden, Hastie finds her uncanny:

There was certainly nothing homely about the sight of Mrs Hyde that evening. Disgusted, possibly, by an unwelcome combination of the familiar and the unknown—for the "thing" wore nothing more alarming than a white mac, one of those plastic, half-transparent coats with a hood that sell in millions [. . .]. For Jean, the sartorial appearance of Mrs Hyde—for she wore nothing, it was true, under the diaphanous white plastic—was alarming and all-important, blinding her to anything else. (31)

But there is precisely something "homely" about Hyde: in her, Hastie sees herself, which is why she feels the horror that accompanies the uncanny: the appearance of

something deeply familiar, “knit closer than a wife,” but repressed so that it appears foreign at the same time. Earlier that day, at the Shade Gallery, Hastie herself wore a mac:

[Mara’s] camera, hand-held and wobbling violently, zooms in on a woman who looks distinctly out of place here: she’s of medium height, wears a fawn macintosh, and has very short, curly hair [. . .]. (13-14)

Here, Hastie is as “out of place” as Hyde in the garden, and dressed similarly. At Jekyll’s flat, Grace Poole asks Hastie if she is Hyde’s relative; Hastie is irritated that she “could be mistaken for a kinswoman of that monster” (60-61). Yet, like Hyde, she is also a mother, and eventually fosters Hyde’s abandoned children. She is described by Mara as having had, like Jekyll and Hyde, a different identity in the past, a personality less conservative and reserved than her current one (53). When Hastie learns Jekyll wants to sell her flat to Hyde, Hastie admits to being similarly “doubly cautious, as a Scot” (40), about the roof over her head. Her figure of speech parallels Jekyll’s literally double caution about keeping *her* property, and alludes to the doubleness of Scottish identity. Hastie depicts Scotland as a “purer” place than London, and the Scottish temperament as a no-nonsense attitude that opposes London’s “monomania” (35). She turns to her sense of Scottishness as a defense against her own “irrational” fears. After the unsettling visit to Jekyll’s flat, she writes:

I nearly tripped over the umbrella stand, which I hadn’t seen before! It just shows how these mirrors and trick paintings and that sort of fantabulasia can drive ye blind as a bat!

[. . .]

I like a thing to be what it is, and no’ pretend to be anything else—as my aunt Peggy used to say. (61)

As if creating a sense of security, Hastie slips into a Scottish accent and recalls the rational, concrete thinking of her aunt Peggy. But countering Hastie's construction of her homeland is the editor's observation that Scotland is as much a site of violence and "fantabulasia" as London:

as for Scotland . . . we weren't far, it occurred to me, on this lonely hill, from the scene of many murders in border keeps . . . and tales, too, of *doppelgängers* and people metamorphosed to beasts or three-legged stools, somewhere in the depths of the woods. (85)

It is in Scotland that the editor comes nearest to uncovering the novel's most terrifying truth, that maybe Hastie is not entirely what she appears, and believes herself, to be:

It occurred to me, slightly uncomfortably, that evil women like Mrs Hyde have a fascination for women such as Jean Hastie: as if a whole buried side to their nature, coming alive for a moment or so at the mention of the crime or whichever wicked deed, stirs pleasurably in them before subsiding again. (85)

The editor gets the character, if not the fact, of the relationship wrong. Hastie does not find in Hyde a source of titillation (the gleeful terror of the early gothic), but rather a discomfoting vision of herself more akin to disgust and horror.¹⁵

Hastie is also reflected in Jekyll. The editor envisions both Hastie and Jekyll as women in Victorian photographs: "I saw [Hastie] for a moment through a brownish haze: she looked like a woman in an old sepia photograph, distinctly Victorian" (84); "That old word melancholy came into my mind as I stood [. . .] and looked up at [Jekyll]. I remembered the photographs of Victorian mad women incarcerated for 'eroticism,' 'melancholy,' even in one case 'intense vanity'" (93). Hastie and Jekyll were classmates, and Hastie feels admiration for Jekyll's stylish lifestyle:

Robina Sandel and Mara had difficulty in avoiding each other's glances at Jean's reverence for the décor installed by Eliza—a good deal more sophisticated, as Jean pointed out, than anything she would have expected of her at art school in Oxford. (57)

The other women feel uncomfortable with Hastie's "breathless" admiration of Jekyll's flat (57); no doubt this is in part due to Mara's dislike for Jekyll's "Heritage stuff," to which Robina may also attribute a certain amount of tastelessness. But their reaction also stems from the intensity and quality of Hastie's admiration. In her encounter with Poole, Hastie calls Hyde "the other woman." Hyde is the "other woman" in the sense of "another" woman occupying the flat, but in the context of the sexual scenario Hastie imagines, Hyde is also "the other woman" in a love triangle, a third party whom Hastie, with her admiring attachment to Jekyll, resents. But in yet another sense, Hyde is Jekyll's, and thus Hastie's, "other" threatening and repellent self. Thus, Hastie is both Hyde's and Jekyll's double: the split entity they make is figured in Hastie. This is suggested, as Sellers points out, by Jean Hastie's initials, which combine those of Jekyll and Hyde (93), and in Mara's suggestion that Hastie grasped the Jekyll-Hyde conflict more than she let on:

Jean Hastie applied to foster [Hyde's children]—in Scotland," Mara replies, as if it had been dumb of me not to see that there was kindness in the Scottish lawyer, all along. "Jean told Eliza that if there was trouble, she'd bring the children up. She guessed some of this, I think. (119)

The editor's conjecture that Hyde represents a "whole buried side" of Hastie is dramatized in the text's "Afterword," written by Hastie. Jean Hastie's journal contains speculations about Hyde alongside research notes. Hastie's book, *In the Garden*, seeks to contextualize theories of evil as inborn original sin and focus attention on historical conceptualizations of evil as an issue of moral responsibility.

This doubles the socio-ethical dilemma unfolding “in the garden” between the Nightingale Crescent and Ladbroke Grove, the stalking ground of the Notting Hill rapist and the site of Hyde’s crime. Hastie’s academic examination echoes the debate the women of Nightingale Crescent stage over Hyde and Jekyll. Some, like Mara, see Hyde as a victim driven to violence by the social injustices of capitalism, and Jekyll as “the kind of woman who gives women a bad name” a “post-feminist” hypocrite (24). Other women, including Hastie, respect Jekyll and hold Hyde responsible for her own circumstances and actions. As Hastie writes after the murder: “None of us [. . .] lacks the opportunity to refuse evil”; “Mrs Hyde is a killer and must be punished for her crime” (73). She discusses her changed thinking about original sin (another instance of a character being “of two minds” about something) and promises to keep Hyde “hidden” from her children:

I keep hidden from her children, who stay with me here and breathe the purer air of Scotland, any news stories or headlines that crop up in the search for their mother. And I’ll make sure they don’t find the other side of this tragic victim of our new Victorian values: the word, scrawled across the pad under a list of household essentials—

Ajax
fishfingers
ketchup
Mother’s Pride

KILL (121)

Hastie’s last words, and the last words of the text, are not the editor’s or even Hastie’s own, but Hyde’s. Hyde’s text is literally buried in Hastie’s Afterword.

The fact that Hyde has escaped the police means she is “still out there”—but where? The text suggests Hyde “remains hidden” in Hastie, but Hastie is not the only

one likened to Jekyll/Hyde. Mara, despite her feminist views and dislike of Jekyll, is similar to her in her occasional dependence on charm and sex appeal:

There's something provocative about [Mara]—it's almost as if she wants to invite some scandalous action and then draw attention to it. Though at this moment she's doing her best to show off—to attract any of the meagre number of men at the [Shade Gallery's] opening [. . .] (14)

Like Hyde and Jekyll, as Robina points out, Mara is “torn both ways”:

On the one hand, Mara wants people to buy her paintings—and to appreciate her as an artist. On the other, she's chosen to paint a very sensitive subject: the victims of the local Ripper. She wants the approval and patronage of such as Sir James Lister. Yet she would like to send him to the guillotine. (19)

Also like Hyde, Mara leaves the country after the murder of Jeremy Toller (82). The identity conflict inherent in Jekyll/Hyde threatens to contaminate all the women in the neighborhood, just as the rapist threatens to attack them. After Hyde's appearance in the garden, “there wasn't a soul [at Robina's]—professional, independent, self-reliant though all (with the exception of poor Tilda) indeed were—who had not been scared out of their wits” (34). If the storm in the garden had seemed “like a woman or a lost soul” (21)—an echo of Stevenson's Hyde, who is heard “weeping like a woman or a lost soul” (44)—Mrs. Hyde's appearance there transforms that lost figure into life, and in her, all the women of Nightingale Crescent see uncanny, fearsome versions of themselves.

The horror of Jekyll/Hyde springs from a two-fold threat to the boundaries of identity. First, there is the horror that opposing, separate entities can exist as one, side by side, but invading each other. Jekyll/Hyde manifests the same horror Stevenson's Hyde embodies: the possibility that the borders of the self will disintegrate. Secondly, there is the threat that this phenomenon is not contained, but

can exceed and repeat itself. Jekyll/Hyde is Everywoman: after her disappearance “there have been no less [*sic*] than 230 sightings of Mrs Hyde, from as far afield as Rio de Janeiro and Reykjavik” (81). Both of these threats foreshadow loss of self-possession, either through social circumstance or through contagion by proximity. As in *The Bad Sister*, when the other is given the agency to speak, it speaks in a problematic voice. Thomas argues that in *The Strange Case*, Hyde’s encroachment signals “the withdrawal of the articulating self from the text—the disappearance of the author” (75). At the end of Stevenson’s text, Utterson is left with Jekyll’s final statement, but does not speak himself. The implicit terror of Stevenson’s ending is that “Hyde lives on and speaks out of the text Utterson holds and reads” (Thomas 80). In *Two Women of London*, Hyde lives on, as well: not through a threatening disappearance of the author, but through a dangerous, contagious proliferation of authorial voices. In getting “too close” to Jekyll/Hyde, Jean Hastie emerges as the author of *Two Women of London*: her narrative, though mingled with Hyde’s last words, closes this text and problematizes its many narratives of agency restored or regained. The disturbing case seeps out of its narrative framework, unsolved by the editor, and uncontainable as a cathartic “confession.” Speaking and writing does not heal or banish what haunts us, but returns it over and over again.

In rewriting and displacing their plots, Tennant does replace Hogg’s and Stevenson’s male homosocial worlds with female ones in order to emphasize gender inequalities in the original texts and to criticize social circumstances that oppress women. In *The Bad Sister*, it is Dalzell’s seduction and abandonment of Jane’s working-class mother

that leaves Jane homeless, nameless, and under Meg's spell; it is the same sexism and classism that prompts Meg to seek vengeance against Dalzell as the "incarnation of capitalism." In *Two Women of London*, the women of Nightingale Crescent face conflicting messages about women's roles while the Notting Hill rapist stalks their neighborhood; like Jekyll and Hyde, the community and its inhabitants are "torn both ways." The updated gothic tropes scattered throughout these all-female landscapes further signify women's oppression and marginalization. Grubby urban labyrinths, suffocating closets, and attic and basement rooms are contemporary substitutes for the moonlit castles, secret recesses, and dark convents where the heroines of earlier gothic novels are persecuted. At first appearing as markers of the uncanny—heralding the return of the repressed—these tropes are finally transformed, instead, into signs of terrifying emptiness. Passages, streets, and signs, like the clues the editors try to puzzle out, often lead nowhere; rooms and houses are the sites of memories, dreams, and events that fail to reveal their meaning. The return of the repressed—past traumas, gruesome secret identities, and supernatural forces—never results in concrete resolution. The effect of this return, instead, is to render both texts entirely inconclusive. It is not coincidental that both novels finally offer images of blankness, absence, and confusion: a diary that cannot be interpreted, photos and a body that cannot be identified, a missing murderer, and an Afterword that slips from one narrator to another, ending with a promise of violence that threatens, but does not point to any particular victim: "KILL—" (121). The pseudo-Victorian facades of *Two Women of London*, which recall the novel's Victorian source text, and the proliferation of allusions, illusions, and narratives in *The Bad Sister*, which multiply

the dual structure of Hogg's *Confessions*, fall away to reveal an artificial, negating reality that renders its many female roles and subjectivities equally unreal: commodities, spectacles, clichés, and ghosts. These alterations imply a certain feminist agenda, a critical break with specific gothic conventions and gothic texts. At the same time that she changes gothic conventions, however, Tennant also continues and advances them. Tennant's destabilization of self and other extends beyond the existential or psychological conflict of the individual to reverse, uphold, and otherwise play with distinctions concerning oppression, resistance, and subversion.

What I want to suggest here is that Tennant's use of this gothic poetics marks a continuity with the gothic that is at least as significant as any feminist agenda making a local break from it, because it points to deeper, more ambiguous and less clearly resolved anxieties in Tennant's texts. These correspondences and surfacing repressions—this gothic poetics of repetition—are at the heart of Tennant's rewriting, and give meaning to the proliferation of gothic tropes that might otherwise be read as a simple, unambivalent challenge to gothic stereotypes, or as a device of pastiche. Tennant's postmodern gothic synthesizes, though never seamlessly or easily, the conflicts of subjectivity and origins that haunt the gothic with her own ambivalent and ambiguous representations of language and meaning. *The Bad Sister* and *Two Women of London* do not serve to correct the "gaps" of Hogg's and Stevenson's texts, but create and recreate gaps of their own, advancing the gothic's divided subjectivities to represent postmodern anxieties not only about self-possession, but about authorship, articulation, appropriation, and power.

¹ Sedgwick argues that “written language ‘is’ Gothic” because it “recreate[s] parallel representations at a distance from the original, subject to more or less frightening distortions” (*Coherence* 63).

² The “literature of replenishment” and “the literature of exhaustion,” mentioned below, are Barth’s term (1988, 1967).

³ Kilgour argues the gothic “feeds upon and mixes the wide range of literary sources out of which it emerges and from which it never fully disentangles itself: British folklore, ballads, romance [. . .] Spenser, Milton [. . .] the sublime, sentimental novelists [. . .] and German traditions [. . .]”; “it is, at best, a highly wrought, artificial form which is extremely self-conscious of its artificiality and creation out of old material and traditions” (3-4).

⁴ Removing the hyphen from Hogg’s “Gil-martin” signifies that Gilmartin offers a whole and unified identity.

⁵ Jekyll is Mrs. Hyde’s former name.

⁶ London: Faber, 1990. Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁷ “MacGuffin” is a film term attributed to Hitchcock, and denotes an object or event of apparent significance to the plot, but which is actually no more than a plot device. For example, a spy movie may revolve around a secret code, but the meaning of the code is never revealed.

⁸ As Robertson argues, there is a problematic relationship between origins and creativity even in the earliest gothic texts (85-101).

⁹ Duncan discusses the implications of Robert’s flight from Edinburgh to the Borders, and elaborates on the way he is absorbed into the folklore there. See also McCracken-Flesher’s examination of Scottish tourism and post-colonial identity.

¹⁰ London: Penguin, 1983. Subsequent references are to this edition.

¹¹ See Sedgwick’s discussion of women and femininity in Hogg (*Between Men* 97-117)

¹² London: Penguin, 2002. Subsequent references are to this edition.

¹³ Shaw argues that late nineteenth-century confessional narratives, including Stevenson’s, “both summon and dispel the horror; the symptom of a forgotten, Darwinian life is transformed into a story, the perverse confessional narrative: confession as abreaction” (91).

¹⁴ Smith defines lesbian panic as paranoia about hidden homosexual desire and the negative impact it has on women’s relationships with each other. Her examination of lesbian develops Sedgwick’s thesis of “homosexual panic” and the conflicts raised by the continuum of male homosexual and homosocial desire.

¹⁵ Whereas *terror* invokes the sublime and generates feelings of astonishment and awe (Burke 36-7, 53-79), *horror* is “bound up with feelings of revulsion, disgust and loathing” and “dissolves a being’s sense of definite identity”; horror “is evoked by encounters with objects and actions that are not so much threatening as taboo” (Mulvey-Roberts 124).

CHAPTER IV

IMPOSSIBLE RETURNS, IMPOSSIBLE POLITICS: REWRITING THE POSTMODERN MYTHOS/ETHOS

“ [. . .] I wanted to present a very entrapped feeling within this large house [. . .]”
(Tennant, “John Haffenden Talks” 41)

As mentioned in the Introduction, *Faustine*, *Woman Beware Woman*, and *Black Marina* combine and retrope elements from multiple source texts. All three novels have a demythologizing function. They rewrite tropes from specific *ur*-narratives, such as Greek mythology and fairy tales, to give them new meaning; delegitimize mythologized cultural figures such as the mother and celebrity icon; and displace discourses, such as democracy and feminism, that offer a politically progressive master narrative of postmodernity.¹ Yet, while they challenge myths, these texts also participate in a form of myth-making, transforming source texts into tropes with different referents to create new meanings—just as myth, according to Barthes, acts as a mode of speech, turning signs into signifiers in order to produce new signs.² Therefore, they delegitimize existing myths at the same time that they offer a substitute myth, one about postmodern roots and origins and their relationship to power. All three narratives explore the desire for and loss of roots, and in doing so rewrite two specific myths: the myth of the stability and inclusiveness of home, and the myth of the compensatory vision of exile.

George points out that home is political in nature, constructed by exclusion as well as inclusion, and by struggle. She argues that the “signs of such struggle are (often incompletely) erased in the formulations of ‘home’ in global English” (18).

Tennant, however, does not erase or repress contests over literal, figurative, and ideological homes. Instead, her texts feature homes that have already been unsettled, enhancing the themes of dislocation, belonging, and ownership that characterize her source texts (for example, exile in the Persephone myth, regional bonds in *Colomba* (1840), and sovereignty issues in *The Tempest*). Rushdie's term for the fictional worlds created by writers in exile is "imaginary homelands" (428). In Tennant's postmodern world, all homes are contingent and "imaginary," and all subjects are already living in exile. The multi-layered and political dimensions of home are made manifest. Home exists on different levels: it is tangible and geographical (house, landscape, country) as well as ideological (nation, family, culture). It is psychological and personal: home is the mother, memories, and the past that shape the subject. Tennant's particular focus on memory and lost mothers, along with her vivid evocation of landscape, architecture (especially family houses) and cultural monuments, weaves these different manifestations of home into her protagonists' psychological landscapes, illustrating how powerfully home is "an ideological determinant of the subject" (George 2). This means that when

different groups or individuals jostle each other to establish a space as their own, as an exclusive manifestation of their subjecthood, this struggle can become as urgent as keeping oneself alive. As a result, "home" becomes contested ground in times of political tumult either on the level of power struggles at a national communal stage or at the interpersonal familial level. (George 18)

Both national/communal homes and interpersonal/familial ones are at stake in Tennant's texts, and shown to be intertwined. Power struggles within the house, the family, and the individual reflect larger regional, national, and cultural conflicts, and their global effects.

Homelessness is also troped through the texts' structure and representations of language. All three novels have no singularly influential source text, and elements from source texts always reappear at at least one remove, as inversions, oblique or metonymic references, or in new combinations. For example, *Black Marina*'s Mari is a twentieth-century proximation of the lost daughter from Shakespeare's *Pericles* (1609), but she also occupies the positions of Prospero's captive subjects in *The Tempest*: she is a rebellious Miranda and resurrected Sycorax, Caliban's female counterpart, and Ariel's human one. Similarly, Rochester's paranoia about female madness and Creole blood in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) is transformed in *Black Marina* into a narrative about madness between a white mother and daughter, madness caused by intermarrying and incest. Anxiety about contamination by racial and sexual others is literally re-cycled, so that *self*-contamination becomes the curse punishing patriarchy and imperialism. Like the mystery genre they imitate, *Faustine*, *Woman Beware Woman*, and *Black Marina* are characterized by red herrings. The title *Woman Beware Woman* alludes to Middleton's *Women Beware Women* (1657), although Tennant's text does not reproduce any specific aspect of Middleton's plot.³ *Black Marina*'s epigraph is an advertisement marketing St James as the inspiration for *Robinson Crusoe*, although the "real" Crusoe, Alexander Selkirk, was marooned in the south Pacific, not the Caribbean. The epigraph's citational function is undermined, transformed into a superficial marketing ploy pointing to a home located "nowhere" and to false (fictional) literary roots. It is no coincidence that many of Tennant's source texts feature travelers, exiles, tourists, and wanderers. Her texts are similarly unfixated, with no single literary precursor, canonical home, or generic

allegiance. In rewriting so many different source texts, they complicate issues of originality, origins, and allegiance on an inter- and intratextual level.

These novels also explore the traumas and advantages of the subject in exile. Said argues that being in exile “makes possible originality of vision”: the exile is always aware of at least two homes, and this “plurality of vision” allows an “awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that is *contrapuntal*” (*Reflections* 186). If being “at home” means existing within “familiar, safe, protected boundaries,” then being “not at home” is to grasp that home is “an illusion of coherence and safety based on the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance, the repression of differences even within oneself” (Martin and Mohanty 297). Exile is potentially a transcendent escape from the illusions and confines of oppressive institutions and language.⁴ Exile enables Kristeva’s dissidence, a “dismantling of the workings of discourse, thought, and existence” through “ceaseless analysis, vigilance, and will to subversion” (*Kristeva Reader* 299). Yet, this critical perspective and subversive work requires the precondition of recovery: an acceptance of loss and a reconciliation of psychological trauma. Tennant does dramatize the penetrating critical vision enabled by exile, especially how exiles perceive that “personal circumstances are inevitably politically charged and that family is a political institution” (Gardiner 135). But she also represents the other side of the story: the inability to build a new home and sense of self because of rage, madness, denial, or guilt. “Exile is not, after all, a matter of choice: you are born into it, or it happens to you” (Said *Reflections* 184). Tennant’s characters are always chosen by

exile, and their futile attempts to recover origins and make a home lend these texts their sense of horror and helplessness.

Thus, these rewritings are more than modernized or female-centered versions of Faustian, revenge, or colonization narratives; they retrope those plots in a different story about the contingency of sites that have become “home.” The process of seeing through surface appearances to hidden truths about roots and home operates through the uncanny (unhomely). Ghosts, doubles, ruins, fragments, and simulacra proliferate in Tennant’s literary landscape, signifying the return of repressed memories and histories. Architecture, geography, nation, and cultural and familial identity are all revealed to be artificial constructions: clichés, performances, and empty signifiers (all the tropes of the surface and the superficial are employed here). The characters’ anxious and paranoid encounters with the uncanny qualify the compensatory truth-revealing vision of exile. The recognition that roots are dead or compromised by violence, and that the return to home is impossible, leads to the more terrifying recognition that “stories themselves can colonize” (DuPlessis 112) as Tennant’s new myth shows how individual agency is always incorporated into the narratives of larger powers that really determine what constitutes homelands, even imaginary ones.

Tennant’s exploration of irrecoverable origins carries over into her representations of language. Like other texts of exile, Tennant’s explore “the unnameable, the unrepresentable, the void in excess of language” (Rao 3). That signifier of asserted identity, the signature, is always unstable or compromised: the texts abound with mysterious handwriting, forgeries, artwork, letters, and diaries. These represent the ambiguity of (national, cultural, familial) identity that results

when roots are seen to be irrecoverable or false. But they also signify the texts' generic ambiguity and ambivalence about rewriting existing myths. Tennant's rewritings are both central and ex-centric: her protagonists are white Englishwomen, but they are also oppressed within their culture: "It seems inappropriate to talk about the spread of a powerful colonizing people around the world as 'an exile' although some may experience it as such" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 426). This is one reason why they identify with society's others: those who have been colonized as well as strangers, tourists, travelers, and orphans.

Below, I show how all three novels retrope source texts and the uncanny to represent the exile's coming to terms with the loss of home. I also examine how they identify power with the visual and the textual: the difference between seeing and not seeing, and between writing and being written into, frequently determines the distribution of power. I begin by showing how *Faustine* rewrites the Faustian plot to problematize the connections between feminism, celebrity culture, and consumerism, while equating the loss of home and self with the loss of the mother. Turning to *Woman Beware Woman*, I argue that the text rewrites the familial and maternal as a primitive politics of exclusion, terrorism, and exploitation that extends beyond local conflicts to global ones. In the final section, I analyze *Black Marina*'s re-cycling of myths, empire, histories, and roots as a myth about the inescapability of myths, and argue that the text highlights problematic similarities between seemingly different modes of home-making, such as democracy versus socialism, and colonial subjugation versus revolution.

1. *FAUSTINE: DISLOCATIONS*

In *Faustine*, Muriel Twyman, a grandmother, sells her soul to spend twenty-four years as the young and beautiful Lisa Crane, a 1960s celebrity icon and media magnate. This Faustian plot is framed by the homecoming tale of Muriel's granddaughter Ella, the primary narrator. In her infancy, Ella is lovingly cared for by Muriel and her (less loving) mother Anna, before she is sent to foster parents Maureen and Bill in Australia. Twenty-four years later, unaware of Muriel's new identity, Ella leaves her beloved nursery charge Chi-ren to return to England and Woodford Manor and be reunited with her grandmother. Ella's desire to reconnect with this lost mother figure and recover her family roots is also a desire to return to a national homeland she has only known through a combination of memory, cliché, and simulation: foster mother Maureen's "English" scones, "calendars with scenes of sheep trials in northern glens," and "hand-knitted Fair Isle jumpers" "personify an idea of England—even if it's a vanished one—as if part of [Maureen] had never really belonged to Australia at all" (6).⁵ Like all homecomings, Ella's is an attempt to determine her identity ("Time I went to find out more about myself" (6)) which has always been characterized by a sense of homelessness and uncertainty: "what I remember may be as invented or as real as a dream. Did I live in this place or that?" (5); "Did I even have [. . .] any memory of home at all?" (12). Ella's position in what Said calls the exile's "perilous territory of not belonging" (*Reflections* 177) distances her from her ideological homeland of England. Her feeling of otherness suggests a troubled colonial relationship with *all* homelands, in which "distance itself becomes difference" (George 4).

It is telling that the novel begins with Ella's arrival at Woodford Manor, which is both familiar and unfamiliar to her. "I have been here before," she begins (3), although her status as an outsider is soon confirmed:

How beautiful it is here, I say to myself—but automatically, like a tourist: the grass mown down to a soft bed where a few leaves from autumn still lie, inviting and "tasteful," like the pictures Maureen has on the jigsaw puzzles in our nursery in Melbourne [. . .]. How beautiful it is, I say, this time aloud. But I remember nothing now. The flash of memory has gone. It seems improbable—ludicrous, even—that I could have come here once. I must go back. There has been a mistake. (8)

The English countryside of Ella's daydreams is in reality a collection of clichés, like images from advertisements. Ella had imagined "a warm, messy kitchen" (19) at the heart of the house, where she would share toffee and cocoa with Muriel (clichés of an English childhood), but the Manor's kitchen is "cold" and "antiseptic" (32). Instead, the loving grandmother is supplemented by endless images of Lisa Crane's face, repeated in the "pictures and silkscreen prints and lithographs and bronzes, the screens of photomontage" strewn about the house (24). Woodford Manor is not a home but a shrine to Lisa, a "tomb" and "mausoleum" celebrating a dead image:

Lisa Crane had held me—and many others—partly for the reason that she had never been a star. A face as the ultimate symbol, a symbol of the meaninglessness and uniqueness of beauty, and of the potential for the endless duplication of the image, until the beauty was reduced to meaning nothing at all. (25)

Lisa's face is a signifier that has been repeated and commoditized so as to lose its meaning, in the same way that England has become "England," a collection of superficial clichés.

This encounter between desire and absence at the very beginning of the text signals an immediate disruption to the positive narrative of welcome and

homecoming Ella has constructed for herself. The moment of arrival, familiarity, and belonging becomes a moment of departure and alienation: Ella is in her grandmother's house, but she is still not at home, a fact depicted through the many instances and tropes of the uncanny that follow. The text also departs from familiar content and structure here, shifting as soon as it begins from a chronologically unified narrative to one that moves back and forth between past and present, desire and reality, and memory and imagination (following Tennant's characteristic style). Ella's description of her arrival is intercut with flashbacks describing the plane ride and train journey, as well as her life in Australia. The text's time frame is only momentarily stabilized toward the end of Part I, "The Granddaughter's Tale," as Ella describes her first night in Woodford Manor. Part I ends when Ella thinks she has found Muriel; Part II begins when Ella learns that the old woman on the Manor grounds is Muriel's acquaintance, Jasmine Barr. Part II, "The Nurse's Tale," is also chronologically disrupted, as most of it is devoted to Jasmine's long tale about Muriel's past. Although Ella continues to be the first-person narrator in Parts II and III ("The Mother's Tale"), her voice is often marginalized as first Jasmine and then her mother Anna dominate the dialogue. Narrative authority is further destabilized by Ella's unwillingness to trust Jasmine, and her dismissal of her mother's account: "Anna is talking . . . my mind wanders" (115). In addition to this series of unreliable narrators, the text is written in a similar style to *Two Women of London*, and its inconsistent punctuation serves to confuse who is speaking. All of these narrators speak in the first person, but there are not always speech indicators to differentiate

dialogue from interior monologue, or the “I” of the primary narrator from everyone else.

This lack of narrative unity mimics Ella’s own feelings of displacement. Her sense of geographical dislocation and distance is enhanced rather than resolved by her journey to England, when “the size of the world, preshrunk as it had been by satellite and cable” amazes her (18). Ella’s use of the term “plane ride” rather than “flight” emphasizes her feeling of being a small and passive passenger, rather than an agent actively traversing these distances. Her helplessness affects her understanding of time, memory, and reality, as well as geography:

The night I arrived in England [. . .] was as unexpected in its outcome as the afternoon had been, my early half-acknowledged memories of the place becoming quickly overlaid by the contrived memories of a woman who was a monster, whether she was alive or dead. And so this tentative sense of *déjà vu* was cancelled, making a mockery of my journey, reminding me yet again [. . .] that my childhood was well and truly buried and that wherever I might choose to look for myself, I would find only evidence of another life. (27)

Geographical, chronological, and emotional dislocation reflect Ella’s growing realization that her different homes—country, house, and family—are not as she imagined or remembered them. Her very sense of self is gradually displaced, as she begins to feel she will only ever find traces of “another life” where her own should be. In this sense, Ella has hardly left Australia at all: Woodford Manor is no more the “real” England than Maureen’s simulated English lifestyle. As Said claims, exile proves to be an “unhealable rift” (*Reflections* 173).

Given this disappointing arrival that is not an arrival at all, Ella’s narrative of homecoming is suddenly transformed into a very different narrative, as her story proliferates into a series of tropes and myths signifying that “home” itself is a trope

and myth. The text, like the crowded landscape and Manor, becomes littered and layered with innumerable images and narratives. These myths initially focus on communal sites, such as national landscapes and domestic spaces. When Ella arrives in England, hippies are congregating at nearby Stonehenge to celebrate the summer solstice, and these visitors crowd Ella's train. Ella's trip coincides with their journey to a site that is a monument of English origins and pagan rites of rebirth: as such, Stonehenge is claimed as a home for "gypsies" (who are, like Ella, permanent nomads). The fact that Ella returns at midsummer also alludes to Persephone's return from the underworld, when she is reunited with her mother Demeter. Yet, as soon as these tropes of homecoming are presented, they are dismantled and retroped as so much cultural clutter. Ella is surprised by the "unexpected shabbiness" of her fellow travelers; when the train stops, she emerges from the crowd "as dirty and run-down as the rest" (19), only to find the station littered with "ragged flowers and the litter bin filled to overflowing with crushed Smarties packets and yesterday's newspapers" (22). Woodford Manor itself seems to be a tourist attraction, with its air of being "open to the public" like a heritage site (23). An abandoned village green abuts the Manor, and Ella imagines this was once "a bowling-green [. . .] where villagers, grateful for the space allocated for their leisure by the lord and lady of the Manor, played on summer evenings" (35). Yet, on closer examination, the village is empty and dilapidated, not picturesque: a dovecot leans "precariously," its "nesting-holes empty and abandoned now like the buildings around the village green" (35). For Ella, "all that old England stuff" (19) of her daydreams is soon reduced to the tawdry clichés that inform the Fishers' jaded view of England: "For Bill England was seaside

postcards, bums and landladies; for Maureen, snooty dukes and potty druids, cavorting at the solstice and lunging at the forces of law and order” (16). When the silent Neidpaths, the Manor caretakers, greet Ella with little surprise, she thinks they have mistaken her for a tourist. She wants to tell them she is not “a casual tripper, a sixties enthusiast” (24), but, of course, she is one of the grubby tourists making a self-described “pilgrimage” (9) to tourist attractions posing as meaningful cultural monuments.

Woodford Manor is the site of shifting meanings and substitutions, but is itself subject to transformation. The Manor-as-tourist-attraction is swiftly retroped as a gothic space. Ella compares it to Sleeping Beauty’s castle (24) and the underworld (29)⁶ and notes it has the “stifling atmosphere” of a “mausoleum” (26). Like all things gothic, it is unspeakable: there is “something about the place, though, that make speech unacceptable” (24). As in a gothic novel, formulaic events conspire to isolate and trap innocent victims: the police have barricaded the area around Stonehenge, keeping Ella in the Manor overnight. Ella feels suffocated, agitated, and vulnerable in this “lair” (29), which she compares to a web with Lisa Crane as “the spider lying at its centre” (34). She is even subjected to a gothic rape scene when a mysterious and angry man enters the room: “his rage is cold, so cold I’m frozen into the lacy sheets, the frivolous foam of Lisa Crane’s bed” (32). Nothing happens, but Ella wonders about “the strange man” who “vented his rage on me so devastatingly” (34).⁷ She senses Muriel’s ghost when she finds her grandmother’s signature inside the cover of *Mrs. Beeton’s Book of Household Management*. Yet, Muriel’s maternal presence is swiftly displaced by Lisa’s, whose signature sprawls below Muriel’s.

“The Granddaughter’s Tale” culminates in a final scene of displacement, when Ella thinks she has seen Muriel. An old woman is “framed in the archway like some ridiculous sentimental picture,” like “Victorian Christmas cards,” but as she approaches Ella is aware that

we resemble some kind of masque—played out on an English green as a pageant at a fete—one of those morality plays where everyone dresses up as someone else and good triumphs over evil in the end.

But, as in the fairy-tales most alarming to a child (*Red Riding Hood*, perhaps, as the most extreme case of mistaken identity, of innocence betrayed), my grandmother doesn’t seem too sure of who I am at all. (35-36)

All the signifiers of home (“England,” “Woodford Manor,” “grandmother”) are transformed into different signifiers, representations of artifice, trite sentimentality, decay, and malevolence.

Ella’s position of distance/difference catalyzes this demythologizing process: her special perspective as an exile enables her to comprehend the many dimensions and tropes at play here. It is significant that Jasmine relates her story in different places around Woodford Manor: this constant relocation reflects the ever-changing consciousness that comes with being “not at home” (Martin and Mohanty 296), while the decay at the edges of these sites suggests both the true nature of Woodford Manor and the death of Ella’s own myths about her origins:

we walk back over the rotting bridge, through dead bulrushes white as old man’s beard [. . .]. We reach a bench—by the line of bamboo that marks off the end of garden from the bog [. . .] and we sit on a line that rules the end of the demesne of the Manor—a kind of no man’s land. For up beyond the house again is the thin line of bright sky that demarcates the bare downs, with their straggling windbelt of larches and spruce. Pagan monuments and bleak sweeps of land and sky divide it from the valley with its little church, its ancient harvest of souls, and the medieval fields and meadows with their legends of good, evil and salvation through repentance for the damned. (41)

The present and local are juxtaposed against the medieval and prehistoric past, ancient geography, and decay and death. Ella's personal story, about to collide with Muriel's Faustian fate, is rewritten and incorporated into a larger narrative about "good, evil and salvation." Ella is newly aware that the linear, stable relationship between time and identity is nothing more than an "illusion of coherence." Looking into Jasmine's face, Ella thinks:

I see, in the lines of her face, an impossible enigma. Is she the person she was, before she grew old? Has her age made her what she is? Is she now interchangeable with Muriel, as anonymous in the disintegration of personality that comes with old age as she? (41)

When Jasmine and Ella move to "one of the tumbledown cottages that sits, interspersed with make-believe granaries and storehouses, around the village green that was the feudal fantasy of the family that once owned Woodford Manor" (60), Ella observes this setting is like "a stage set":

Everything is arranged and false here, it seems, and I fear the outcome, already, of Jasmine's story. It will be as melodramatic and unlike its subject—the simple, loving Muriel—as this house and garden and hidden river, with its contrived, artificial atmosphere, is unlike the true English countryside of the books I read Chi-ren at home: Beatrix Potter and *The Wind in the Willows*. (67)

Listening to Jasmine's story, which contrasts so sharply with her own memories of Muriel, Ella must also accept that "there's one thing you have no control over, and that's memory" (52).

From her literal and figurative ex-centric, ever-shifting vantage point, Ella can begin recovering the repressed story of her origins, which also means accepting that her memories of home have been an "illusion of safety" as well as an illusion of coherence. She has been haunted by a dimly remembered figure from her infancy, a

man in a trilby hat. As they pass a river, a resurfacing memory is conveyed in the present tense, bringing past and present together:

Yes, you came here once, says Jasmine Barr. You were nearly three years old, and you fell in the water. Just here, where you were trying to climb into the boat.

And we look down at a boat almost submerged, shored up against the black water like a body found in a peat bog—once alive, once straining against an evening wind [. . .] now murdered, garrotted, with oars broken and hull smashed into foundations of mud and brick.

I bend down to reach the boat—the young boat, freshly painted green and waiting for me, to take me out into the current—a man is at the oars. The man in the trilby hat that is pulled down over his eyes, and he’s laughing; then there’s a silvery laugh behind me, but to whom does it belong? And is it he who pushes me in, just for fun, so I scream and clutch at the weed that drifts by, weed that seems to have lain in wait for a slippery little victim like me? (40-41)

As Jasmine’s tale unfolds, Ella remembers other terrifying events bordering on neglect, child abuse, and infanticide: her terror as she was pushed too quickly in a pram; the man wiping her bloodied forehead; and the familiar feeling of “being a pawn, talked of, disposed of, as unwanted children always are” (93). She also begins to remember the woman “who was, and was not, Muriel” (81), who produced a “silvery laugh” as Ella slipped under the water.

Ella can also see that Muriel’s desire for youth, sympathetically explained by Jasmine, is really a desire for power. Muriel’s physical transformation grants her unlimited sexual magnetism: in her new form, she “casts spells over” and “mesmerizes” people. Her seduction of Harry is a manner of Faustian sorcery and substitution: Muriel wears Anna’s “kinetic dress that looks like a sorcerer’s robe, with moons and stars and wild cabbalistic patterns” (87), so that Harry mistakes her for Anna, but then becomes attracted to Muriel herself. Muriel also bewitches the head of New Image, Inc., who makes her the new editor and cover girl of a rejuvenated

New Image magazine. Like Faust's desire for unlimited knowledge, which is motivated by a desire to master alchemy, Muriel's motivations for regaining her youth are easily contaminated by a desire for wealth as well as power. She uses her beauty and rising fame to accumulate luxury goods and shares in the world's media. Twenty-four years later, Ella watches the endless video loop at Woodford Manor and sees images of Lisa Crane at the height of her powers, discussing "her ambitions and aims for the Empire she owns . . . the Empire of Communications, for Lisa has bought into and runs the world's media" (76). Lisa's reach extends beyond England, even to the new super-nations of America and Asia: "Lisa is in Manhattan, skyscrapers behind her head like a barbaric mega-billion headdress, primitive and barbaric [*sic*] in its glittering multi-faceted light" (77); "I am going into Asia, says Lisa, ruler of the world!" (80).

Like the awestruck public, Ella has also idolized Lisa Crane. As a teenager, she kept posters of "the most famous woman of her time" (24): "while some would remain faithful to the memory of Marilyn Monroe, or even pin up Jean Harlow and Mae West in their adolescent dens, Lisa Crane had held me" (25). She has idolized Muriel in much the same way, spinning endless fantasies about her "beloved grandmother." But now, having arrived to find herself "not at home," Ella can see that Lisa's power and beauty "seem to contradict each other to the point of making her an impossible anomaly—a monster" (76). Her idolization of Lisa Crane, like her idealization of home, is replaced by a more jaded awareness of the way idols and ideals become commodities. Likewise, her quest for roots becomes an impossible

return to origins: the only thing Ella recovers is the memory that Muriel *is* Lisa Crane, the strange woman who abandoned her when she was sick with childhood meningitis:

In the delirium of that fever, I remember the lady who came and stood by the foot of the bed.

She was dressed in white and she was made of frost and snow. All the dripping icicles and snow ermines and frost sequins of the Snow Queen were on that lady at the foot of the bed. Yet somehow I knew that the Snow Queen was my grandmother, and I would never see her again.

Her heart had frozen. And when she turned and kissed the man who came in [. . .] she kissed him on the lips with her lips that were as red as hare's blood in her snowy face. (108)

This image of Muriel-as-Lisa incorporates all the signifiers of absence, artifice, and corruption that characterize the Manor itself: ill-gotten wealth beside costume jewelry, and, vivid beauty contrasted with emotional death (as typified in Hans Christian Andersen's Snow Queen), sexual predation, and the echoes of distant parents and denied love that make fairy tales so terrifying to children. Additionally, Ella's implicit allusion to the Brothers Grimm Snow White tale represents her understanding that the old woman has been transformed into a preternaturally youthful beauty. Fairy-tale tropes of the looking glass and evil stepmother are employed here to highlight Muriel's vanity and jealousy of the younger women who will supplant her. Yet, the allusion also recalls Snow White's slumber: the metonymic transformation by which the Queen's looking glass becomes her stepdaughter's glass coffin foretells Ella's transformation into a copy of Lisa, whose desirability derives from her passivity, blankness, and emotional coldness, her death-in-life (Lisa's blood-red lips suggest a predator, but are also the *bloodied* mouth of a victim of physical and/or sexual abuse). Tennant criticizes by inverting Goethe's objectified Eternal Feminine: the maternal figure inspiring Faust's ascent to higher

spiritual realms becomes the desired female corpse representing the world's descent "nearer to those regions in which no one any longer believes" (136). Goethe's tropes of fulfillment and redemption become Tennant's many tropes of absence and corruption: necrophilia, materialism, vanity, lovelessness, and simulacra attend the world's descent into hellish chaos.⁸

Ella's realizations about home in turn yield another, more significant, kind of vision. From her position of exile, Ella comprehends what Lisa and even Anna cannot: how power lies in the difference between seeing and being seen. Lisa is "worshipped" but Ella knows this means incorporation into postmodernism's "endless duplication of the image" that robs signifiers of originality and subjects of identity, all to promote commerce:

The age of the throwaway, of the excitement of anonymity and the destruction of the bourgeois pomposity of signed art—those were the notions going around, though I was too young to know them, of course, and by the time I came to read the endless rehashes of the lives of the stars and to see the Warhol multiples in the colour supplements, the pop-art images of Marilyn and Liz and Lisa had become bourgeois collectors' items in themselves. (25)

And:

we see the repeating images, the Warhol look-alikes, the freaks and funnies from his sad circus of urban-deformed. Does Lisa not understand she is one of them too; that to this artist she is a sacred horror, as funny and repellent as the fat lady or the druggy young girl?

No, Lisa cannot realize this. She is money. And there's nothing pathetic about money.

Or about her beauty, more frozen now and hard, that stares back at her from mirrors in the camped-up studio—and from the likenesses of her, smudged and hasty and priceless, that hang, or lie like discarded dollar bills, everywhere you look. (77)

Ella's insights are confirmed by Part IV, "The Devil's Tale," and the text's final twist. The final narrator, the devil, has been "invisible, unfortunately, since the Tarot

pack designed by the exquisite miniaturist Bembo.” “I am a blank,” he tells us, “a white space” (135); and indeed Mephistopheles, alias Harry Crane, has played an invisible role in the narrative thus far. A “pervert” in this “Centrefold world” (135), the devil knows Muriel is invisible too, and desires her body as well as her soul. After making his Faustian offer in the television repair shop, he plays the role of Harry Crane, seducing the daughter only to abandon her for the mother, gleefully punishing feminist Anna for “her foolish, ‘progressive’ ideas” in the process (136). Muriel-turned-Lisa then becomes the devil’s plaything, a tool in his “interglobal communications network” needed “to keep the cauldron of greed simmering” (136), one of the “blonde girls, dead-eyed, who bring in the crooks and villains, the murders, robbers and rapists, who make up the Chaos that is my legacy” (140). The devil’s only obstacle in this plan is the loving bond between grandmother, mother, and daughter: in order to complete Muriel’s conversion, he manipulates the women’s desires and fears to break the family apart. He even employs Jasmine’s jealousy to turn the women against each other:

Jasmine Barr . . . well, we need handmaidens as much as ever we did. Ha! She may extricate the hairs on her chin with a tweezer every day, but there’s a natural witch if ever I saw one. Envious, spiteful, gloating over the mishaps of others—she brought Muriel to me without any trouble at all, and even sent for the granddaughter when the time had come. (138)

As Jasmine points out, “Anna and Muriel did seem like a pair of sisters in a way. Before Harry turned up” (67). As Harry, the devil creates a romantic rivalry between the women by courting them in turn, and cultivates their ideological antagonism. When Jasmine says, “There was Anna trying to bring you [Ella] up to be self-sufficient, to go about the world with the same sense of belonging to your share of it

as a boy would have,” Ella thinks, “[a]nd there [. . .] was Muriel, coming home with dresses of spun strawberry silk [. . .] and, of course, the dolls” (48). Even after Ella is sent away, the women use her to play out this conflict between feminist and traditional values, with Anna sending Ella books produced by her women’s press, and Lisa sending “dolls with impossibly flaxen hair” (15). Anna was at “the very forefront of the new generation of feminist women” who “often said the only way forward was to destroy the authority of the father altogether” (47). As Anna’s boyfriend, Harry parodies by exemplifying the “new man,” aiding Anna with her feminist magazine and other projects, “all of which he seemed to sympathize with and knows something about,” while also encouraging her “to join in with all the fun that was going on just then” (69). By keeping Anna out of the house, Harry increases Muriel’s household work and her resentment of Anna’s independence:

Muriel was babysitting you every night, Jasmine says. (I feel I’m supposed to be guilty, as if it had been I and not my mother who had demanded these services.) She loved you, of course . . . but she got pretty fed up with a diet of nothing but TV. (66)

Having then wooed Muriel, Harry turns the tables: Anna now resents Muriel’s independence since it leaves her with the household burdens, and sees her as a “deadly rival” in the competition for Harry: “The enmity I didn’t know I had in me just rose to the surface, and I knew, if she didn’t move away from [me and Harry], I might kill my mother” (118). Such feelings are designed to create a painful emotional conundrum for Anna, “ruining” “her theories of female solidarity, and sisterhood” (98). Additionally, as a feminist intent on eradicating patriarchy, Anna must find Lisa’s success deeply problematic, since it is founded on her sexual charms. Ella’s disapproval of Lisa Crane echoes Anna’s feminist principles: for both women,

Lisa's method of celebrating her femininity and "having it all" is a capitulation to rather than a subversion of patriarchal capitalism and sexism. Lisa's attempt to reclaim her former self fails when she sees a vision of her aged body alongside news reports of arms deals, ecological disaster, and drug addiction. This is enough, the devil says, "to make the silly woman turn tail" (139), punning on the fact that Lisa trades on her sex appeal.

The devil also engineers Ella's exile to Australia. To end Anna and Lisa's custody battle, Harry continues dating Anna after his marriage to Lisa. By extending their romantic rivalry, he manipulates Anna into using Ella as a tool in her fight with Lisa. As Anna explains: "[Lisa] sent me an ultimatum [. . .] that she would sue for custody of you and would prove that I was a negligent parent. *She had Harry by then. I fought back.* What else could I do?" (120, emphasis added). Thus, Ella grows up resenting her mother and suspicious of her feminist ideals (she refuses to open Anna's feminist books), but this suspicion also allows Ella to see that Anna's brand of feminism is just as problematic as Lisa's. When Jasmine compares Anna and Harry's romance with Wollstonecraft and Godwin's "marriage of equals," Ella notes the discrepancy between ideals and reality, thinking: "Only Mary Wollstonecraft died in childbirth [. . .]. And my mother didn't. She lived on, to show herself incapable of loving her child" (94).⁹ Anna, trying to sympathize with Muriel's case, wonders: "Why should [Muriel] be exiled to old age and redundancy just because the laws of the Victorian age laid it down"? (114). But Ella thinks *Anna's* views are outmoded: "It is [Anna] who appears a Victorian, a Jane Eyre figure, as she [. . .] lectures me on ecology and, as I might have known, mythology" (115). As Anna talks, Ella looks to

the garden and sees “an illusion of a wreath for a pagan head, a circlet of beaten gold for Dionysian curls, prancing over a face with black eyes”—a symbol of the Dionysian excess and chaos embodied by the devil. She wonders if “the presence of my mother, with her store of ancient myth and her Cassandra-like messages to the rapidly self-immolating world, has invited this illusion” (116). Anna’s feminism feeds into the devil’s plans as much as Lisa’s, though only Ella can see that the discourses intended to liberate women sometimes set them against each other. Both Anna and Lisa are blind to the devil’s manipulations: Anna believes Lisa has “poor Harry” in her thrall rather than the other way around (119), while Lisa’s power, derived from her status as a global image, belies her status as the devil’s puppet and figurehead.

Ella, the eternal exile, proves more perceptive than her predecessors, half-guessing and half-remembering that Harry Crane, the stranger in the house, is the same entity as the television salesman and mysterious predator from her childhood. Her glimpses of sacrifice and excess—the illusion of Dionysus in the garden, her vision of the village green as a “druidical Disneyland” (124)—and her awareness of the signs of chaos and entropy at the Manor’s edges—the hippies’ litter and burning fires, traces of the problematic 1960s in this 1990s setting—suggest she is at least half-aware of what this man will bring. She sees him standing on the river’s edge “like an exclamation point on a blank page,” but realizes that “he does not denote surprise, for me. I have seen him before” (83). Behind him, the hippies fight and strew litter, while before him the river contains “all the effluvium, all the filth in the west of England,” so that the water seems “evil, indescribably filthy, ruined by the

outpouring and detritus of man” (83). Ella sees that “the stranger by the side of the river brings all this with him: the fighting, drinking, swearing louts in the woods; the foul pollution of the stream” and feels that “the earth is very old, and cannot much longer endure the chaos and ruination brought upon it” (83). Ella’s apprehensions about this figure, the world’s future, Lisa Crane, and feminism are traced through the text’s representations of writing. The morning after Harry Crane bursts into her bedroom, he sends her an apology note. The handwriting is “black and boldly written” and makes Ella think, “with a sudden feeling of panic,” that “no piece of paper could be large enough to contain the writing of this correspondent, as if the slightest encouragement would cause that great hand to spread over hill and dale, claiming everywhere as its domain” (58). This description recalls Lisa’s similarly sprawling signature in Muriel’s *Book of Household Management*, and her pronouncement that she is “ruler of the world!” As Ella finally sees, Lisa’s scrawled name is a forgery, and not “her” signature at all: it is both the (contrived) symbol of a false identity, and the devil’s handwriting, since he writes and works through his latest “dead-eyed” (unseeing) female accessory. The devil, Harry Crane, is always described as having blank or black eyes, reflecting his lack of a soul but also his unreadability. He alone is a self-described blank, “invisible” and eluding inscription, although he inscribes Muriel’s “body surface” as well as her image and signature (138). Ella, however, is able to read the devil’s blankness as a sign of both his power and the chaos of which he is a harbinger. She is also able to see what she herself signifies to him, although in the end, her insight comes too late to help her escape her fate.

As discussed above, the text undermines all signifiers of home, revealing nation, landscape, house, and even childhood, memory, and the mother to be artificial constructs available for export in the global mass market. This destabilization of home is troped through the uncanny—the return of repressed memories, the familiar/unfamiliar nature of the Manor, the repeated and mannequin-like images of Lisa Crane—and this extends, ultimately, to Ella herself, who is revealed to be Lisa Crane’s double and heir. Ella is initially blind to this fact, unaware that the Neidpaths accept her presence because they mistake her for Lisa. Ella’s first night in the house is characterized as a gothic scene, and this is uncanny in part because the Manor is filled with the ghostly traces of Lisa, and seems like a mausoleum housing her remains. Ella wonders where Lisa (or her corpse-like body) is hidden, but fails to realize that she herself has taken the place of the entombed figure by sleeping in Lisa’s very bed. Lisa’s bedroom, with its “wall of mirrors with signed studio portraits tucked in at the edges, as a teenage girl might stick snaps in her looking-glass at home” even echoes Ella’s own poster-filled bedroom in Australia: both women are suspended in a permanent and powerless adolescence. Lisa and Ella even have the same fears of aging. Looking at Jasmine’s veined hands and “puddingy layer of secondary chins,” Ella thinks: “I know [. . .] that I never want to grow old” (63). Like Lisa, Ella is always an object of observation and objectification: she has “the sense of being intently scrutinized” (56), and is frequently framed within the Manor’s “staged” scenes. She compares her quest for Muriel to the plot of a “romantic novel” (13) or “biopic” (17). This self-glamorizing recalls Lisa’s similarly self-conscious poses, but also the fact that Lisa is, literally, spellbound. Ella, enthralled by Lisa, also feels she

is a “captive votary” “succumbing to the soporific fumes” of Lisa’s incense-scented shrine:

In this house where time is sunk like most of the once-lovely garden in the river that seems to bind us here with its twining loops across the water meadows, there will never be a chance of finding [Muriel] or of coming to terms with reality. (76)

But Ella’s reality does lie in finding Muriel. Directed by Jasmine, Ella puts on Lisa’s dress and finally “finds herself”:

I stand looking across at the bed where Lisa Crane lies, asleep.

I make no noise, but she wakes and sees me. The mirrors in the room show her face and mine—like two halves of an apple, shivering in the looking-glass doors.

I turn and leave the room. I go along the landing to the main stairs and I go down. It is time for dinner and Mrs Neidpath is crossing the hall with a tray.

I know why she thinks she has seen me here before. (129)

These are Ella’s last words. She becomes a nameless “young woman,” as her tale of homecoming is transformed into a repetition of Muriel’s fate:

The young woman can be seen walking up the drive of Woodford Manor, her arm in the arm of the visitor, who wears black boots built up at the heel and a dark suit.

It can only be the effect of light and shade from the moon [. . .] that gives the impression that an old woman, huge in the faint glow from the fires in the woods, is running up the drive after them. (131)

Ella’s exile and return were engineered from the very beginning: like all unwanted children, she is a pawn in someone else’s narrative, a passenger on a journey she only thinks she controls. Even if she is partially aware of this—and she admits she is only “half-seduced by Lisa Crane” (76)—her special awareness as an exile fails to help her escape her fate.

It seems, also, that Ella will not be the last person to suffer under the spreading capitalism for which Lisa Crane is a figurehead. If Ella is the victim of her

mother's and grandmother's desires for freedom, then Chi-ren may be the victim of Ella's desire for independence. Ella abandons her maternal responsibilities in order "to find herself," just as Anna and Muriel do. Like Ella, Chi-ren is a displaced person in a different culture; as Ella reads him Maureen's prescribed Beatrix Potter books, she wonders if a Malaysian child "wouldn't have preferred a book with creatures and characters more recognizable to him" (12). The fact that the children in the Fishers' nursery are all children of Malaysian and Chinese immigrants (6) recalls Lisa's plans to expand her media empire into Asia, to colonize the eastern and southern hemispheres with her brand name as she has already colonized the West. The Manor is full of signs that this expansion is already underway: Lisa's many belongings include "bales of silks and gold-striped saris and straw hats Lisa must have left there on purpose, to remind her of days of travel, of Hollywood nights and dinners on mountain tops in Nepal and Kathmandu" (33). These belongings are both souvenirs and trophies, signifying that these countries are already undergoing commoditization and colonization. It is no coincidence that the text's first instance of self-recognition foretells this, when Ella sees her reflection in the plane window: "I stared from the lozenge of window at a black sky over India and saw my own face look back at me with no love for Anna printed there at all" (19).

Faustine would seem to suggest that Ella's ability to see the truth derives from her position of distance, that exile is in some ways a privileged or liberating position. Discussing literature written in exile, Ingram argues that "exiled writers' own estrangement from the 'center' often frees them to dissect oppressive institutions" (6). Ella's exile from the family center, and from the English empire represented as the

world's cultural and imperial center, enables the text's critique of the beauty myths, youth- and celebrity-obsessed culture, and consumerist greed arising from the "liberating" ethos of the 1960s. In Ella's world of the 1990s, everything is reduced to surface, as monuments, landscapes, and "home" become saleable images and ideas. Ella's position of exile also allows her, and us, to see the problematic side effects of feminist discourses, and how they become entangled with the global and inter-generational spread of (patriarchal, Western) capitalism: in *Faustine*, the next generation always pays the price for "having it all." Ultimately, however, Ella herself is one of this next generation, and this is hardly *her* narrative: her voice disappears when the devil takes over the text (just as the editor takes over Jane's text in *The Bad Sister*), and so does her individual identity as she merges with the parade of images that constitute Lisa Crane. Ella's story does not conclude with liberation from problematic discourses and institutions, but with her incorporation (even bodily) into them: if Ella finds a home at all, it is in a myth of exile and exploitation that had already been written for her. In rewriting so many different myths, *Faustine* dramatizes that "stories themselves can colonize" but also offers a new myth about impossible returns and the politics that seek an impossible negotiation of such returns as a means to agency.

2. WOMAN BEWARE WOMAN: NO FIXED ABODE

Woman Beware Woman is a rewriting of Prosper Mérimée's Corsican revenge tale *Colomba*, and similarly invokes the honor codes that enforce familial bonds and regional, class, and national connections by exclusion and violence. This political reality of home runs counter to Minnie's childhood memories of Cliff Hold, which

she weaves into a series of personal myths about belonging within the Pierce family. The contradiction between reality and desire generates Minnie's doubled perspective: a simplistic, static worldview overlaid by a more complex one in which place, time, home, and morals are relative. In exploring the former perspective, the text alludes to the allegorical typecasting of morality plays such as Middleton's *Woman Beware Woman* (1657), the formulaic "country house murder," and Hugo Pierce's own satirical novels. In exploring Minnie's more fluid counter-perspective, the text also reworks themes from Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927). The Pierces' housekeeper is named Lily, recalling Woolf's Lily Briscoe, although it is Moura who paints the local landscape, and Minnie who observes family life from an outsider's perspective. It is also Minnie who, like Lily Briscoe, tries to "capture" the family matriarch in her developing creative vision, attempting to fix Moura first in memories and fantasies, then in the images of a tapestry, and finally in her own revenge plot. In many ways, *Woman Beware Woman* is as elegiac as *To the Lighthouse*, in that it also explores the passage of time and the loss of a mother. These elements of the text, however, are overwhelmed by the darker themes of cultural conflict and power struggle adapted from *Colomba*. Mérimée's *Colomba della Rebbia* uses her "evil eye" and the regional tradition of the women's *ballata* (oral ballads) to manipulate her brother Orso into carrying out an honor killing. Orso's loyalty is torn: he feels obligated to avenge his father's death according to "primitive" Corsican mandate, but he also wants to emulate the "civilized" culture of the continent, epitomized in a new father figure, the English Colonel Nevil. Orso is also torn between two young women: his sister Colomba, whose passionate *ballatas* stand for local tradition and values, and

Nevil's daughter Lydia, a romantic interest, who sees Corsica through a tourist's eyes. As is characteristic of Tennant, *Woman Beware Woman* combines, shifts, and magnifies Mérimée's motifs and characters, making them into new signifiers. Mérimée's feud over family honor is recreated in the Pierces' feud with the Rooneys, which is about family honor as well as regional power. The Colomba character is multiplied by three: Moura, Fran, and Minnie all use different modes of feminized craft and the "evil eye" to gain control of both the domestic scene at Cliff Hold, and the larger political situation in Dunane. Yet, Minnie, for instance, also occupies Orso's position as someone torn between two ways of understanding the world. *Colomba* plays with the problems of interpretation caused by the instabilities of language: forgeries, letters, and misunderstandings of local idioms drive Mérimée's plot and some of the tale's humor. *Woman Beware Woman* repeats this theme through the use of different devices (e.g., Minnie's diary entries, her lack of understanding of local and family politics) but more explicitly reveals how power is gained, lost, or usurped through the mastery of narratives and modes of seeing or not seeing. This can be read through the text's different tropes of story telling and myth-making, recurrent themes of deceit and entrapment, and attention to the visual. Like *Faustine*, *Woman Beware Woman* narrates a homecoming in order to reveal the interplay of desire, politics, and myth in the making of "home," but concentrates specifically on the internal or familial politics that determine group membership, as represented especially through the figure of the deceitful and unloving mother.

Since childhood, Minnie has lacked a fixed abode. Her real (nameless) mother is a jet setter who frequently leaves Minnie in others' care, so that for Minnie,

“home” is always temporary. In *Faustine*, Ella’s geographical dislocation and attention to place (sites, spaces, surfaces) are symptoms of her being “not at home.” Minnie’s geographical displacement, also manifested through her attention to the qualities of place, is always intertwined with chronological instability, emphasizing that home can be a point in time as well as space: “My sense of mis-timing is famous. Or is time away from Cliff Hold always mis-time? Is Cliff Hold [. . .] the only place I’ve ever felt at home?” (13).¹⁰ A daydreamer without a home of her own, Minnie is barely rooted in the present, and has no foreseeable future:

My mother is a maths tutor—and so, in a feeble way, am I (children under nine, smart new pencil case in hand, the long silence as the mind wanders and the plane trees outside my mother’s Crescent flat seem to block all future thought). (16).¹¹

Other than Cliff Hold, place is mutable. In Minnie’s daydreams, London is easily transposed with Dunane:

It’s strange that I should have been transported so completely, after ten years. But I was. I stood outside the front door of the converted Edwardian house in North Kensington and I saw the sea, and then the hall at Cliff Hold, Moura’s long flower basket and a pile of old boots that Philip and Gareth had worn. I smelt the sea. (18)

Always in transit, Minnie lives at a literal and chronological distance from her imagined roots in Dunane. Extremely sheltered, she also exists at a metaphysical distance from “real” experience: “I spent all my time in one bedroom or another, reading the books my mother had brought back from her journeys: travel books that smelt of tobacco, love novels that had a sickening smell of chocolate gone stale” (23).

Minnie lacks a stable home, an “ideological determinant of the subject.” Consequently, she has little strength of character, hence her name, which denotes her insignificance, and her “haziness” (44) and “faulty memory” (31). She lacks self-

belief and physical confidence: she is socially awkward, tongue-tied, clumsy, absent-minded, and consequently self-deprecating about her “feeble” nature. These character traits are symptomatic of the trauma of exile, Said’s “unhealable rift” that Minnie has experienced many times over. Yet, they also signify Minnie’s denial of these traumas, her refusal to face the lesson of exile: “not that home and love of home are lost, but that loss is inherent in the very existence of both” (Said *Reflections* 185). Yet such an awareness rests on a certain unity of mind, a recognition of the loss of home and of the difference/divide between before and after, here and there. As Martin and Mohanty note, one can know “that stable notions of self and identity are based on exclusion and secured by terror” and at the same time be “aware of the risk and terror inherent in breaking through the walls of home” (296). For Minnie, who cannot face the “risk and terror” inherent in such a recognition, exile does not provide a beneficial “contrapuntal awareness,” but a double consciousness deeply *divided* between denial and acceptance.

In some ways, Minnie is still “at home,” both insisting she belongs at Cliff Hold and clinging to “stable notions of self and identity.” Like Ella’s conception of England, Minnie’s memories of Cliff Hold mingle real events with fantasies of belonging and returning, reflecting what Said calls the exile’s “need to reassemble an identity out of the refractions and discontinuities of exile” (*Reflections* 179): “I’d spent too long at Cliff Hold not to be counted almost as one of the family” (66); “my own life was firmly laid down at Cliff Hold” (67). This perspective works from a static worldview and is derived from the authorial father figure of Hugo himself:

I didn’t see myself in any of [my mother’s] books, and saw the world, consequently, from a frightening angle: it took Hugo, with his laughter at the

ways of the world, his rapid explanations of people's characters and motives—and all this done partly as a joke—for me to see myself at all. (23)

With the “dispassionate eye” of an author, Hugo writes “simple adventure stories” (*Captain Sloth, Rex Envy, Earl of Greed*) that divide society into transparent categories, making the world appear ordered and predictable to Minnie (18-23). Exceptionally punctual and fond of puns, his authority extends even to time and language. Hearing news of his death, Minnie sees that “the ruled lines and the words” in her pupil's notebook “no longer meant anything” (24). She compensates for this loss by turning to her myth that Hugo and Moura are her real parents: “Moura was kind to me when I was a child, kinder than my mother; Moura was my mother really, I suppose” (17). This returns her to the easier, comforting zone of childhood “before” home was rendered unstable.

Said argues that the exile “compensat[es] for disorientating loss by creating a new world to rule,” an “unreality [that] resembles fiction” (*Reflections* 181). Minnie's first contact with the Pierces in ten years initiates a process of forcibly projecting her “fictional” world onto reality: “I had to wait until now—until [Moura] really needed me again, to come back to the place I never really left” (67). She interprets a hurried phone conversation with Moura as an invitation to Cliff Hold:

[Moura:] “Who? Oh . . . good heavens . . . Minnie.”
[. . .]
[Minnie:] “I'm so sorry about Hugo.” I couldn't think of anything else to say.
[Moura:] “What . . . what . . . are you coming, Minnie?”
So she did need me. (24)

Minnie's “intuition” about Moura's feelings is strategic, since it allows her to cast herself once more in the role of needed daughter:

I'd been summoned like a daughter, a daughter who's been away a long time, as happens in the west of Ireland when girls go to London or New York and come back embarrassed at the family meeting at the airport. (41)

Moura's silences (frequent pauses, distracted air, and tendency to ignore or dismiss Minnie) increasingly seem to signify annoyance, but Minnie interprets Moura's coolness as intimacy: "Already I was like someone who was a permanent fixture at Cliff Hold—we'd had tea in virtual silence, even, like members of a family with no need to speak to each other" (51). Deluded about her importance to Moura, she projects her own need for childhood's security onto her: "Moura wouldn't speak of Hugo, or of his death: it was as if my presence had brought her a nursery safety" (51). Such conjectures allow Minnie to ignore the fact that Moura puts her in the "visitors' room" (60) and Gareth does not remember her at all (68).

However, projecting simplistic, comforting interpretations onto the silences, distances, and absences of Cliff Hold does not alter its atmosphere of strangeness, or Minnie's status as a stranger therein. Her earlier thought, "It's strange that I should have been transported so completely, after ten years" (18), is repeated after her arrival: "Strange, when until ten days ago I hadn't been here for ten years" (13). As in *Faustine*, the mundane is imbued with the strange and unspeakable, so that home is defamiliarized and rendered unhomely. Minnie's encounters with the uncanny are frequently bound up with the *other* aspect of her double consciousness, her intense awareness of instability and flux, particularly regarding time and memory. Cliff Hold is so like Minnie's daydreams she must remind herself she is physically present:

I wasn't smelling herbs in my mother's kitchen in the North Kensington and being transported over the years to Cliff Hold. I was actually here. The

realization made me suddenly afraid: what happens if you walk into your own memory? (46)

Returning to Cliff Hold intensifies rather than resolves Minnie's problem of "mis-time," so that "home" remains at a literal and metaphorical distance, and Minnie's "homecoming" infinitely deferred despite her insistent fantasies:

What does time do? And we can't even see it. There was a sense in that first evening at Cliff Hold of a September evening of ten years ago ripped from its grave and laid out in front of me like a preposterous joke. Or was it just because it was that kind of evening, quiet after the commotion of the waves—familiar and still, more like a memory than what is happening now? The 'sameness' hung over the house, and the trees outside, and over the bay; and I felt [. . .] that the sameness was somehow false, as if a coat of varnish had been sprayed over the whole scene. (45-6)

Some of *Faustine's* themes appear here: the gothic tropes of death, menacing domestic spaces, and the return of the past, all mingled with artificial surfaces, trickery, and jokes. The very nature of familiarity is undermined; Minnie herself qualifies "sameness" by putting it in quotation marks. Like Ella, Minnie becomes an uncanny figure: a "ghost in the Dunane main street" (49) and a foreigner who feels like Moura speaks "in an unknown language" (57).

While Ella's awareness of the uncanny at Woodford Manor allows her to apprehend its disturbing underlying reality, Minnie continues to waver between her two modes of consciousness, especially at traumatic moments when the repressed begins to surface. When Minnie cannot impose her comforting interpretation of events, her symptoms—being clumsy and tongue-tied—become exaggerated. Minnie is "stunned" by Moura's revelation that Gareth and Philip rarely return to Cliff Hold: "the Christmases when I'd pictured the Pierce family by the log fire in the sitting-room, Hugo stirring hot whiskey punch with a spoon. The pictures turned to

slush like advertisements: all was false” (57). This is more than a demythologizing of holiday clichés: it undermines Minnie’s entire construction of the family as a stable unit held together by Hugo’s authority and the magic of Cliff Hold. In quick succession, she knocks over a “jumble of old tourist junk,” drops a tray of china, spills coffee, and faints. The “tourist junk,” which includes souvenirs from Philip’s travels, is a potent signifier of the reality Minnie struggles to deny: Philip’s abandonment, the scattering of the Pierce family, and Minnie’s own transitory, uprooted existence. As she hovers between “sleeping and waking” (61) she also moves from one mode of consciousness to the other, envisioning Hugo

walking between the minute hand and the second hand on the grimy face of the [kitchen] clock. Hugo walked into a thicket of Roman numerals and fell into the roots. He tripped, fell over and was dead. (60)

This vision approaches an acceptance of the realities of the present, namely Hugo’s death and the dead end of Minnie’s imagined “roots” at Cliff Hold. Yet, when Minnie is “properly awake” moments later, she again escapes her “bewilderment about the unexpectedness of things” by digressing to a catalogue of happy memories (62-3).

It is Minnie’s *wavering* between the two states of consciousness that directs our (and her) attention away from her own revenge plot, generating our surprise when she accidentally/intentionally murders Philip at the end of Part Two. Minnie describes this state between “sleeping and waking”: “Between the two hangs the quickly-snapped thread of reason and explanation: voices whispering, faint flashes of the truth”; “the day is a chasm, dark and deep and with two sides that only occasionally are bridged, by a slender bridge that turns out at a change in the weather

to have been nothing more than a trick of the light” (69). What links the two perspectives is ambiguous, both “a trick of the light” and a “dark chasm,” and it is this ambiguity, as well as the play on seeing and deceit alluded to in Minnie’s description, that presage the text’s conclusion. The “quickly-snapped thread of reason and explanation” reflects Hugo’s death and Minnie’s compromised ability to reason and interpret, but her allusions to plotting (“whispers”) and deceit (“trick of the light”) also suggest she perceives more about Cliff Hold than she lets on, even to herself or the reader: as she hints earlier in the text, “my clumsiness was more opportune than I knew” (20).

In Part Two, Minnie becomes aware that Cliff Hold’s strangeness is generated as much by its underlying political reality as by the subjective nature of time and memory. Although her intellect is “not subtle enough” to grasp the subtext of Hugo’s novels (22), her *intuition* enables her to work out Moura’s plot. Like Colomba, whose evil eye and gift for the *ballata* are traced back to her female ancestors, Moura has inherited her “evil eye” from a “long line of Blackstone matriarchs” (91): “it was family lore—that [Moura’s] mother, that strong, wise, beautiful woman who lived at Blackstone—had been a possessor of the ‘eye.’ People were afraid to cross her. Moura said it was because she had magic powers” (42). Colomba’s *ballata* is multiplied and retroped as Moura’s local and feminine crafts: her paintings, embroidery, gardening, mosaics, and tapestries are Cliff Hold’s very texture. When Moura invokes her mother’s death to prompt Gareth’s sense of family loyalty, she metaphorically weaves a scene of guilt and oppression:

The room sighed with guilt, with the dark hours of *ennui* and suffering that had sunk into the walls and came out in scenes like this: a palimpsest of

human pain, reconciliations, compromise. Blackstone has always made me uncomfortable. (108)

Moura's craft is an extension of her mother's; inheritor of the "evil eye," she expands and reweaves the "palimpsest" of Blackstone's history of oppression and power.

Minnie describes walking around Cliff Hold as "running a thread on the elaborate walls of a maze" (48), as if she is trapped in the Minotaur's maze of Greek myth. The allusion to the spinner Ariadne recalls that Moura's name echoes that of the mythical Moirae, the three Fates who spin, measure, and cut the thread representing a person's life. Likewise, Moura determines the Rooneys' fate. Minnie foresees Moura's plot in a tapestry hanging at Cliff Hold, which depicts "a father, a seigneur" and "a woman in a white coif that looks as it sails out on her head like a white bird" (98). They are surrounded by young men and a young woman gathering sticks in the background.

Out riding with Moura the next day, Minnie thinks:

I felt as if I were being sewn into a drama I had never suspected—into a moving tapestry. Even the shadow of the young woman gathering sticks was there, up in the woods, where Hugo had fallen. I smelt the pain of the dying fox; the orange of the beech leaves underfoot was part of the livid colour of the violence that seemed to be all around. [. . .] Moura's white headscarf fluttered ahead of us like a white dove. (99)

The pastels of Moura's landscape paintings belie malice seething under the surface of Dunane and Cliff Hold and represented by the lurid tones and images of violence throughout the text: the rust-colored cats that fight outside of Cliff Hold, Moura's "orange flowers" that "shed petals like painted nails" (87), and her stark paintings, with their "stabs" of paint (67) that are so different from Lydia Nevil's picturesque watercolors in *Colomba*.

Like Colomba, Moura is motivated as much by her passionate adherence to established honor codes as her desire to assume the place of the patriarch and control her immediate family, specifically to wrest her “two stolen sons” back from Fran (171). Moura’s resentment of Fran, and her decision to frame Fran instead of Gareth for killing the Rooneys, is also due to generational and cultural differences. Moura is bound by tradition, rooted in the local, domestic, and private. Fran, in contrast, is a globetrotter and career woman whose “luck, or charm” comes from being born into wealth, or from being American, or both (26-28). She is the “New Woman” lacking “masochism, dependence, vulnerability”—all of “women’s traditional ills” embodied by Moura, who must constantly defend her family’s position in Dunane (28). More significantly, Fran’s interest in Ireland and Cliff Hold is purely exploitative, making a fetish of “starvation, illness, death” (27):

Oh, how Fran loves terrorism! Does she think she’s coming close to revolution, like when she goes to Gambia or El Salvador? [. . .]

“You can see what a great story this is,” Fran said. “I’m going to call the N. A. B. It’ll cause anti-Irish feeling just about the time they’re demonstrating in San Francisco in front of the Queen. It may make a difference to the election.” (142)

Even Minnie can sense that Fran’s “professional-interviewer” (142) pose is hypocritical:

It would have been unkind to discuss with her the nature of the régimes which her family, by way of investment, supported or at least condoned. But it was the old story: Fran thought she could use her money [. . .] to make the world a better place. Whether these people ever do is another matter. (32-33)

Fran’s filmmaking is analogous to America’s equally exploitative interventions around the globe. Many of the locations in Fran’s films—Beirut, Latin America, Afghanistan—are sites of American military and economic intervention.¹² Her

“documentaries” are modern versions of Lydia’s tourist paintings that invalidate Moura’s artistic affirmation of the local and traditional by reducing the villagers to simpletons, drunks, and eccentrics: “Stereotypes gestured and spoke to the camera with insincerity. Every point was too simple, but conclusive. Why can’t Fran leave all this alone? It’s so much more complicated than it seems” (140). In rewriting Lydia as a pushy daughter-in-law, Tennant makes explicit the unspoken rivalry between Colomba and Lydia, and retropes *Colomba*’s tension between island and continental mores as one between past and future, the traditional woman versus the “New Woman,” and Ireland’s provincial society versus America’s global empire.

Minnie, meanwhile, intervenes in this rivalry by setting her own revenge plot in motion. Fran has let slip that Moura, not Hugo, prevented Philip from marrying Minnie: “‘Philip always told me it was Moura who wouldn’t let him marry you,’ Fran said. ‘He told me Moura threatened to cut him out of Cliff Hold if he married you. She told him you were unstable, or something’” (153). Minnie’s version of Colomba’s manipulative *ballata* and tricks takes shape as imaginative scene- and narrative-making, in her daydreams, fantasies, and long-held myths about Cliff Hold. She revises Moura’s tapestry, giving its background figure an active role: unseen and unsuspected, Minnie “half upsets” Fran and Gareth’s identical jackets, so that Minnie wears the one Moura has loaded with a gun. She subverts Moura’s plot to frame Fran for the Rooney murder, usurping both Moura’s “eye” for justice and Fran’s filmmaker’s gaze. Looking through the scope of a gun, she thinks: “for that second I knew what it was to have her power, to hold the world in a frame and freeze it dead” (173-74). Minnie enacts her own vengeance in killing Philip, switching

around the meanings of frames, shots, and “an eye for an eye,” just as she shifts the positions of Moura’s loaded jackets and intended victims. But Philip’s death and the fact that Minnie’s “viewfinder” is a scope and not a camera, is only revealed at the very end. Because we are reading diary entries, we accept Minnie as a reliable narrator, but her diary is simply another means of enforcing her desired reality upon others. Colomba’s tricks and “evil eye” are retroped again as Minnie’s trickery allows her to control even the reader’s perspective: because she has led everyone to believe in her feebleness, no one suspects her of perceiving and foiling Moura’s plot. Minnie’s desire for revenge against Moura and Philip is another surprise, even to herself. Her divided consciousness enables her to deny her own machinations and motivations, perhaps even to the end. Her last words—“You know my mother wasn’t a real mother to me. I’ve got to stay here, Moura, and keep an eye on you!” (176)—are “simpleton” behavior that contradicts her knowing pun on “eye,” and it is impossible to know if Minnie has finally reconciled her two states of mind.

Woman Beware Woman multiplies and retropes the terror of Mérimée’s feminized and primitive codes of belonging, while shifting focus away from the honor of the patriarch to the women’s rivalries that play an equal part in the making and breaking of home. Tennant also makes more explicit the connections between family and regional politics: power, control, and submission within the family mirror larger struggles between different class, regional, and national groups. On a regional scale, struggles over who determines home are played out as terrorism and inter-class antagonism. Moura descends from the landed aristocracy while the Rooneys are represented as working-class thieves and terrorists. However, Moura’s calm

demeanor and upper-class airs belie *her* involvement with terrorism: her ancestors were supporters of the Republican cause and even knew Maud Gonne (44). (The start of the feud, Hugo's friendship with Kitty Rooney, echoes Parnell's relationship with Kitty O'Shea; Moura's grandmother "had hated Kitty O'Shea" (91).) On an international scale, the conflict between a patriarchal England and matriarchal Ireland is played out between Hugo and Moura. In another retroping of *Colomba's* island-mainland difference, Hugo is presented as a civilized counter to Moura's primitive codes of honor, an embodiment of "an eighteenth-century man" (21) of rationality and of left-wing communist politics, whose prize-winning books parody capitalism and the Anglo-Irish upper classes. Even his marriage conforms to his "philosophy of taking what you can from 'the capitalists,' even if 'the capitalist' was a rich girl who thought she was liked for herself" (113). But Hugo's leftist politics are possibly a glamorous pose, like his "delighted fantasy that he was Irish to the core, a rebel and a romantic entirely on [Ireland's] side": he is not really Irish, but prefers "a famous Irish revolutionary on the maternal side" to his more relevant background, "the East Anglian family Pierce, with the pheasant-shooting acres and ruddy landowners" (72-73). Despite being cut off from his family, Hugo has been born into privilege like Fran, and can afford radicalism; his brand of "rationality," like Fran's "objectivity," is built on the "pretended freedom, liberty and easily held radical beliefs" of the 1960s (28), and the unseen reality of imperialism: "[Hugo's family had] connections with South Africa, too, but how little food for thought that information provided, compared with the glamour of the famous revolutionary" (73). It is telling that Hugo loves infamously xenophobic narratives of conquest and adventure: American

Westerns and tales by the likes of Henty, Ballantyne, Kipling, and Haggard (62-3). Tennant's critique of England's eighteenth-century empire extends, of course, to American's twentieth-century one, represented by Fran. Tennant's retroping of these power struggles on an ever-growing scale illustrates how inevitably home is a product of exclusion and terror, shaped by larger forces than the individual. Minnie's half-comprehension of this truth does not free her from it. Her incorporation into the pattern of terrorism and hypocrisy reveals that if home is impossible to recover, it is also impossible to rectify.

3. *BLACK MARINA*: "THERE'S NO CULTURE HERE"

Black Marina takes place in the Grenadines just after the American invasion of Grenada in 1983. Holly, the first-person English narrator, has lived on the isle of St James for sixteen years, and speaks from the displaced position of exile in order to delegitimize the progressive liberal ethos of the 1960s in the West, exploring its horrific fallout in the literal, intertextual, and political Sargasso Sea that is St James. Tennant's modern version of Prospero's island becomes a metaphor for a global situation in which home, roots, and identity are determined by the operations of large, unseen political forces, invoking Jameson's postmodern sublime ("Logic" 38). As in *The Tempest*, different parties contest for ownership of the island: "Sanjay" Allard, last member of the island's original owning family; a Venezuelan business consortium investing in tourism; and Ford, who may be cooperating with Hudson Austin's revolutionary colleagues to stage an invasion of St James. Several sub-plots become intertwined with this main narrative: the story of Sanjay's wife and daughter, Dora and Pandora; the scheming of American Marines and figures from London

media and literary circles; and the return of Ford's supposedly estranged daughter Mari. The confusion of these plots is enhanced by Holly's narrative style, which, like Ella's and Minnie's, is a blend of observation, dreams, and memories, moving between past and present and reality and speculation without warning. Holly is also an unreliable narrator, concealing the extent of her knowledge about and participation in events from the reader, her insights and actions affected by personal motives that become apparent as the narrative progresses.

Woman Beware Woman and *Faustine* portray the experience of one exile to show that home is a paradox of inclusion and exclusion, and safety and terror. In *Black Marina*, all the major characters are exiles. Holly may have London roots, but she is also an orphan who grew up "in an aunt's boarding-house in North Berwick" (29). Since moving to St James, she has lived "like Robinson Crusoe" (50), isolated from England except for letters from her friend Lore.¹³ She is an outsider living in the "conglomeration of squalid houses" in the island village of "misfits, white trash, old-young" (23). Sanjay, despite his family's long ownership of St James, is technically homeless, since he only leases the south end of the island. Mari, or Marina, is the text's most obvious exile, separated, like her namesake in *Pericles*, from her real parents and birthplace. Her adoptive parents are also exiles: Teza is the daughter of an exiled Czech scientist, while Ford lives in self-imposed exile from St James, seeking his cultural roots by writing poetry that establishes

a common strand running between the Mayan and pre-Colombian societies of the South American continent, to whose neighbouring islands his ancestors were transported as slaves, and Africa, the land of beginning [. . .]. (80)

Ford's and Teza's histories illustrate the twentieth-century diaspora that is the legacy of world wars and preceding centuries of imperialism. Mari, their foster child who is also alienated from her roots, marks the continuation of this dispersion from homelands, native cultures, and families. Like Holly's village of misfits, St James is a microcosm of a such a world and era, a mix of tourists and wanderers, as well as "native" villagers who cannot trace their native roots, being the descendants of slaves. It is no wonder, as Holly notes, that everyone seeks "[r]oots, roots, roots" (65). Yet, roots and home are as mythical and elusive as St James "moving slowly away from us like a peaceful dream you can never quite catch" (20), or Grenada, "one of a chain of sad, thickly green islands in the blue [. . .] *bottomless and roofless* in the evening mist" (75, emphasis added).

As in *Faustine* and *Woman Beware Woman*, the instability of home is represented through instances of the uncanny, marking the return of repressed "local histories of exploitation and struggle" (Martin and Mohanty 296). As Holly's "homespun philosophy" dictates, "You have to go to the past to find the seeds of trouble" (20). The island's idyllic, tourist-friendly surface belies a history of human and ecological exploitation resurfacing in rewritten gothic tropes marking the uncanny. Fragmented manuscripts become shards of pre-Colombian pottery uncovered by the island's "strange tides" (125), signifying an oppressed and repressed pre-slavery culture. The gothic's rattling chains become ghostly slave music in the night, "the one thing the white man couldn't chain down":

The hedge of coconut palm and seagrape along the beach go first, as suddenly as colour draining out of the cheeks of a corpse. Then the horizon [. . .] is knocked flat out of the picture. It just isn't there anymore. The sun splits sideways, bunging up the sky with red. This gives a blood light all over to the

sand and the trees—and at the same time, although there’s no wind, there’s a rustling, whispering sound that sounds like a whole townful of tongues. I’ve even heard music. (29)

The aestheticized and titillating tropes of terror (night, exotic/foreign settings, ghosts) are transformed into the gory tropes of horror: “blood light,” the metaphor of the draining corpse and the images of blood, split skin, and cut tongues recall the physical violence accompanying one people’s subjugation at the hands of another. (The island’s slaves make another uncanny appearance when Holly sees their descendents still working in the island’s cottonhouse in 1967 (14-15).) Meanwhile, the gothic’s sublime European ruins become the island’s destroyed landscape, as the disintegrating infrastructure under old Allard (22) gives way to the ecological ruin wrought by the consortium: “A digger and dumper will wrench out the roots of the trees—it’s already started and you won’t hear the trees scream over the roar of the engines (20); “I don’t like to go down to the lagoon now and see the scar the tractor made [. . .] and trees dying that have leaned against each other [. . .] for thousands of years” (70).

The island’s history of enslavement, colonization, and recent commoditization is reflected in the repressed aspects of the Allards’ history, a history in which women, like the villagers, are victims of colonial enterprise. Sanjay’s wife Dora is

trapped in a dream that didn’t even belong to her husband but to his dead family—a pretty horrible dream, too, when you come to think of it: slaves, cotton, sugar, idleness, frippery. (75)

The “instant code” of sexism between men who look like “polo-playing, wife-murdering Englishm[e]n” (34) mandates that “women were a race apart—and faintly disgusting” (81). Accordingly, under the Allards the island conforms to a patriarchal

social structure in which women are positioned as subordinates: mistresses, slaves, servants, or employees. They are also infantilized. Dora, the “baby-faced wife with black curls,” epitomizes an ideal that equates femininity with submission: her put-on “lisp[ing] voice” and never-ending ailments are designed to mingle childish vulnerability with sexual appeal, which she uses to attract Sanjay’s attention (32). This is necessary, since Sanjay is known for his promiscuity. It is no coincidence that Sanjay’s favorite possession is a sculpture of a white woman and her slave lover, modeled on bodies from the ruins of Pompeii: the island’s mixed-race children are a legacy of the Allards’ treatment of female slaves. This practice continues, albeit between employer and employee, after slavery has ended, as Sanjay’s relationships with Millie and Holly illustrate. (It is unclear if Sanjay’s relationship with Millie is consensual. Holly enters into an affair willingly, but Sanjay abuses his position as her employer by withholding the pay raise she needs to leave St James.) Despite Dora’s sexual charms, she is just as powerless as these other women, and as her counterparts in Sanjay’s library of Western classics: “Shakespeare, Petronius, Ovid” (72). Women are in the same situation as the island’s villagers; like the colonial politician in V. S. Naipaul’s *The Mimic Men* (1967), all are actors, mimes, and pawns: “We, here on our island, handling books printed in [the “true, pure world” of Europe], and using its goods, had been abandoned and forgotten. We pretended to be real [. . .] we mimic men of the New World” (175).¹⁴ Symbolic of the discourses driving the Allards’ patriarchal imperialist dream, Sanjay’s books instigate Dora’s hysterical symptoms: “She couldn’t breathe when they were there” (72). This recalls Thaisa’s drowning in *Pericles* as well as Prospero’s similarly problematic library in *The Tempest*.

Shakespeare's narratives also foretell the cycle of absent mothers and captive daughters that will continue under Sanjay.

Like her namesake from Freud's case study, Dora suffers from hysteria.¹⁵ Her faints, difficulty breathing, and obsession with the island's poisonous landscape (a version of Ida Bauer's obsessive house-cleaning) may be symptoms of sexual frustration caused by Sanjay's affairs. But Dora's paranoia, hypochondria, and "insane" jealousy are at least symptomatic of repressed rage. As Teza asks, "Why should a man think he can shut a woman up on a lump of earth in the middle of the sea and just expect her to live out her life with him? [. . .] Treat someone like wallpaper and they peel off on you" (74). The text's allusion to *The Yellow Wallpaper* confirms that Dora's madness does not (only) have an organic cause, such as interbreeding (116), but traces back to Sanjay: "Sanjay wouldn't leave the island, and it rewarded him by becoming all he had [. . .]. His staying there made Dora continually, terminally ill" (73). This pattern of women's oppression continues with Pandora, who "inherits" her mother's madness: "All the fears of the islands came out as Dora raved and wept and dosed herself with anti-depressants, tranquillizers, vitamins. And Sanjay sat there silently, it was his fault" (74). Both mad, the women's distinct identities are lost as they become uncanny doubles of each another. This doubling becomes even more unsettling after Dora's death. Dora is not literally resurrected like Pericles' wife Thaisa, but instead haunts the text through her daughter, a "living dead" version of Dora whose madness renders her mindless and zombie-like: "The clouds of madness have come down and wiped out the past" (123). Pandora takes Dora's place in Sanjay's affections. He dotes on her and even gives

her a substitute wedding band, a “little gold ring” given to her as a child, and regularly adjusted for size (126). His attention to Pandora recalls his attraction to Dora’s childish flirtations, suggesting an incestuous relationship that may go as far back as Pandora’s infancy. As early as 1967, Holly is sickened by Sanjay’s interactions with the toddler during a picnic at the lagoon: “The way men rub up to a girl, make a pass at her one moment and then speak in the same voice to a child the next. It smacks of something disgusting to me” (35). Like Freud’s “Dora,” Pandora’s hysterical antics, which are often sexual in nature, suggest repressed memories of sexual abuse. She stares at her father’s Pompeii sculpture and envisions “the act of love she’d never known and could only imagine—in those sad, desperate wailings—with her father” (122). These “fantasies” are more likely memories linked to her intense fear of the lagoon and Sanjay’s toy marina:

I knelt down, pulling [Pandora] with me to the edge of the greenish-black slime that now filled the toy marina. [. . .] I began to pull at the tattered sails. A boom, fragile as a mummified finger, crashed without sound into the ooze.

“No! Pandora cried. “No! No! No!”

[. . .] What memories came into the girl’s splintered mind I’d find hard to say. There was Daddy, of course . . . and marina . . . and marina again . . . and Millie and dress, pink dress, something like that. Poor Pandora, the mosaic nearly fitted. Then it blew to smithereens again. (131)

The images of decay are uncanny, suggesting dormant memories coming to life and a repressed family history that is both corrupted and corrupting; the “mummified finger” that reaches out to Pandora signifies the threat of contamination from incest.

This scene also repeats the earlier scene from 1967, when Sanjay seems to flirt with his very young daughter. This is also when Pandora encounters her (then unknown) half-sister and black double Mari: the toddlers are burned by the poisonous

machineel trees and fight over Sanjay's toy boat before Dora hits "the little Creole kid" (35). This scene instigates Pandora's madness: "It wasn't long after the day of that picnic at the lagoon that little Pandora fell into madness. Millie thought someone had put a hex on the child" (42). Thus, Pandora's "primary scene" of incest and madness, a parody of Freud's Oedipal narrative of sexuality, is bound up with Mari's past (the repetition of "and marina . . . and marina again" highlights the word's double meaning), while the poisons of the island—the machineel trees and obeah hexes—are retroped as the contaminating decay associated with the Allards. The lagoon is also the very place where the "strange tides" reveal unearthed pottery, "sticking up in the sand like humps under bedclothes" (125). The reference to bedclothes alludes to Sanjay's incest with Pandora but is also a harbinger of his incest with Mari in the very same place later in the text: "Sanjay held her down. [. . .] She was struggling sometimes, then she was still, like a winged bird. You can't tell me I have to say it is rape. I'll say nothing now but a scream did come out of me" (151).

When Mari takes Holly back to the lagoon after this, Holly thinks:

It was a horrible thing, it could have been Pandora there. Her words . . . it was like two halves of a splintered mind coming together and the pieces fit and make a picture . . . and the picture is different for each of them and yet it's the same. That mark . . . that white mark on Marina's neck [. . .] that red blotch on Pandora [. . .] the sudden rain that came down through the machineel trees and bring [*sic*] poison-burn the day of the picnic at the lagoon.

Fear—and father—that was the part of the puzzle where the poor mad girl and Marina were joined. Fragments of fear, of envy and rage, of a mast sticking up in the creek's muddy water, and the sails of the new ship that Sanjay their father had made. (154-55)

Like Shakespeare's Marina, Mari has been reunited with her father, but the comical plot in which Pericles mistakes his daughter for a prostitute is inverted into tragedy, as the reunion of father and daughter becomes a literal scene of incest. Tangled roots,

repressed memories, and island politics come together through the “mosaic” of metonymic and metaphorical associations planted throughout the text: the toy *marina* and phallic mast, poison, scarred/scared children, fragments of the past, etc. If Pandora is a living dead version of her mother, then Dora/Pandora is doubled yet again in “black Marina,” who is described as a “zombie” (139, 153), a “spirit” and “souciant” (140).¹⁶ The cycle of sexual exploitation repeats and intensifies as interbreeding becomes incest, and as the death and decay associated with the Allards takes on a living form. All the uncanny tokens of the repressed—doubles, vampires, fragments, hysteria, etc.—work to reveal Pandora and Mari’s hidden and shared roots, and to “uproot” the repressive and repressed nature of the Allards’ homemaking on the island, which mingles patriarchal oppression with the evils of colonialism and slavery.

The island’s uncanniness extends from a repressed past of decaying imperial powers bound up with incest and slavery to the island’s present and future as a “product” of a modern commercial venture. Ghostly doubles and decaying mansions sit alongside equally uncanny simulacra. The island’s squalid village, “a slum” as the wealthy English call it (60), has a counterpart in the consortium’s manufactured “authentic” version, designed to entertain rich tourists (21). The new Craft Centre displays replicas of the pre-Colombian pottery found around the island while acting as a front for the investment of millions of American dollars. Although the landscape is crowded with stylized architecture, and the buildings themselves with cultural artifacts, there is no genuinely “native” culture on St James. In this sense, the island is again a microcosm of a global situation:

Twentieth-century identities no longer presuppose continuous cultures or traditions. Everywhere individuals and groups improvise local performances from (re)collected pasts, drawing on foreign media, symbols, and languages. (Clifford 14)

History and culture are performed on St James, but not in the free, rejuvenating eclecticism of postmodern art. Rather, artifacts and traditions are “(re)collected” in both senses—reified (collected as objects) and retold (made to re-signify)—by the island’s successive ruling powers, revealing how small a part local and individual agency play in the making of home and culture. Sanjay’s personal “museum” of artifacts (122), for example, represents the plunder of empires that literally uproot cultures, reducing colonies to material possessions and entertaining “exhibits” (122) that signify an empire’s power, rather than cultural identity or roots. Sanjay’s key piece, the Pompeii sculpture, is not even an authentic artifact but a copy of the real thing: a symbol of slavery, rape, and empire all bound up with one another, and of the violent removal from origins entailed in such exploitations. Similarly, the consortium’s attempt to recreate a native culture has the opposite effect by negating that culture. As Holly observes, the wealthy tourists have no sense of the island’s Caribbean roots: “Half the visitors down here pretend they’ve gone to Greece, we’ve even had orders for retsina” (43). Without a home to serve as an ideological base for identity, the villagers have no sense of identity and no power: “There’s no culture here and no history and without those you can’t have a sense of achievement, or so says V. S. Nightfall” (43), Holly notes, paraphrasing Naipaul.¹⁷

In this situation, where roots have been violently removed, even subjects are incorporated into the system of simulation or else registered as the primitive, dangerous, and unreadable other. Mari’s connections to her Afro-Caribbean origins,

her paternal and maternal lines, have each succumbed to these paths. Mari seeks her roots in the black father figure of Ford, who, in giving up his poetry, has ceased to contribute to a living Caribbean culture harking back to “the dance and the tales of kings and monsters, and the song” of his slave ancestors (29). Instead, he adapts his Caribbean and black identity into a series of performances, first entertaining the London literati with his poetry (39, 48), then joining Black Power and playing the role of “anarchic Ford” (31), and last seen parodying (perhaps) “the Establishment” as he unloads guns on the island in a “posh” cream-colored suit (88). Ford’s shifting identities signify his lack of rootedness and are in keeping with his assertion that “Caribbean peoples have no skills [. . .] no culture. We descended from slaves. What’re our hands for?” (90). Ford’s anger and desire for revolution, like Mari’s newfound radicalism, is meant to stand for a government of the people, but the text presents this radicalism through the paranoid perspective of the white English, as the rage of a native other *already constructed* as primitive and dangerous, as well as unstable.¹⁸ Mari’s emulation of Ford-the-performer marks her assimilation into a discourse that names her “*black Marina*,” but her radical aspirations are pointless in another sense, since Ford’s revolution fails and he is not her real father in the first place.

It is Mari’s hidden maternal line that truly links her to her black roots, but this connection is similarly compromised. Her mother Millie, for instance, is a “fantastic mime” whose mimicry of whites’ stereotypes about Afro-Caribbeans “redeem[s] the pathos of cultural confusion into a strategy of political subversion” (Bhabha 88-89). But for Millie, the reality is that this is also an exercise in “*self-mockery*” and “*self-*

deprecation” reinforcing her powerlessness (44, emphasis added). Tanty Grace may occupy the role Christophine plays in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, her obeah causing African fevers in the Grenadines and signifying a link with African traditions, but like her literary predecessor, she is also *already* constructed as a marginal, threatening, and unreadable presence. When she appears to Holly in a dream, she takes the form of a voodoo witch:

The shadow of her head ended in a sort of blaze, like a witch’s fire with black twigs sticking out, and I was frightened of that in the dream and shrank away from her. [. . .] “There’s been enough trouble caused by you,” Tanty Grace said. “Leave us all alone.” (147)

The meaning and addressee of Tanty Grace’s message is unclear, but implies intent to thwart Ford’s revolution. This counters the text’s earlier representations of a living obeah tradition as a challenge to white colonial authority. The novel’s conclusion reveals that Tanty Grace, like Ford, fails to subvert the island’s new colonizers, the tourist industry and the American military. Her obeah magic has been stripped of its power, as suggested in the way the feathers she uses for spells are “recollected” (rewritten) as signifiers of America’s biological warfare: “All the feathers and all the spells. And it was the Americans after all who put in that mosquito that gave Dora the dengue fever so she died” (114). As Holly realizes, under the island’s new ownership, all that will change for Tanty Grace and Millie is the nationality of their employer: “with Sanjay gone too they’ll have to do other things—go and get jobs with the Venezuelans, go up to the States maybe” (132).

Like Pandora and Dora, Mari is an exaggerated double of her mother Millie, but this is, paradoxically, a function of Mari’s distance from her (mother) culture (“the two women could have come from a different planet” (43)) and an

intensification of Millie's own symptoms of exile and rootlessness. Like Millie, Mari is a "mime" (140), choosing her identity from a selection of racial, cultural, and political options. The text makes much play of Mari's "honey-colored" skin and how it shifts between black and white, exotic and "savage": "In the moonlight she was white, and her hair, braided out from her head, was a deep black" (101). A moment later, she is "a different person again": "her face was black, features heavy in her face, mouth full in a savage contempt. Her plaited hair was like reeds in a tribal crown" (102). As with Ford, the reduction of Mari's sense of self (political, racial, cultural) to performance renders her powerless. She is described as a "shadow, leaving just a white husk behind" (126) and a "zombie" (139). Her changing color and political leanings are retroped as "litmus paper" when Julian Byrne tests her potential as a pawn in his plot to aid Ford's revolution (of which more, below) (87). Her changing skin and zombie-like anger are retroped again as the stereotype of a siren or *femme fatale*. In a gesture of mimicry and protest that echoes Ford's white suit and Millie's miming, Mari paints her face white, but Carr only sees her as "one of those soucriants [. . .] the spirits *that like to dress up* as beautiful women and stare out at you" (140, emphasis added), while Sanjay is "too dazed, too struck" by Mari's "extraordinary beauty" before he rapes her (144). Mari's radicalism ultimately becomes "grotesque and clownish" (144), a pose far less significant than her sexual appeal for (white) men: "[Mari] may say she wants an extreme left-wing revolution but is more likely, by the looks of her, to end up as a *Playboy* centrefold" (145). The male gaze becomes bound up with an imperialist perspective in which the villagers' agency means nothing, recalling Sanjay's model boats, a metaphor for the Allards'

use of St James as a personal playground for sexual, commercial, and “idealistic” pursuits. The modern incarnation of the English empire, represented by the media magnate Lockton, does the same on a larger scale:

Lockton had many interests in Venezuela and El Salvador. There was no interest for him at all in seeing a toy resort island in the middle of the trade route through the Grenadines become a trading post instead for Russian warheads and increased political instability. (76)

In his conversation with Carr, Carr’s point about the island’s independence goes ignored.

The island’s autonomy is meaningless, but this reflects the equally empty ceremonial performances of English culture that declare the island “‘independent’ (what a laugh)” (37), and the empire’s own “roots in ignorance and fantasy” (122). The old Allard mansion is itself a simulation of an English country home, like the island’s imported British foodstuffs and holiday décor, meant to recreate “brass fender and fires burning and the kind of Christmas you were meant to have had as a London child” (29). *Black Marina* narrates the loss of English roots as well as Caribbean ones (thus the allusions to the shipwrecks strewn throughout some of the founding texts of English literature—*Robinson Crusoe*, *The Tempest*, *Pericles*), although it is clear where Tennant lays the blame for this. The family’s intermarrying, a self-protective practice meant to preserve bloodlines, becomes self-contamination as inbreeding disintegrates into incest and mad, unviable offspring.¹⁹ Continuing the metaphor of incest, the family’s most monstrous offspring, the island itself, circles back on the family, literally devouring the Allard empire as the mansion decays in the jungle, Sanjay’s library disintegrates into “paper mulching back in the tropics to root and tree” (72), and the “skins of white women go green and the hair

goes lank in this tropical heat” (32). Like Rochester in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Sanjay is another victim of his family’s dream that no longer belongs to him (75): “Living here is like lying in your own grave [. . .]. But I can’t get up” he tells Holly (73). He is left marooned and rootless by old Allard’s sale of the island, as his leased house, built from a shipwrecked boat, attests (70). As Holly notes, he is trapped in the “tail end of the nineteenth century while the new age thundered ahead in the north” (71). Carr also pities him:

there was something childlike and untouched about the man, that made you sorry for him. It was when you thought of him up against it in a tough, modern world. [. . .] You could see Sanjay walking across his fields or moors with the absolute confidence that belongs to those who have been brought up to believe that ownership of the land goes with the Act of Creation [. . .].
(142-43)

Like Pandora, who is a ghost of her mother, Sanjay is a ghost of all his ancestors, the exploitative Allards as well as the Allard of 1876, who supported the Federation Riots in Barbados and feasted with his own workers, except Sanjay “saw the village as a sort of commune, only one that would cater pretty exclusively to his needs” (19-20). Carr calls Sanjay an “old-fashioned liberal” akin to Maurice Bishop, but “too bloody naïve” (78). Sanjay is familiar with the villagers, reads Ford’s poetry, and may be aiding Ford’s invasion, but his hands still say, ‘I’m powerless’” (126). The narrative’s final irony is that Sanjay’s sympathy for the revolutionaries and the fact that he’s “gone native” are turned against him. His attraction to Mari repeats his too familiar ways with Millie, rewriting *Pericles*’ comical reunion into a tragic one, with an element of black humor and revenge as the invading American Marines mistake the mud on his face for black skin and murder him.

The process by which roots and authenticity become simulation and performance is shown to be pervasive, extending from cultural identity to political beliefs. Holly's allegiances, for example, are always shifting. She has sympathy for Sanjay, but also supports the Austin coalition (95, 114). She imagines a t-shirt that says, "YANKS HANDS OFF" (16) but is later named as an informant for the Americans (150). Holly is frequently less innocent and more involved than she lets on. She feels maternal toward Mari, but perhaps jealous also:

Just to teach you, Marina, that your pure-little-revolutionary act can be pretty irritating to an old cynic like me. These things can jump two ways, you know. You come to find your roots on the magical island of St James, baby. OK, so I'll help you with your identity. And maybe you and that poor mad girl will have something to cry about together after all. (128-29)

On witnessing the rape, she admits: "Maybe I knew all along just what I would see" (151). She also admits to hexing Dora and antagonizing Pandora, all to get Sanjay to leave the island with her. While she believes the obeah curse killed Dora, she is also knowing about "the trials and tribulations suffered by St James over the past years":

Was anyone aware that tropical fevers not previously known in the region had declared themselves in Grenada, Carriacou and Bequia? [. . .] Would Mr Carr please report this, as well as the employing of poisoned feathers and the defoliation of trees, down at the lagoon in particular, where there was a primal jungle much in need of conservation? Did Mr Carr know that a Mr Jim Davy, who was involved in the local Craft Centre, had put in a large amount of US dollars [. . .]? Didn't all this add up to a concerted effort on the part of the United States of America to "destabilize" any island with a regime that favoured the people? (118)

Later, she elaborates:

I'm not surprised when they tell me, "You know who fix this revolution in Grenada? The fuckin' CIA, that's who." It was practice time in Vieques years before [Bishop's overthrow]. The Yanks bomb a Puerto Rican island, Vieques. Ferdie tell me that down at the bar. (153)

Given her shifting interpretations of events, which rely on paranoid speculation and island gossip arising in the wake of events in Grenada, it is never clear if Holly is naïve, paranoid, or insightful. Her political allegiances are confused by her personal motivations: her attachment to Sanjay, her resentment of Dora and Pandora, and her desire to leave St James. This may be a marker of her canniness, of playing different sides of the many conflicts on the island, but even if this is true, her shrewd behavior is connected to her divided sense of self and political consciousness. As discussed above, Holly's social status is ambiguous, somewhere between a native villager and a white English tourist. Even before coming to St James, she was a study in contradiction, sharing Teza's radical rejection of "patriarchal imperialism" (22) but working as a barmaid/escort for "literary drunks" (31). As she goes to the lagoon on the night of the rumored invasion, she adopts a different accent:

Envy, rage, like *baligey*, shooting up like the wild banana fronds I stumble through in that jungle [. . .] inside the walls where the white man lay down his straight paths and keep me out. [. . .] You remember what that boy on Grenada say when the gringos come. 'Before the revolution we were not in the light,' he said. 'I rather they kill me dead than I go work for them if they come to take over we land and try to oppress we again.' (150-51)

But this stance of identification with the revolutionaries is not necessarily authentic. As Holly herself states: "Everything single thing got its other side. And I can do that double thinkin' too" (153). She performs her different identities in the same way the wealthy tourists and the villagers perform theirs—which is why, when the text shifts to Carr's viewpoint, he thinks she is "ready to believe any of the mixed-up stories she invented for herself" and is wary "of being set up as a spectator at a hackneyed but still powerful piece of theatre" (120).

Others' political motivations are equally hypocritical and changeable. Like the consortium, which disguises its business interests as an investment in local culture, the media has a hidden agenda of protecting Latin American interests and fostering a relationship with America (Lockton asks Carr to share his information with Jim Davy). Reportage merges with spying, and in turn with entertainment. Readers' trust in Carr's "agate integrity" derives from their trust in similar performances: "Alec Guinness as Smiley or Sean Connery as Bond" (60). Carr is caught up in the media theatre, costuming himself in shirts from Jermyn Street and "remembering his left-wing views" as if they are part of a script (100). Used by Lockton to signify the newspaper's "objective and fair" stance, Carr becomes an advertisement in an industry where real events, places, and people are repackaged as fleeting news stories and party gossip (93) before becoming forgettable:

Carr's articles will be read with the port and cigars at the clubs in St James's [in London], and in humbler homes, in garden cities and shires. And many of the readers will do no more than reflect with relief on how wise they were not to have booked a "luxury holiday" in the Caribbean after all. (60)

Like Carr, Julian Byrne lacks real substance. He has an aura of "ghostliness"(79)

because his personality is derived from a literary industry as fake as the media:

from an endless re-reading of novels of fierce restraint by Yorkshire parsons' daughters (not nearly as good as Jane Eyre [*sic*], obviously) to the viewing and re-viewing of stilted, permed performances by unknown actresses. (80)

Byrne's primary interest in Ford's "character" is his revolutionary politics, a distraction from the "embalmed quality" of his tedious literary career (80). Holly notes that Byrne and Ford "were like boredom and impatience coming together" (91): the events in St James are little more than an exciting plot to Byrne, in which Ford and Mari are malleable characters.

Although Holly participates in the same kind of hypocritical “double thinkin,” as a “misfit” she is able to see through others’ performances, and to realize that the many parties involved in St James really represent two major interests: “The fighting’ll be between the Cubans and the Americans. I see it in my dreams and then the Russians fly in in planes from dark skies heavy with snow” (37). America, in league with South American business, seeks to control oil trade routes along the Grenadines, while the Grenadian revolutionaries are realistically just a means for Cuba and Russia to gain a military foothold in the area. Thus the fight to control St James, which appears to be a local struggle between tourists and natives over who gets to define “home,” is actually a larger battle of discourses between capitalism and communism in which culture and community do not matter. “Sharing is called democracy. Or it’s called socialism,” Holly sarcastically tells an uncomprehending Pandora (131). Both discourses are revealed to be the problematic heirs to imperialism. Old Allard’s body is symbolically carried off the island in an American car (21), and Sanjay looks out to South America as if foreseeing the island’s future while “[i]n a comic-strip show of equality and comradeship, the Americans and Venezuelans will dance with the villagers from St James” (37). This is democracy as farce: “It’s money, of course. Everything is” (16), as the sight of oil tankers traveling from Venezuela to the United States suggests (42). Meanwhile, the text’s critique of imperialism and capitalism extends in equal measure to socialism. Teza, a radical feminist, has a “kind heart” matched by a “totalitarian mind” (23). Like Ford, whose desire for social equality is at odds with Black Power’s sexism, Teza’s politics are

inconsistent. She is supportive of communist regimes but blind to their exploitation of women and the poor:

Last time she went to Cuba she sent me down a bundle of Havana cigars. “It’s shocking, Holly,” she said on the card from the Socialist Havana Hilton poolside. “These cigars are still made by the women here rubbing the tobacco leaves on the insides of their thighs. And it’s still a piece-work system, I’m quite surprised. (23)

Holly bitterly notes that Teza can afford to be radical; like Byrne, she is a member of the educated upper class playing at socialism from the comfort of her own stylish home:

Who’s the one who went back to England and came into money from her mother or someone and pursued her radical journalism and bought a nice little house in Portobello Road, where the West Indians are, move along, move along, please up the Harrow Road as the area becomes more fashionable? (22)

Holly compares Teza favorably with Sanjay, whose “bloated and pinched look” is the “effect of too much money and too much drugs and what you rip off with one hand you give munificently with the other,” but for all Teza’s protests that Sanjay represents “the most extreme form of patriarchal imperialism,” the knock-on effects of her politics are not that different (22-23). Meanwhile, Ford’s government of the people is seen to be a “violent brand of Marxism-Leninism” (76). Too “middle-aged” for radicalism (“Revolution wears off” (89)), Holly dwells on the human losses incurred when socialism is achieved by violent means. Thinking about the procession in which Bishop and his girlfriend Jacqueline Creft were murdered, Holly remembers:

Mrs Creft, Jackie’s mother, rushed out as the procession passed her door and said, “Hold it, I’ll bring you out some bread.” But by the time she’d run into the kitchen and back out again, the procession had surged on. She never saw her daughter again. I don’t know why—that story seems to me the saddest one of all. (129)

This story repeats the victimization of women—especially the separation of daughters from mothers—under the Allard regime, highlighting the similarities between imperialism and a too-extreme radicalism that lapses into totalitarianism.

Although Holly possibly helps set Mari's fate in motion, she is the only character able to see the mythical, fated nature of Mari's return, and the larger cycling of old powers into new ones. Tennant's rewriting of canonical texts in which home is contested sets up an intertextual relationship that is cyclical and repetitive, rather than (not only) linear and progressive. Toward the end of the text, Holly's awareness that "stories can colonize" is represented through explicitly mythical tropes adapted from Ford's early poetry (itself a Caribbean rewriting of Greek myth). Ford's most famous poem is about a "singin' she-dog," a version of the riddling Sphinx at Thebes.

Although Holly's relationship to Ford's poetry concerns his later work—he dedicated poems to Holly as "the spirit of London"(146)—in her dream Holly envisions herself as the "singin' she-dog," signifying her new identification with an earlier tradition directly related to the island:

I watched in the corner, crouched on stone paws. Like it was one of the lions in Trafalgar Square, but when I looked down it was me—I'd turned to stone and I was crouching there on my chipped stone paws. A singin' she-dog, and on the corner of Portobello Road. (146)

As Holly travels toward Ford's landing point and the scene of Mari's rape, the mythical force of the situation is troped through Holly's oracular vision: "Outside, outside the walls of Thebes where Ford say the singin' she-dog live, I squat on stone paws answering that riddle where the answer is always incest, ruin, death" (150).

Pushing past "the roots in the earth that looked like the heads of prehistoric monsters" she witnesses Mari's traumatic encounter with her Allard roots, which is played out

against the cyclical image of an “upturned tree that was like a great wheel, with all the spokes mangled and forcing themselves out” (151). Thus continues a cycle of “incest, ruin, and death” in which family histories repeat themselves, roots are exposed, old literary tropes are replaced with new ones, and one ruling power accedes another. As the island landscape itself foretells, “the tales of kings and monsters [. . .] all come out of this terrible darkness” (29). Holly’s earlier comment—“What difference does it make which pigs get into power and run the world?” (126)—takes on a different meaning, suggesting helplessness rather than cynicism, since “Whichever way you go, the path lead back to the same place [*sic*]” (153). Like Mari, Holly has recovered her own (political) roots, and seen how problematic they are. The “sad feeling” of “late 60s” when “[e]verything was rotting with sadness and protest and self-pity and loneliness” (33) persists, except now the era of rock music, disposable products, and “spontaneous and glorious sixties parties” has become an era of “funny political stuff and violence” (88) and throwaway ideals.

In Tennant’s new/old myth, in which all homes and identities are written over into empty signifiers, only Mari represents hope for the future, as the potential heir to Ford’s abandoned poetic project rather than his problematic radical activism. Before Mari’s homecoming becomes a repetition of Pandora’s past, Holly compares Mari to Alice Walker’s *Meridian*, and like an oracle foresees Mari’s “craziness” as taking a different route than Pandora’s: “Marina may seem ‘a little crazy,’ like *Meridian* in Alice Walker’s book, but she’s not crazy, to her own mind, like Pandora”; “She, with her calm acceptance of purpose, can bring the mightiest country to its knees” (128). As discussed above, Holly’s and Mari’s desire for revolution is revealed to be

problematically motivated and pointless. But at the end of the text, Holly's narrative has been replaced by new narratives that shift the text's meanings all over again.

Carr's article for *The Sunday Times* reports the American invasion of St James that leads to Sanjay's death, confirming the shift from one empire to another while signaling the end of Holly's narrative. Carr's report is followed, however, by Millie's letter to Mari, and a poem entitled "Mighty Barby's Song." Millie acknowledges Mari as her daughter and urges her to find a new life in London, while Mighty Barby's song explains the irony of Sanjay's death, the mud on his face that caused a case of mistaken identity. Millie's letter shows that Mari has recovered her Caribbean roots in a written reunion with her mother, and positions Mari as the new "spirit of London," while the text's concluding song is written by Mari's *other* double, a young albino black man who takes up Ford's role as island poet. The island's poetic future is passed to characters of symbolic racial indeterminacy, whose skin does not inscribe them with any particular ethnic origin. Places, positions, and means of identity are unsettled in a way that breaks the cycle of corrupted powers replacing one another. Ford's "spirit of London" is no longer a misfit Londoner, but a St Jamesian; earlier, Mari climbs inside the pre-Colombian urn in the Craft Centre, literally filling/embodying the only genuine artifact on the island and illustrating her potential role as the muse for a new kind of poetry. London itself has changed, becoming a new home to Caribbean immigrants; even as they are still being unsettled—shifted down Portobello Road by the fashionable and fake—they and other immigrants dominate the city's vibrant markets, where their "rugs and textiles patterned like nothing you've seen in your life before" symbolize the makings of a

new text (49), “the dance and the tales of kings and monsters, and the song” that emerge from the world’s “terrible darkness” (29). “Imaginary homelands” can be taken away, but they can also be rewritten.

Like Tennant’s protagonists, the three texts discussed above occupy a complicated position with/against imperialist, patriarchal, capitalist, and upper-class centers, a position that enables Tennant to “dissect oppressive institutions” (Ingram 6) and delegitimize myths. But, as bell hooks argues, occupying an ambiguous position both within and without one’s own culture promotes an ambivalence of perspective: “We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as the margin. We understood both” (ix). Told from both outside and inside, Tennant’s new myths also problematize the “progressive” ethos and liberating discourses of the 1960s, the era presented in the texts as the birth of a global postmodernity characterized by the loss of all kinds of origins and homes. Language itself—art, poetry, the double-voicedness of mimicry—becomes a strategy for subverting or countering these discourses, but is itself represented in a deeply ambiguous and ambivalent way. In *Black Marina*, Tennant gives a voice to Caliban’s modern counterparts, allowing them to “curse” their oppressors in a hybridized form of their own language, just as in *Woman Beware Woman*, Moira and Minnie enact their own curses through modern forms of the *ballata*. However, as seen most explicitly in *Faustine*, there is always the possibility that larger powers control and speak through you. In these realities of ever-shifting surfaces, where *everything* is surface, the appearance of control may be only that. *Black Marina* conveys a sense of

hope in the island's future poets and writers, but the text also shows us that history tends to repeat itself. And that history reveals, depressingly, that poetry, writing, art, and mockery are double-voiced as well as double-edged, a form of mimicry that is potentially subversive, as Bhabha argues, but also potentially irrelevant. Like the radical, liberating politics undermined in all three texts, strategic language, such as the rewriting of long-standing myths, is reducible to a pose or otherwise an earnest but futile gesture in a world where the difference between the two no longer matters.

¹ Displacement and delegitimation are discussed in Chapter 2. See DuPlessis, Purkiss, and Ostriker.

² Barthes's understanding of myth as a semiological system or language means that myth "can consist of modes of writing or of representations; not only written discourse, but also photography, cinema, reporting, sport, shows, publicity, all these can serve as a support to mythical speech" (*Mythologies* 110).

³ Tennant was not aware of Middleton's play at the time of writing her novel. It was Angela Carter who suggested the title to Tennant after hearing her description of the story ("Women Talking" 133).

⁴ See also Gardiner 149 and Savory.

⁵ London: Faber, 1992. Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁶ Ella compares the Neidpaths to Cerberus, the three-headed dog who guards the door to the underworld in Greek mythology (29).

⁷ Tennant's use of "frivolous" is also a nod to the contemporary genre of the mass-market romance, which draws on the gothic. Tennant often juxtaposes the popular with the classic or classical, and this is more apparent in the texts discussed in this chapter, since they draw on so many different source texts at once. In *Faustine* for instance, tropes from "high" Greek mythology are interwoven with tropes from "low" fairy tales and the popular romance.

⁸ For readings of the eternal feminine in *Faust*, see, for example, Jantz and Niazi.

⁹ The allusion to Mary Shelley and *Frankenstein* points to that text's intertwined metaphors of maternity and creativity, and its ambivalence and anxiety about both.

¹⁰ London: Picador, 1984. Subsequent references are to this edition.

¹¹ Every scene from Minnie's London life is set in her mother's North Kensington flat, which suggests she is not a homeowner but a tenant or dependent; if she is merely *visiting* her mother, it is significant that her own home does not figure at all in the narrative.

¹² Fran's earliest films show footage of "the corruption of American companies in Latin America, the colonization, brothelization [. . .] of islands in the Caribbean under American influence [. . .] torture in the Philippines" (32).

¹³ London: Faber, 1986. Subsequent references are to this edition.

¹⁴ London: Reader's Union, 1968. Subsequent references are to this edition. Holly later alludes to *The Mimic Men* directly. See also note 17.

¹⁵ Freud initially diagnosed Dora with sexual frustration, but later uncovered memories of sexual abuse when she was fourteen, although Freud interpreted that incident as being pleasurable to Dora rather than traumatic (8: 35-164). Cixous has suggested that Dora's symptoms are a protest against patriarchal oppression (*Portrait; Boyman*), and Tennant takes a similar stance in parodying the case study in her representations of Dora and Pandora.

¹⁶ A souciant is a female vampire/witch of Caribbean folklore.

¹⁷ Naipaul's protagonist in *The Mimic Men* realizes that "in a society like ours, fragmented, inorganic [. . .] a society not held together by common interests, there was no true internal source of power, and [. . .] no power was real which not come from the outside" (246).

¹⁸ Both Lockton and Byrne doubt Ford's political sincerity. Lockton tells Carr, "You could never tell with these fellows. They changed their position every two minutes" (76) and Byrne says that "Ford was never properly serious about politics": "The last time I saw him [. . .] he told me was thinking of joining the Ess Dee Pee!" (84). Byrne is already convinced of Ford's dubious intellect and sense of commitment, and is therefore blind to the way Ford often adopts a mocking stance.

¹⁹ These anxieties about the products of a tainted womb retrope the original understanding of hysteria as a disorder in which humors from the uterus travel to the brain.

CHAPTER V

REWRITING/VENTRILOQUISM: PASTICHE, PLAGIARISM, PROFIT

“ [. . .] I do think that one tricks oneself as a writer, in the most extraordinary way. And it’s one long, sort of dishonesty, and lie, quite honestly” (Tennant, “Women Talking” 139-40)

In this final chapter, I turn to Tennant’s more recent work. This includes rewritings that rely on pastiche and ventriloquism, such as sequels and biofictions.¹ In earlier chapters, I have considered Tennant’s refusal of categorization, the political and generic ambiguity and ambivalence of her texts. I have examined the related question of reception and valuation in Chapter I, but have not delved into the *ethical* ramifications of Tennant’s rewritings. The texts discussed in this chapter tend to be relegated to the (overlapping) categories of non-literary, commercially opportunistic, and ethically troubling writing. All of these categories, in one way or another, point to the problem of profit (financial or personal), and of profit gained by questionable means. This seems especially applicable to texts that seem *designed* for the mass market, either because they follow a proven formula or because attach themselves to well-known figures or events. The specters of scandal and sensation inevitably appear, all the more so when a text seems to infringe on someone else’s work, or someone else’s life. In particular, the pastiche sequel, self-consciously written “in the style of,” is seen as aesthetically dubious: “sequels are always disappointing” in comparison to their “charismatic” predecessors (Castle 133). Budra and Schellenberg argue against this bias, pointing out that “[i]n an intertextual universe, within which the name of the author no longer demarcates an inviolable territory, every text is a

sequel to every other text” (11). The novel—sequel or not—is always driven by profit, as Budra and Schellenberg point out:

the public sphere in which the original text takes its place must be considered both as a marketplace and as a discursive space, which can, in both of these forms, be constructed not only by writers, publishers, texts, and readers, but also by other actors such as agents, pirates, advertisers, imitators, and reviewers. (4)

Yet, the sequel inevitably prompts questions about originality and plagiarism, as reviews of Tennant’s “parasitic” work have sometimes suggested (Kemp, “Too Much”). The ethical import of biofictions, or fictional representations of real people, seems even more pressing: when is it acceptable to transform historical figures—often beloved by the public—into characters, and what are the rules for doing so? Although at first glance the texts discussed in this chapter seem to be less “original” and more “superficial” than those discussed in other chapters, on closer examination one can see that the questions they prompt (and anticipate and play with) are not dissimilar to those raised by rewritings that seem less motivated by profit. When does any kind of rewriting, whether revision, displacement, pastiche, sequel, creative reconstruction, etc., cease to be innovative in its own right, and start to become parasitic, aesthetically and “morally shallow” (May), in some way *false*?

I argue that Tennant’s uses of pastiche do not amount to Jameson’s version of pastiche as “blank parody” signifying lost norms (“Logic,” 17). They resurrect the (literary) past, and although they do this through a simulation of other styles and voices, the texts do not suggest “nostalgia for a lost referential” (Baudrillard 44), or act/pose as a symptom of “the frenetic proliferation and circulation of images” (Carmichael 175)—at least, they do not so without also offering some other message.

Rather, the texts discussed here are akin to “historiographic metafiction” in their *paradoxical* and double relationship with the past and with literary history specifically.² For Tennant, pastiche is a double strategy: a way to parody how literature itself becomes commoditized, but also to explore the consequences of suspending the difference between real and unreal, or between fictional and true narratives. In Tennant’s fiction, pastiche points us back to the surface, to superficiality, but only to show how so-called fictions still hold so much meaning, and so haunt us despite our attempts to rewrite them.

1. PASTICHE: BEYOND PARODY

Tennant’s consistent reliance on different kinds of pastiche generates her ambivalent and ambiguous signature. The term pastiche can denote two kinds of rewriting: the combination of elements from multiple genres (“a medley of references”), or the “extended imitation of the style of a single artist or writer” (Sanders 5). Tennant employs both kinds of pastiche, sometimes in the same text. Because I have examined Tennant’s combination and rewriting of genres throughout this thesis, I will focus on pastiche in the latter, author-imitative sense here, although it is important to note that the one can quickly collapse into the other. Imitative pastiche blurs original and copy: it is potentially homage or parody, a continuation of a previous text or a deliberate disruption of it. Despite these surrounding ambiguities, however, this kind of pastiche tends to be defined as a lower-order genre based on a “relationship of dependence and derivation” with earlier texts: “pastiche is subordinate and contingent inasmuch as it relies upon other works and cannot be independent” (Gutleben 25).

Jameson argues:

Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists. Pastiche is thus blank parody. ("Logic" 17)

As Jameson argues, along similar lines to Baudrillard, the prevalence of pastiche in postmodern writing is symptomatic of an era in which there is no "real," whether that means language, history, or art. Jameson laments the "reduction" of norms to simulations: language's deterioration into a "reified media speech" among innumerable jargon-laden "idiolects;" history's reduction to "a vast collection of images;" art's transformation into the imitation of "dead styles" in the "imaginary museum" ("Logic" 17-18). Of course, as Nancy K. Miller points out, the loss of norms, such as the loss of ego or the death of the author, and by extension, the loss of history, might signify a position of privilege (*Subject* 106). That the past no longer means, that history's representations are no longer real, does not hold true for everyone. Writing from a feminist perspective, or writing in "popular" genres, as Tennant does, may mean struggling against a still-thriving canon of male and/or "classic" texts, against the discourses they propagate, and against an implied hierarchy of artistic value based on the relationship between aesthetic, commercial, and moral worth. The fact that Tennant's pastiche sequels and biofictions link themes of fidelity and reproduction—both biological and literary—to issues of profit might itself be read as a metaphor for the influence or legacy of a past transmitted through official histories ("History") and fictions, as well as a playful nod to the way "aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally" (Jameson, "Logic" 4).

Favret observes how film adaptations of Austen texts intertwine loyalty in Austen's plots with the issues of fidelity surrounding adaptation. Favret argues that fidelity is an "encounter with the past and death"; "At the heart of these films is the question [. . .] of whether or not being true is an animating or mortifying process" (64). Romantic loyalty is a key theme in Tennant's sequels to Austen novels, and offers an analogy for intertextual fidelity; there is a similar parallel between biological reproduction and literary reproduction. In Tennant's nineteenth-century source texts, fidelity between marriage partners and reproductive fertility are bound up with the protection and inheritance of property. Tennant's sequels make this connection between fidelity/fertility and money more explicit. *Pemberley* and *An Unequal Marriage*, sequels to *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), center on Elizabeth's ability to produce an heir, and on the conundrum posed when the Darcys must choose an heir between an unsuitable son and a responsible but ineligible daughter. (As promised in *Pemberley*'s Prefatory Note, these sequels challenge Austen's implication that her characters live "happily ever after"; they also explore more fully the gender inequalities of Austen's society, especially in relation to the ownership and management of property.) In *Elinor and Marianne: A Sequel to Sense and Sensibility*, crises over marital fidelity and the loss of property occur simultaneously with Elinor's and Marianne's first pregnancies. In *Emma in Love*, a sequel to Austen's *Emma* (1816), Emma Knightley seeks a diversion from her unconsummated marriage in her sexual desire for another woman. Questions of motherhood, matchmaking, and illegitimate children—all connected to protecting estates—permeate a plot in which Emma is duped by a lesbian jewel thief who

disguises herself as characters from French novels. These connections between fidelity, fertility, and fortune find a parallel in Tennant's own fidelity to Austen: all of Tennant's sequels continue where Austen's plots leave off, and imitate her style.³ *Pemberley* even begins with a paraphrase of Austen's most famous line: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a married man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a son and heir" (3). But this fidelity to Austen is only a simulation of authenticity, one catering to a ready-made market of "Janeites" and Austenites." Tennant's Austen pastiches are not original or authentic in terms of their content or aesthetics (both formulaic), but when we consider them as postmodern texts, originality and authenticity are not the point: Tennant's juxtaposition of fidelity and fertility in marriage, and fidelity and fertility between literary texts, ironically highlights how profit drives both concerns.

Even in these most superficial "linguistic masks" of Austen, Tennant's tropes of faithfulness and reproduction render pastiche a means of parodying the literary industry, if not Austen's texts *per se*. Tennant's sequels bring authors and their characters back to life, at the same time that they kill or reify them into commodities with a paradoxical lowbrow-highbrow appeal. On the one hand, fleshing out Emma's bisexual desires is a canny risk, since courting sensation and scandal (precisely about fidelity to dead authors) guarantees publicity and sales. On the other hand, the sequel employs its "classic" source text as a signifier of its *own* value, and relocates itself in the originating position in the chain of simulation it both parodies (*Emma in Love's* joke about literary impersonations is unmistakable) and perpetuates: the preface to *Emma in Love* indicates that Tennant has "created a new literary genre, *now much*

emulated, the classic progression” (emphasis added). In a second paradox, the sensationalistic plot allows Tennant to remain faithful to Austen’s so-called lesbian subtext while also rewriting the twentieth-century Austen myth.⁴ The transformation of an author and her texts into a for-profit “living tradition,” and the ambiguous, ambivalent nature of rewriting (faithful or traitorous? animating or mortifying?) are Tennant’s implicit subjects, although they are (almost) beyond parody.

2. PLAGIARISM: A DOUBLE VENTRILOQUISM

The Austen sequels, parodying but profiting from an exploitative literary industry, are examples of the way pastiche can be read as ambiguous and ambivalent—double in its significance—even as it points us away from depth (content) to the surface (style, formula). The Austen sequels also raise questions about fidelity to dead authors, even though they do not explore these questions directly. Tennant’s sequels to novels by Emily and Charlotte Brontë explore the doubleness of pastiche, and concerns about ventriloquism, homage, and plagiarism more explicitly by weaving these concerns into their narratives. Tennant’s *Adèle: Jane Eyre’s Hidden Story* employs a double-voiced ventriloquism, reproducing the settings, characters, and style of *Jane Eyre*, but also displacing that text by giving a voice to Brontë’s illegitimates: madwomen, mistresses, servants, “French bastards” such as Adèle Varens, circus performers, and grotesques. The text is mainly narrated by Adèle, although Grace Poole, Mrs Fairfax, and Rochester are also narrators. Like Jean Rhys, Tennant humanizes Bertha by restoring her original name, Antoinette. Tennant’s plot changes are a more significant means of displacement, however. Angry, fantasizing, and rebellious, Adèle learns many secrets over the course of Tennant’s “hidden story,” secrets she

represses as she grows older: how a scheming, alcoholic Grace Poole tries to blackmail Rochester; how Mrs. Fairfax torments, starves, and later murders Antoinette by locking her out on the roof; and how Mrs. Fairfax uses Adèle's magnifying glass to start the famous fire that sends Grace Poole, disguised as Antoinette, plummeting to her death. These plot changes enable Tennant to displace "Bertha's" monstrosity onto a version of Mrs. Fairfax resembling Mrs. Danvers, the housekeeper from du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938). Such indirect allusions to *Rebecca* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* place *Adèle* in a tradition of rewritings of *Jane Eyre*. As in *Rebecca*, a sequence of women and their replacements is at stake; in *Adèle*, this sequence corresponds to concern about literary predecessors and replacements. Like *Wide Sargasso Sea*, *Adèle's* intertextual self-consciousness is registered through a parroted cry of "*Qui est là?*" (53),⁵ but also through the metaphor of the magnifying glass allowing a "closer look" at Brontë's narrative (and potentially a destruction of it). The magnifying glass is central to Adèle's retrieval of her repressed memories, a retrieval that lets Adèle differentiate between fantasy and reality so she can reconcile her guilt about replacing her French mother figures (Céline, then Antoinette) with Jane Eyre in her affections. The glass also leads Adèle back to Paris and her birthplace: to a circus world whose magic has been replaced by "sham sparkle" and "ruthless exploiters" (as advertised by the text's jacket notes). Yet, this postmodern-style Paris is also associated with carnivalesque subversives and visionaries: feminists, radicals, early photographers, and the fortune-teller who supplies Adèle's magnifying glass with a prediction about fire. Following the pattern of Brontë's *bildungsroman*, *Adèle* shows how its protagonist must leave her childhood world

behind, along with her “ire” and wild imaginings, in order to achieve a fully developed identity. Also like Jane, she must uncover Rochester’s secrets before she can become a legitimate member of his family. The revelation of a second “French bastard,” Adèle’s brother, allows Rochester to finally accept Adèle as his own, and provides Adèle with answers to her persistent questions about her “true identity” (205) (“*Qui est là?*”).

Tennant’s plot shift from the elimination of inconvenient first wives to the legitimation of bastard offspring points to her own text’s self-legitimation: re-marginalizing Adèle’s French world of fantasy, anger, and trickery, *Adèle* assimilates all of its subversive elements into an homage to Brontë’s English heroine. Adèle’s journey ends with the identification of Jane Eyre (and *Jane Eyre*) as her best role model: “Jane—the owner of the cool, quiet voice that has finally brought me here to find my past and my future—will be my companion and guide in life” (209). Meanwhile, *Adèle* ends with Jane’s own refusal to endorse an unsuitable—because tacky and implausible—alternative ending. Mrs. Fairfax attempts to push Jane from the third floor of Thornfield, hoping to disguise her death as a suicide, but Jane refuses to sign the forged suicide note; in their ensuing struggle, the housekeeper falls to her death instead. Mrs. Fairfax’s telltale handwriting, along with Adèle’s testimony about her abuse of Antoinette, are later used to exonerate Rochester and Jane, and displace the injustice surrounding Antoinette onto the housekeeper’s “insane and evil intent” (224).⁶ Illegitimate outcomes and signatures successfully avoided, *Adèle* concludes with a repetition of Brontë’s happy ending: “So the family at Thornfield live happily ever after” (224).

Heathcliff's Tale pays homage to another Brontë, but through even more ambiguous and ambivalent modes of ventriloquism. *Heathcliff's Tale* is a pastiche in both senses of the term, since it interweaves the “lost successor”⁷ to *Wuthering Heights* with other generic forms: an epistolary narrative about Emily Brontë’s publisher, Thomas Cautley Newby, and his nephew Henry; Henry’s “deposition” about events around Haworth in 1849 and shortly thereafter; and “The Rape of Gondal,” Henry’s “biography or fiction (it is hard to tell which)” about Emily and Branwell Brontë (205).⁸ As in *The Bad Sister*, these materials are presented by an editor, whose notes indicate the documents will be auctioned in York, and have already caused arguments between biographers, libraries, “Emily-supporters” and “Branwellites” over their authorship (and, no doubt, their historical and commercial worth) (2). This multi-generic structure, which places the discovery and sale of the documents in the outermost narrative frame, immediately raises the issue of “ownership” troped in many ways throughout the text. Thomas Newby sends his nephew Henry, a solicitor’s clerk, to Haworth just after Emily Brontë’s death to redeem a £25 advance already paid to “Ellis Bell.” The publisher’s unscrupulous character is exposed in canny legal knowledge—“the manuscript is the property of Thomas Cautley Newby. Our family firm of Newby & Sons confirmed the legality of this” (8)—and in his implication that Henry obtain the author’s remaining work by any means, even if this involves intrusion into a grieving household, or theft. The effect of this urgency on Henry is, for different possible reasons, disastrous. He maneuvers his way into spending the night at Haworth and steals fragments from a burning manuscript.⁹ Unbeknownst to Henry, these papers are a sequel to Emily

Brontë's novel, in which Heathcliff describes his tormented and criminal existence away from Wuthering Heights. As the editor excitedly tells us, these chapters "help to elucidate one of literature's greatest enigmas: viz. the origins of the most evil hero ever to be portrayed" (1). Impressionable Henry, affected by the gothic atmosphere of the parsonage and the powerful characterization of Heathcliff, takes this to be a true "confession," as related to a real Joseph Lockwood in 1802. Madness ensues: like Lockwood, Henry hears a hand knocking on his window that night. The terrifying scene is taken one turn further when a woman's corpse appears in his bed:

the dank creature which now lay beside me on that narrow bed was more horrible by far than the hand at the window—more shattering to the heart and soul than any monster dreamed by a child. For what lay beside me was a woman—not long dead as I soon saw when the moon looked in through the lattice with a harsh light—a woman who clung to me with the piteous desperation of one who dreads a certain return to the tomb. She asked me to save her: I swear she did; but my arms were as heavy as lead; and she died a second time beside me there, her skin giving out a chill impossible either to forget or to describe [. . .].

"Emily!" came a voice from the passage, a high, squeaky voice, yet the door did not open and my dead bed-companion did not move an inch. (48-49)

The physical materialization of the ghostly suggests how profoundly Henry confuses reality and fiction. The scene is also testimony to the powerful impression left by Emily Brontë's writing, and to her immediate transformation into a living legend: supposedly, Henry does not yet know the true identity of "Ellis Bell." As frightening as this apparition is, Henry is more terrified he will encounter the "unprincipled thief, imposter and—almost certain—wife-killer," Heathcliff (32). His ensuing adventures in Haworth are characterized by this paranoia but also by his intense interest in Heathcliff's story. With determination reminiscent of his uncle's quest for profit, Henry visits local residents and locations, desperate to know the whole of Heathcliff's

fragmented tale. When he realizes Heathcliff is fictional, his interest shifts to what the editor calls the “second puzzle” of “one of literature’s greatest enigmas”: “How could a young woman with no experience of the world—or, indeed, of passion—have brought into being a man such as Heathcliff?” (1). For Henry, as for later biographers, readers, and, of course, sequel writers, probing into Brontë’s personal life becomes an obsession. The real-life inspiration for Heathcliff becomes entangled with Henry’s speculations about Branwell Brontë’s exact relationship with Emily and the real authorship of *Wuthering Heights* and “Heathcliff’s Tale.” Henry’s confusion of real and unreal extends to a confusion of authorship with inspiration, and admiration with emulation:

I understood for the first time the ecstasy and agony of the artist [. . .] and, quite literally, I worshipped the man who had brought this character into existence (for, I know not how, I learned in my inner mind that Master Branwell ‘was’ Heathcliff, and that his genius had brought this demonic figure to an everlasting life) I could not continue with my own existence if my curiosity about the future of this momentous passion remained unsatisfied. I would—I must!—as a lover of words so *puissant* that they are indeed made flesh—hold Cathy in my arms as Heathcliff, I ardently desired, had done. (109)

Henry’s already-melodramatic language becomes self-consciously stylized, in keeping with his announcement that “I know now that my vocation is as a writer, not a servant of the Law” (67). It becomes clear, from Henry’s new “vocation” and from the editor’s notes, that the “Newby manuscript” may not be genuine. While Henry investigates whether Emily or Branwell Brontë wrote *Wuthering Heights* and its sequel, the editor wonders if the sequel and Henry’s account are fabrications. Even Thomas Newby berates Henry for his melodramatic account: “If you wish to concoct

a story, dear nephew, may I suggest you open a volume—by Sir Walter Scott or another—and learn your craft” (46).

If Henry’s account is a lie, the text is ambiguous about the causes for his fabrication. There is evidence for Henry’s predilection for “tall tales” (53) and his desire to be a writer, but also for a vivid imagination or madness brought on by the gothic parsonage and “Heathcliff’s Tale.” Both Newby and the editor also speculate about hallucinations caused by laudanum or other drugs. In both Henry’s account and the editor’s, biographical information, such as Branwell’s addictions to drug and drink, becomes entangled with Henry’s experiences. These ambiguities further complicate the status of the “Newby manuscript,” but also highlight, more generally, how much speculation and fiction inform biographical enterprise. Fiction and fact are deliberately confused for another reason, too: to emphasize the unclear boundaries between creativity, documentation, and profit seeking. Begging relief from his uncle’s demands, Henry claims lack of fitness for the task: “a solicitor’s clerk, as I am and must remain, dear Uncle, cannot be expected to be a literary man” (6). Yet, Tennant makes clear from the outset that there is little difference between a publisher seeking legal “ownership” of literary texts and a “literary man” who may plagiarize those texts, or plunder them in order to write lucrative biographies. A few years after his first visit to Haworth, Henry becomes a literary man in full. He has “inherited” his uncle’s nose for “the truth in a scandalous story” and for commercial profit (190). His appointment as Branwell’s official biographer, the text hints, is due to his ability to prove he is the true author of *Wuthering Heights*. This “truth,” to be revealed in Henry’s final chapter, will draw on the “cult” (190) already grown up around the

sisters since the revelation of their true identities.¹⁰ The Branwell biography will generate a large profit for his uncle's publishing company (now facing, appropriately, a libel suit and bankruptcy). The exploitative, even sacrilegious nature of Henry's latest venture is made clear: Henry knows that "any salacious detail" he can "dig up" "would cause grave disapproval and also titillate the readers," and so "increase sales considerably" (193). Yet this account of "Henry Newby, Biographer," is an invention of the editor. The preceding notes tell us:

We have here attempted to show, as we conceive it, the dawning of understanding on the part of Henry Newby when confronted with evidence regarding authorship of the "lost" successor to *Wuthering Heights*. Only an objective approach we feel can uncover the truth and reveal the genius of the much maligned [*sic*] Branwell Brontë. (187)

The contradictory claims of speculation ("as we conceive it") and objectivity are in keeping with the editor's own awareness of the profitability of the documents presented. Throughout the editorial notes are passing references to the workings of the book market: "biography holds the whip hand in book store [*sic*] and library alike" (70); "Celebrities rules the book world these days" (99). Given this attention to profitability, the editor seems motivated less by "truth and honesty" (163) than by cashing in on scandal and celebrity. And profit is not only monetary: posterity is also a motivation here. The editor remarks, "Unfortunately for us (and for his posthumous reputation) [Henry's] wild surmises on the parentage of Heathcliff, etc., have come down to posterity" (173). Henry may be writing himself into the Brontë mythology by way of plagiarism or fabrication, but the editor's desire for personal gain also compromises literary posterity. Citing academic integrity, the editor presents Henry's theory about incest between Branwell and Emily thus: "This possibility has been

ignored, in recent biographies of the poet and author of *Wuthering Heights*, but we feel duty-bound to record it here” (99). “Duty-bound” or not, these speculations will surely raise the selling price *and* historical value of the documents.

Like the Austen sequels, *Adèle* and *Heathcliff's Tale* seem to know that speculation about literature's famous characters, and fidelity to dead authors, can be a profitable venture. However, we can read in *Adèle* a profound ambivalence about rewriting, an ambivalence made more explicit in *Heathcliff's Tale*. *Adèle* raises the specter of subversive revision in its many tropes of destruction, close examination, and otherness, then carefully cancels these out in order to conform to an arc, set out in *Jane Eyre*, wherein subjectivity is achieved through the unification of a legitimate family unit, and is bound up with the protection and passing on of an English estate/literary canon. However, that which is banished or marginalized is never fully eradicated: a trace remains, and traces of *Adèle's* “other” predecessors resurface in the conclusion, when Tennant retropes *Wide Sargasso Sea's* metafictional allusions and “offstage” French locations, and recycles *Rebecca's* anxieties about female antecedents. *Adèle* ends with a particularly ambiguous representation of Adèle's assimilation into her English family. We learn that Adèle returns to Paris to see Céline's role model, the great actress Rachel, perform in *Phèdre*. In a “joyous meeting” backstage, Adèle introduces herself as “the daughter of the famous *danseuse de corde*, Céline Varens” (224), and Rachel invites Adèle to train as an actress in Paris. Although Adèle can only accept this invitation on the condition that her “other studies were completed and approved” first (224), Tennant's ending reverses the sequence in which illegitimate (French, maternal) role models are

replaced with legitimate (English, paternal) ones. The text's endorsement of a patriarchal legal system centered on property and profit is qualified as Adèle's future veers toward *Céline's*, not Jane's, aspired-to path of development: self-determination achieved by becoming a respected and financially independent actress, not through legitimation granted by a patriarch. It is appropriate that Adèle introduces *herself* to Rachel, invoking her mother Céline, not Rochester or his accomplice Jane, as she does so. Like Rhys's reference to the "cardboard" of Thornfield Hall,¹¹ Tennant's tropes of performance, many references to pantomime, and attention to "backstage" stories underline the fictionality of *Jane Eyre* and "England." Tennant coyly suggests that *Adèle's* assimilation to Brontë's text, and Adèle's devotion to *Jane Eyre*, are perhaps just another performance (or pantomime, vaudeville show, or children's story; many such "low" genres are invoked throughout the text). This unclear conclusion corresponds to Tennant's characteristic ambivalent fidelity to named source texts, and to the creeping traces of "other" stories that render her intertextuality so ambiguous.¹²

In *Heathcliff's Tale*, the ambiguity and ambivalence of rewriting is figured in Henry's discovery of the "lost sequel." After finding in a dog-basket "only a bone or two and a knitted garment, much chewed and spat on," he locates the manuscript:

it was here, under a rug fashioned from rags and scraps of material, that I saw a hump, which I took at first for a bag of further ingredients, for such rag rugs as ladies of uncertain means are taught to make. The bag, when pulled out onto the boards, turned out to be stuffed not with cotton or chintz, but with paper—with pages, in fact [. . .]. (13)

Literary scraps are magically transformed into new "pages," an intertextual "rag rug." At the same time, this transformation involves digging up bones and a text "much

chewed and spat on.” This seminal, *ambiguous* moment of discovery, in which the acts of creating new texts and “digging up” old ones are placed too close to one another generates a whole series of tropes concerning the transgression of other boundaries in the “too-close” relationships surrounding rewriting. In Henry’s deposition and in “The Rape of Gondal” we find two more sequels to *Wuthering Heights*. In both, the continuation of “much chewed and spat on” stories is surrounded by tropes of incest, rape, theft, and conquest that show rewriting is not “animation” *or* “mortification,” but problematically both. In his deposition, Henry describes a vision of Isabella Linton returned from the dead and confronting Heathcliff about their son, Linton: “I did not die, and here’s the proof of it!” Isabella cries, “You stole my son from my brother’s house” (202). This vision immediately follows Henry’s decision to give up his profitable Branwell biography and rescue Emily from slander: “I could not and would not defame the true author of a masterpiece in order to please a publisher or for financial gain” (200). The deposition repeats the revival of ghosts in the last scene of *Wuthering Heights*, and recreates its Byronic concept of merged identities (“I *am* Heathcliff!”) in Henry’s confusion of Brontë with her characters. The blurring of metaphysical boundaries in *Wuthering Heights* becomes blurred *generic* and *moral* boundaries in Henry’s deposition. As he presents it, the effacement of boundaries between genres, between imagination and reality, and between homage and plagiarism, is justified as a means of restoring female agency and promoting integrity and respect over commercial profit. This is a positive representation of rewriting as a progressive and corrective act. As the editor notes, Henry passes

from non-reader to one who devours novels and continuing through the fields of biography to discover his voice at last as a writer of historical fiction. In that mode, he may finally have discovered the truth of the impossible relationships between his hero, Heathcliff, and his heroine Emily Brontë. (197)

Yet, Henry's alternative ending also exposes the incestuous and illegitimate unions that bind Heathcliff to the Earnshaw and Linton families. As Isabella reveals, Heathcliff is Earnshaw's bastard son, and he *does* consummate his love for his half-sister Catherine. Incest begets incest: Cathy Linton is Heathcliff's daughter, engaged to marry her own half-brother, Linton. A cycle of too-close relationships and illegitimacy continues, punishing future generations; this undoes Brontë's original ending, in which future generations resolve the conflicts of their predecessors.

This cycle is repeated again, outside the confines of fiction, in Henry's pseudo-biographical work, "The Rape of Gondal." Henry depicts thirteen-year old Branwell, newly acquainted with Byron's "bad things," confusing tales from the Brontë juvenilia with reality. Pretending to be "Alexander Percy, Lord of Northangerland"—"once Alexander Rogue and before that, in an early incarnation, Alexander Naughty" (211)—Branwell sets out to conquer Gondal and its heroine, Lady Augusta:

For long now, the hero with flaming hair has courted the Lady Augusta Segovia, and now the time has come to seize her, pillage the sweet modesty of which Emily and Branwell, collaborating in the long odes and ballads dedicated to Lady Augusta, have made much; and then watch her die [. . .]."
(212)¹³

That this imaginary conquest involves the actual rape of Emily is made clear from Emily's side of the story, in which an unnamed "presence" "fastens on her face" with "cold lips" (210). Henry, well acquainted with the Brontë juvenilia from his

biographical research, knows Gondal was Emily's, not Branwell's, creation. This implied theft of Emily's early fiction is bound up with Branwell's later attempt to claim *Wuthering Heights* as his own work. Meanwhile, the incestuous rape is aligned with a publishing industry that also gets too close to authors and their texts via invasive biographies, improbable sequels, and "forensic" examination of manuscripts (70). The numerous and ambivalent sequels presented in Tennant's text suggest that rewriting will always contain these tropes of transgressed boundaries and confused signatures, signifiers of the too-close relationship with source texts and with a profit-seeking publishing industry.

3. IMPERSONATING BIOFICTIONS: GENDER AND GENRE

As I have shown, Tennant raises the specter of gender, class, and racial inequalities in the Austen sequels and in *Adèle*, even if she neutralizes their potential for revision and subversion. Yet, in *Heathcliff's Tale*, Tennant's ambiguous representation of rewriting is ultimately directed toward more pointed questions about gender and genre. In both his deposition and "The Rape of Gondal," Henry attempts a feminist revision of Brontë's life and novel, one that restores agency to women by bringing them to life, and incriminates the patriarchal society that exploits them. The similarities between the problematic "legal" ownership of texts and academic obsession with authors surface in Henry's attention to the many ways the author's body and her text are penetrated and reified. His confusion of real and unreal, which identifies Heathcliff with Branwell and Patrick Brontë, allows him to lay blame on foreboding patriarchal figures. Indeed, the deposition reveals Patrick Brontë advocating Branwell's cause, while "The Rape of Gondal" depicts his dismissal of

Emily's screams as "another melodramatic expression from the kingdom he has heard referred to as Angria" (210). Henry's different endings to *Wuthering Heights* condemn a world in which only men own literary texts, and only male authors survive into posterity. However, for all his interest in "rescuing" Emily Brontë, Henry is also guilty of identifying author with text in a way that obscures the actual woman in question and robs her of agency. Exactly like Branwell, Henry confuses reality and fiction, and rescue with conquest. In Henry's addled mind, Emily Brontë, Catherine Earnshaw, and Isabella are merged into one woman. He embraces Brontë's corpse, then fantasizes about embracing Cathy, and finally develops an infatuation with Isabella. In his final vision of Isabella, she appears "wild—wilder than Cathy" (202), and exactly resembles Brontë's portrait. Sexual desire, and desire for creative inspiration, qualify his need to "save" all three women from "unprincipled thieves," "imposters" and "wife-killers." A more serious consequence of Henry's confusion of real and unreal is the way he transforms all three women into tropes; specifically, he figures them as penetrable and inscribable blank texts. Both *Heathcliff's Tale* and "The Rape of Gondal" conclude with the image of a woman's dead body. "The Rape of Gondal" explicitly alludes to James Hogg: Branwell imagines Alexander Percy is the "the son of the Border Ballad, the scion of *Blackwood's Magazine* where the most violent and ghoulish stories of those great writers and tale-tellers, appear regularly, to be pounced on and read again and again" (211).¹⁴ The presentation of a dead body connected to a mysterious manuscript—both "pounced on" "again and again" in Tennant's text—comes from Hogg's *Confessions*. It also repeats *The Bad Sister's* final scene, which frames the editor assimilating Jane Wild's body with her

unreadable text, and then reinscribing them both with his own words. Like that editor, Henry/Branwell also erases the real body *behind* the text by confusing it *with* the text, thus creating both a blank page ready for his own inscription.¹⁵ Henry has penetrated the Brontë myth after all: *Heathcliff's Tale* ends with “The Rape of Gondal,” or *Henry's* tale, presented for “the interest of future scholars” (205).

The double ventriloquism in *Heathcliff's Tale* moves beyond the playful parody of the Austen sequels and the coy betrayal-in-fidelity of *Adèle* to explore the consequences of blurring genres and confusing real and unreal in the quest for profit. Yet, the text remains ambiguous about the ethical import of such actions. On the one hand, the editor decides that Henry's “historical fiction” has a truth-telling function, an end that justifies his dubious means; on the other hand, the editor, also implicated in the quest for profit, is effectively another of Tennant's unreliable narrators. The text dramatizes the erasure of real (female) bodies required for the (male) artist to achieve inspiration and posterity, but at the same time frames these acts, and then frames that framing. This *mise-en-abyme* effect suspends final interpretation, but clearly locates the editor as a character *within* the narrative. Acts of slander or exploitation involving real people (Branwell and Patrick Brontë, for example) and acts of plagiarism are thus displaced onto fictional characters: *Heathcliff's Tale* represents wrongdoing, but does not engage in it. The same *mise-en-abyme* effect is replicated in texts that *do* engage in such acts, however: when the fictional status of the text and outermost narrator/editor is left ambiguous, and when pastiche becomes “biofiction,” ethical issues, such as the relationship between gender and genre, become more complicated.

Tess and *Felony* are pastiches, respectively, of Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) and Henry James's *The Aspern Papers* (1888).¹⁶ *Tess* offers a modern version of Hardy's text, set in the 1950s to the 1990s, about Tess and Liza-Lu Hewitt. *Felony* retells *The Aspern Papers* from the perspective of the real people who inspired it: Claire Clairmont, her niece Paula Hanghegyi, and Paula's daughter Georgina. These rewritings are feminist displacements, giving agency and a voice to marginalized or passive characters from Hardy's and James's narratives. However, both texts are complicated by the fact that they *also* draw on biographical material in order to impersonate Hardy and James themselves, attacking the authors as well as their texts. One critic sums up the ethical problems of this technique in relation to *Tess*:

Although the narrator gives her version of Hardy's life in her own idiosyncratic language, she scatters her account with Hardy's words, borrowing now from his fiction [. . .] now from his poetry [. . .] now from his correspondance [*sic*]. Thus, while Hardy's character is being harshly condemned, his voice is being appropriated to enliven and embellish the narration. (Gutleben 25)

There are two issues at stake here: Tennant's "appropriation" of Hardy's work, with all the usual insinuations about plagiarism, lack of originality, etc., and Tennant's personal attack on Hardy. Middlebrook makes a similar point about *The Ballad of Sylvia and Ted*, Tennant's "novel" about the Plath-Hughes marriage,¹⁷ observing that "snippets of Plath's [journal] entries are embedded without quotation marks or other acknowledgement to embellish the prose" and that "paraphrased" material by Plath, Hughes, Anne Sexton, and Emily Dickinson is also "absorbed, without acknowledgement, into the narrative of actions and motivation" (47). Middlebrook's main criticism, however, concerns Tennant's blurring of generic categories for the

purposes of slander. She points out that the Author's Note says the book is "based on fact" and that sometimes "the facts were previously concealed or unknown." This hint about "facts" contrasts with other signifiers marking the text's fictionality, such as the use of the word *ballad* in the title (and the subtitle, "A Novel" in the U.S. edition). More than Tennant's ventriloquism or plagiarism, her intertwining of fiction and biography provokes Middlebrook's strong reaction:

Adopting the stance of the gossip, she positions at the novel's front door an author who invites readers to assume that the most shocking, disturbing, and discreditable actions she represents in the novel may be 'based on facts [. . .] previously concealed or unknown'—facts available to this author through personal access to witnesses and participants in the ugly story she tells. Under the cover of fiction, surreptitiously, Tennant offers insider knowledge of these famous people and their celebrated catastrophes. (48)

Yet, Middlebrook undermines her argument against "insider knowledge" when she praises Tennant's autobiography *Burnt Diaries*, which describes Tennant's affair with Hughes, precisely because it blends fictional elements with biographical ones.¹⁸ She specifies that the "non-fiction novel benefits artistically from being narrated by an ethically uncompromised persona" and that the narrator's "objective" or "satirical" position must be clearly signified.¹⁹ Yet she ignores the postmodern context of such fiction, in which "objectivity" is already destabilized, and unreliable narrators proliferate.

This is also a context in which literature often acknowledges the fictionality of historical accounts, including biography. Contemporary authors frequently write about characters that are authors, fictional or real: A. S. Byatt's *Possession* (1990) and J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* (1986) come to mind. In his discussion of what he terms *biofictions*, Middeke points out:

With reference to life-writing—no matter whether of the authoritative or the fictional kind—we may suspect a postmodern emphasis on the indeterminacy of biographical knowledge and the laying bare of epistemological uncertainties and blanks within the context of the representation of biographical facts. Especially, we may gather that the biographer, like the historian, is likely to be mistrusted for his declaration of neutrality and the assertion of the objective nature of what he is recounting. (2)

If we acknowledge that “fiction and historiographic/biographical discourse are not mutually exclusive” (Middeke 3) then we should also acknowledge that some fiction explores the biographical elements of literature, the way creative work takes inspiration from real people and events. It is fitting, as Middeke points out, that biofiction often portrays artists and writers, since this focuses “our attention on what it means to be an artist and on the attendant circumstances in the creation of art” (3). Tennant’s pastiches and biofictions are self-consciously ventriloquistic and generically ambiguous, but these are *strategically* exploitative strategies for exploring but refusing to resolve the very ethical issues Middlebrook raises, and for showing how the author/narrator is never an “ethically uncompromised literary persona” (Middlebrook 49).²⁰

This is shown to be true of actual authors in *Tess* and *Felony*. In *Felony* we see Henry James transforming a woman into a trope when he uses Constance Fenimore Woolson as a model for Miss Tina Bordereau in his novella *The Aspern Papers*. James’s narrative was inspired by gossip about the American sea captain and Shelleyite, Edward Silsbee, who attempted to obtain Shelley’s papers from Claire Clairmont by courting her niece. Tennant draws obvious parallels between James and his Silsbee-like narrator, who exploits Miss Tina’s romantic interests in the hopes of obtaining the Aspern papers, yet later wrestles with his (temporary) guilt about doing

so. Thus, we see James repulsed by Woolson's declarations of romantic interest, yet worried about misleading her in their friendship; especially, he is concerned that Woolson will see her resemblance to the "plain dingy elderly person" in his story (James, *Aspern* 142). These feelings are complicated by the competitive relationship between the two writers, their "friction fed on gender and reinforced by the antagonisms of popular and high art" (Gordon 8). James dismisses Woolson's popular writing—there is an "unbridgeable gap between a (bestselling) female novelist and himself" (6)—but is jealous of her earnings.²¹ His infamous sensitivity about privacy extends to a fear of his work and reputation being contaminated by any proximity, literary or romantic, with Woolson. While his narrator becomes obsessed with Juliana Bordereau's cache of Aspern's papers, James becomes paranoid about Woolson's hoard of incriminating correspondence; where his narrator believes Juliana's unbecoming obsession with money tarnishes the poetry she inspired in her youth (he finds it "odious" to "stand chaffering with Aspern's Juliana" (James, *Aspern* 63)), James is similarly precious about his own work, and worries that Woolson's proximity will have a contaminating influence. He even has a nightmare in which all of his books are replaced by one of Woolson's:

Nothing is there of his famous library—and, worst of all, none of his own works grace the shelves.

There is one book, which stands forlornly [. . .]. James approaches it; he knows already the title of this trespasser, this monster which has pushed out all the true and the good, all his own examples of the Real Right Thing.

[. . .] *Horace Chase*, reads the title, gold lettering on a fine morocco binding. "By Constance Fenimore Woolson." And at last, with a dry mouth and thudding heart, he wakes. (148)

In his unflattering transformation of Woolson into a muse of sorts, James both exploits her and figuratively kills her off, acts which take shape more literally after

Woolson's death, when Tennant depicts James appropriating ideas from Woolson's notebooks and sinking her letters and clothes in Venice's lagoon. Women are killed off into tropes (metaphors and metonymies of death) so as to enliven the productivity and ensure the posterity of a male "Master"²²; this repeats the way James's narrator resurrects Aspern into a prosperous afterlife while casting the actually living Juliana as a "ghastly death's head" and "grinning skull" (James, *Aspern* 60). Tennant's biofiction rewrites James's life and his work, just as Woolson did in her own stories,²³ and Woolson herself is ventriloquized in the narrative, though in a recuperative way. James's narrator thinks that "it was impossible to allow too much for [Miss Tina's] simplicity" (*Aspern* 81), but here we see the real Miss Tina—Woolson—all too aware of James's thoughts and feelings. She throws a volume of *The Aspern Papers* at the wall—the volume in which Miss Tina "is shown as a helpless supplicant"—where it kills an insect and leaves a stain: "Constance's blood, a mark she will not try to remove, turns quickly to an autograph, a smear" (143-44). By imagining this scene, Tennant gives Woolson space for agency and rage: in doing so, she allows Woolson to leave her "mark" or signature on James's text, while at the same time returning the real blood and pain of a woman who has been turned into a trope, illustrating that "the inevitable turn to the rhetorical can also engender or be founded on instances of real violation" (Bronfen 69).

James's confusion of real and unreal—dead and living, trope and human subject—is turned back against him in Tennant's portrayal of the events inspiring *The Aspern Papers*. Tennant returns the "real" people to James's story, exchanging his fictional characters for the actual people involved in the Silsbee-Clairmont case.

Miss Tina's "blankness and gentleness" (James, *Aspern* 57) are replaced with Paula's fierce personality and fleshed-out sexual desire, while James's hints about Juliana's cunning are confirmed in Clairmont's awareness of the machinations of publishing scoundrels like Silsbee. This includes Edward Trelawny, member of the Shelley circle and author of the *Recollections of Shelley, Byron and the Author* (1858) (and cited in Tennant's Acknowledgements). James's narrator worships and resurrects Aspern; he is also an actor of sorts, feigning romantic interest and adopting a "*nom de guerre*." Similarly, Trelawny resurrects bones, saved from Shelley's funeral pyre, into relics referred to as "Shelley" (Clairmont refers to the poet's papers in the same way). Trelawny is also a pretender, adept at imitating Byron's and Shelley's voices, and using the guise of an old love for Clairmont to glean anecdotes for his book. Despite her eyeshade, Clairmont *can* see Trelawny's real love is Shelley, not her: "You want my memories from me so you can add them to your own" she cries, "To add to your 'Recollections' or your 'Record'—leave me mine" (65-66). The child narrator, Georgina, also "sees" what those such as Silsbee and Trelawny suspect she is too young to understand. Georgina has no counterpart in James's novella, but in Tennant's narrative she bears witness to (and is complicit in) the many felonies surrounding her beloved "Aunt." Tennant takes this theme of vision from James: his narrator is skeptical about Juliana's blindness, suggested by her eyeshade, while Juliana's suspicions about him are confirmed in her declaration, "I want to be where I can see this clever gentleman" (James, *Aspern* 111). It is Juliana's "extraordinary eyes," revealed at the text's climax when she condemns the narrator as a "publishing scoundrel," that make him feel "horribly ashamed" (James, *Aspern* 125). Tennant

also plays tricks with Clairmont's eyes, which remain partly open when she sleeps or enters a "trance" (43), so that no one knows what she sees, or pretends not to see. This extends to Clairmont's "visions" of her dead daughter Allegra—visions shared by Georgina, although she admits she knows Allegra is not real. Georgina's games prove the most perceptive: whereas James's narrator admits to Juliana, "I look at you but don't see you" (James, *Aspern* 112), Georgina understands her Aunt's need to "see" Allegra, and sympathetically plays along. Employing James's theme of vision in this play on actual and imagined apparitions, and genuine and pretended motivations, Tennant makes visible the "private history" informing but hidden by James's tale: a history of women abandoned and exploited in men's different pursuits of genius. The process by which living, feeling subjects are made into tropes is reversed, as a series of female corpses and dead children—from Woolson to Harriet Westbrook, Allegra, and Elena Adelaide Shelley—resurface in Tennant's tale. In mingling fiction and biography explicitly, *Felony* unveils the real people behind James's text, pointedly dramatizing that

in privileging the analogy between inanimate character (corpse) in a story and inanimate character on a page (sign or image) we may occlude the other relation [. . .] between the representation and the materiality of a body to which it refers. (Bronfen 69)

However, this feminist displacement raises questions about appropriating other people's voices and private documents, even while it pretends to justify these means. *Felony* is not a real "private history" at all, of course, but an imagined one, although the text does much to complicate its generic status. The paratextual apparatus mimics that of a scholarly or biographical text: it includes a descriptive list of relevant figures, followed by "Acknowledgements" that cite several biographical

studies, and by an “Author’s Note” which states: “Dates and details in this story of what really went on in Claire Clairmont’s household in Florence in the 1870s are as accurate as possible” (ix). This Note also clarifies that the text’s “sole invention”—Trelawny’s visits to Clairmont, and his proposal of marriage to Georgina—yet hastens to add that “a romance of the kind indicated here could have taken place” because of Trelawny’s “predilection for new, young brides at regular intervals” (ix). The Note’s authorizing function is immediately compromised: speculation and fictionalization are presented (disguised) as *nearly* true facts. (Tennant’s free indirect discourse and Jamesian syntax, elaborate narrative frames, and, as Litt points out, the use of a child narrator in a “witty nod to the James who wrote *What Maisie Knew* and *The Awkward Age*,” have a similar effect, creating an echo of James’s voice but also calling attention to construction and stylization.) Despite identifying the Trelawny events as the “sole invention” of the text, the Note goes on to say that the “time and places of the writing of *The Aspern Papers* have changed slightly” (ix). The official-seeming paratext belies, but also emphasizes, *Felony*’s fictional status. Similar signifiers of fictionality are “buried” in the prefatory material: the subtitle is “A Novel,” the “Dramatis Personae” retains theatrical connotations, and *The Aspern Papers* is included among the biographical sources in the Acknowledgements. This confusion of generic status has two functions: to assign a fictional label and so protect the author from accusations of libel or slander (felony), and to lure readers in, as with *The Ballad of Sylvia and Ted*, with the promise of real scandal. “Plagiarism”—of James *and* of the biographical sources listed²⁴—and invasion into “private” lives can be justified as poetic license,

creative reconstruction, or historical fiction. Yet, such categories are also a pose; the text undermines them right from the start, laboriously blurring the difference between fact and fiction, but also raising questions about the ethics of doing so. In committing the very same felonies it represents, Tennant's "novel" does exactly the same thing as *The Aspern Papers*. *Felony* seems to assert that if James can create a masterly text from gossip, slander, and plagiarism, then anyone else can, too. Yet, the proliferation of dead bodies in the narrative—dead bodies that insistently reappear in the "Postscript" about Woolson's and Clairmont's graves and the profit made from their respective "papers"—emphasizes the real damage that can be done in doing so. More than incriminating James, Silsbee, et al., *Felony* presents two contradictory creative processes that *both* rely on ventriloquism and plagiarism, while refusing to determine the line between art and felony.

In *Tess*, the first-person narrator Liza-Lu also draws on biographical material to impersonate and vilify Thomas Hardy (whom she identifies as the narrator of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*), although this material is not always formally cited. Like Henry James in *Felony*, Hardy is seen using real women (the milkmaid Augusta Way and her daughter, the actress Gertrude Bugler) as models for Tess Durbeyfield, who is herself transformed into a trope—a corpse, a blank text, penetrable "feminine tissue" (82) in his novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*.²⁵ The Muse-Master relationship is more conventional here, since it mingles Hardy's creative aspirations with sexual desire for his "muses"; indeed, he is seen fetishizing dead (killed, silent, passive) women. Liza-Lu tells us how Hardy neglects his wives only to immortalize them after death in his poetry, and how he is "haunted" by the public hangings witnessed in his youth:

those murderesses with their billowing skirts . . . urine and faeces trickling down on yellow-stockinged legs swollen from labour and penury, faces grim and blackened, lips that *could not even form letters* when confronted with their own death warrant to read. (82, emphasis added)²⁶

As Liza-Lu stresses, this pattern takes on a life of its own, extending from the Victorian past and Hardy's novel to the reality of 1999. Liza-Lu's own sister Tess, exploited by Alec Field and Gabriel Bell (Alec d'Urberville and Angel Clare's modern counterparts) belongs to a long line of Tesses. Liza-Lu offers a vicious condemnation of Angel Clare via hippyish rock star Gabriel Bell, underscoring the hypocrisy of the new free love, and of the "new man" (193) who cannot commit to "a chick with a child" (202). Alec d'Urberville is reinvented as the mechanic Alec Field (stripped of his false d'Urberville status in Tennant's inversion of surnames and social class²⁷), who does not rape Tess, but does claim custody of her daughter Mary. Liza-Lu's most vitriolic criticism is reserved for the author himself, more directly reincarnated as Tess's father, John Hewitt, who tends the mute swans at Abbotsbury. As in Hardy's text, "the narrator's erotic fantasies of penetration and engulfment enact a pursuit, violation and persecution of Tess in parallel with those she suffers at the hands of her two lovers" (Boumelha 120). Like Hardy, John Hewitt is as "firmly rooted as any Victorian in the old values" (28), and his sexual desire is bound up with his need to punish and control his offspring. When he catches seven-year old Tess and nine-year old Alec playing "scientists," a sexual game, he beats and rapes Tess:

he makes me watch as he brings the cane down on poor Tess's white flesh
[. . .].

And I still must watch as our father pulls out that great swollen purple thing that looks like the worms he taught us to thread on hooks [. . .] and sinks it right into Tess's bottom there as she shrieks and he clamps a hand over her mouth [. . .]. (203-4).

The sexual abuse, which punishes and silences Tess, repeats John's actions at the swannery, where he drowns select cygnets to keep control of the population. John's rape of Tess becomes another form of sexual selection when he begins molesting her daughter Mary, his granddaughter, years later:

Mary is sitting on my father (and her father too: it's too appalling to contemplate); she's sitting on his lap and he's fondling her hair and pulling up her little pink frock [. . .].

Our father, the father of Tess, the lover-father in the tradition of the great poet, fashions another Ruined Maid as he pushed the child down on him and he clamps his hand over her mouth as she screams . . . (207)

Parthenogenesis, so closely allied with rape in Liza-Lu's depiction of Hardy, is realigned with these more horrifying acts of incest and child abuse.

Liza-Lu has two motivations in telling her story: first, to expose the history of women's oppression exemplified and continued by Hardy's tale, and second, to break the pattern by speaking out: "Kill the deadening sense of repetition, where every single thing you do has the taste of being done by a woman standing just ahead of you: your mother and then her mother and all the mothers together"; "Go into a new world," she tells Baby Tess on the verge of the new millennium (3). Part of breaking this pattern is to offer a counter-history: in contrast to the chronological, developmental "Phases" of Tess Durbeyfield's fate, Liza-Lu's tale is digressive, ranging from the nineteenth century to prehistory, from the Roman invasion to the millennium. This is a fluid narrative, a "herstory" woven of feminine tropes: nature, the sea, menstruation and childbirth, the night, matriarchy, etc.²⁸ It is also an oral history, conveyed in fairy-tale mode by the witch-like Liza-Lu to young Ella, and countering the history Ella learns in school, a history of monarchs and rulers that "seem[s] distant to a bunch of girls" because only "the boys will inherit the sceptre of

the kings” (15). As in *Felony*, ventriloquism becomes a strategy for displacement. Liza-Lu wants to attack the problematic images of women in Hardy’s tale, but also to challenge the deterministic discourses informing it. Her story is informed by a double, almost contradictory awareness: first, that the Victorian period is the “era of emergence” of the social, sexual, and scientific discourses that shape her own century,²⁹ and second, that these discourses are more fictional than truthful. If *Felony* exposes the biographical reality behind fiction, *Tess* reveals the fictionality of discourses that present themselves as true. Her strategy is most clear in the way she counters Hardy’s Darwinian determinism³⁰ with the “wild scientific poetry” of Lamarck, whose theory about the inheritance of acquired characteristics allows for the possibility of remembering “that we are all one in the unity of Nature,” and so freeing ourselves from the “bad cycle” of history (18-20). Liza-Lu displaces the official discourse of evolution by reclaiming Lamarck’s discredited ideas; this willful act of regression also counters the implication of progress in Darwin’s theory, a theme taken from Hardy’s depiction of the dehumanizing Industrial Revolution, and repeated in Liza-Lu’s critique of the similarly dehumanizing technological and social revolutions of the twentieth century:

You remember I told you about the invention of machines?

And how the washing machine, and the tumble dryer, and the dishwasher, and the automatic timer on the oven, were supposed to liberate women? Along with the Pill, of course. Give them choice?

Yes. This freedom, this sudden “choice” only succeeded in removing any possible moral reasons for men to take the consequences of their actions.
(30)

Liza-Lu is well aware of the selective applications of Darwin’s theory and the negative implications for women, especially justifications of patriarchy based on the

“natural” effects of male sexual selection.³¹ The relevance of all of this for Tess Hewitt is illustrated in the game of “scientists,” which sets her fate in motion. Tess’s agency and delight in this childhood game enrages her father, who must reclaim her as his own by raping her, therefore taking control of her reproductive future. It is significant that he later ignores the chemical calendar Tess uses for contraceptives and tries to marry her off to the wealthy Lord Morgan. Like John Durbeyfield, he hopes to profit by selecting his daughter’s sexual partners.

In her counter-history of Dorset, Liza-Lu rewrites a landscape fossilized as Hardy’s Wessex, making it into a new world that operates through Lamarckian cycles. In this new order, where events can be reversed (can regress), and meaning can shift, Tess Durbeyfield’s dead body is replaced with the reified body of Hardy himself—whose afterlife culminates in a tawdry local tourist industry³²—and the murdered body of John Hewitt. Liza-Lu’s mother Mary “regresses” from a neurotic 1950s housewife and Christian martyr to a self-determined Saxon freewoman (91), and finally a Celtic pagan, “a hag, a witch, a prophetess” with a job gutting fish in Bridport, whose knife is compared to an Old Norse spear (94-96). When Mary and Tess discover John is abusing Tess’s baby, they avenge themselves:

I can see the women as they came down from the ridge, two maenads, the knife held between them, two huge sea-women racing to avenge the crime. The crime of domination.

The crime of father-fuckers. I can see them, hair swirling behind them, a part of the long black tresses of the fog. (209)

The act of revenge reverses Hardy’s pattern, killing the patriarch and reclaiming the landscape for women. Signifiers take on new—or ancient—meaning. The “Bridport dagger” (slang for *rope*) that hangs Tess becomes the knife that penetrates, instead,

John Hewitt. Incest victims become avenging “father-fuckers,” and *mother* becomes the Old English *modor*, so close to *murder* (97).

Despite this self-justifying act of feminist revenge, *Tess*, like *Felony*, is not ethically unambiguous. *Tess* centralizes a story about female psychology, community, and creativity, a story marginalized in Hardy’s text. Yet, this is not about replacing negative images of women with positive ones: in many ways Liza-Lu’s narrative is even more unpleasant than the one she attributes to Hardy. It is a narrative of jealousy between women, of resentful second sisters and mothers whose love is ambivalent. Liza-Lu knows she is the “plain younger sister. The goose, half-formed” (12); “I am Liza-Lu; Lizzie; Liz—whatever they choose to call me when my turn comes to play my part” (13); “No one looks at Liza-Lu, not even the man she eventually marries, who was meant for Tess, and she is forced to look at the world instead, and make up stories about it” (43). She tells her story to give herself a central role, but also for the other “redundant women” in Hardy’s text.³³ Envious of her beautiful, important older sister, Liza-Lu is even complicit in Tess’s fate, deliberately accepting her assigned passive role and often choosing inaction or silence when she foresees disaster: “Younger sisters so often do just that—they stand and watch and then it’s too late” (116). Like her mother Mary, she knows her father is abusing Tess: “We couldn’t help knowing what went on even though we could never admit it to each other” (90) she says decades later. Both women are in league against Tess, even as they hope to escape the pattern of women’s oppression. They even enable John to abuse baby Mary. Liza-Lu asks herself if the “goose-girls” are truly tied to their fate: “Does something in this ‘unlucky’ people propel them to visit their

inheritance on the beautiful?"; "Did I 'accidentally' lose the child [Mary], so she could be ensnared and abused by our father John Hewitt as her mother Tess had been?" (206). Mary Hewitt is also culpable. Tess leaves her daughter in Mary's care so she can have a singing career, which means Mary can no longer work herself:

By coming back to care for her little granddaughter, even she becomes trapped again, her wings were clipped, her power drained out of her until all that was left was—

Revenge. (207)

If Liza-Lu surrounds male creativity and the perpetuation of patriarchy with tropes of rape and incest, she surrounds her own tale with tropes of miscarriage, monstrous births, and abortion. Liza-Lu wonders:

Do some women, by entering a compact with the writer of the old ballad—the song of betrayal after love, of revenge and murder and death—carry the song to the next generation by accident almost, in their recital of fairy tales, their crooning of the old tunes? (206)

The complicated relationship between mortification and animation arises again in Liza-Lu's questions, and is symbolized in an image of monstrous offspring. When Tess becomes pregnant, Mary urges her to visit the old midwife Mother Hurn. After Tess swallows Mother Hurn's potion, she and Liza-Lu see what remains from an earlier visit: a "thing" in the basin that "heaves gently in a pool of clotted blood"(189). What should be aborted and dead is horribly, monstrously, impossibly alive.

Such images and the ironic portrayal of Liza-Lu qualify her feminist rhetoric and attack of Hardy,³⁴ but also show how Liza-Lu's narrative repeats the patterns and magnifies the anxieties in Hardy's text. Her cyclical imagery and structure are tropes of feminine, oral storytelling, and an attempt at narrative fluidity that breaks from the

determinism and linear patterns she reads in Hardy's text. But cycles can also mean perpetuation, as Liza-Lu eventually acknowledges. This confounded, ambiguous relationship, traced through tropes of reproduction gone wrong, circles around the very question of ventriloquism. Hardy's text "speaks for" Tess, but his project of faithful representation is doubly compromised: first, because text and narrator assimilate Tess into patriarchal constructions of the feminine (Boumelha, Kincaid), and second because Tess's voice is often excised from the narrative or appropriated by the narrator (J. H. Miller 116-46). This "domain of free indirect discourse" and "mediated summaries of Tess's thoughts and conversations" means that Tess's voice "will always necessarily be belated" (Higgonet 16). Liza-Lu's attempt to "speak for" Hardy is similarly compromised, since it also succumbs to problematic discourses of gender (directed at men) and also silences and appropriates Hardy's voice. The difference in Tennant's rewriting is in the way her text imagines the real-life consequences of Hardy's ventriloquism, and in Liza-Lu's process of recognizing that she risks perpetuation in retelling. Like *Felony*, this biofiction explores but does not resolve the ethical and creative consequences of the eternal slippage between reality and fiction.

If the pastiches discussed above play with or transgress the boundary between fiction and biography, and emphasize the way authors and their work are reified and made into commodities, they also explore *other* ways fiction is "real." In *Heathcliff's Tale*, *Felony*, and *Tess*, stories come to life in frightening, disturbing ways. We see Henry Newby terrorized when fiction seeps into reality, and Liza-Lu's horror and shame

when she realizes just how persistently stories perpetuate themselves. Henry Newby admits to becoming acquainted with “the power of the word” (55), and becomes “accustomed to the repetition of stories, usually described as memories, which appeared to become fixed in a kind of gelatine of unalterability each time they were brought out” (194). His unconscious anxiety about recreating/plagiarizing, anxiety which is also a fear of bringing Heathcliff/Branwell to life, is manifested in his character Isabella/Emily, who worries about her bond with Heathcliff: “I feared my allegiance, shown in my unexpected loyalty [. . .] would bring me back, a boomerang, to the source of my hatred and despair” (143). Indeed, Henry’s recreation of Brontë’s life brings *her* back “like a boomerang,” and resurrects the “hatred and despair” Henry imagined in Branwell. Just as often, Tennant’s pastiches point to the real people and events behind them. They frequently make a special point of replacing author’s tropes with female bodies: the masterful turn (stylish and meaningful) becomes a grotesque, and grotesquely violated, corpse. Hardy’s “feminine tissue” is perversely retroped in *Tess*’s lurid depictions of incest, for example.

Tennant’s pastiches are full of trickster figures: actors, dissemblers, ventriloquists, and imposters. Branwell is known as a prankster, but so is Henry Newby in his own way. In *Felony*, Trelawny impersonates dead poets and imbues bones (“Shelley”) with life: he also plays tricks on Clairmont, pretending to court her and even presenting a nun as the adult Allegra, to dispel Clairmont’s wishful fantasy that her daughter is alive. As this example suggests, seemingly harmless tricks, turns, and play mask real cruelty. As befits pastiche, these texts are often preoccupied with the surface (there are many, seemingly superfluous, descriptions of clothing, food,

and texture) and with the superficial (style, formula, profit). Tennant's pastiches fulfill Jameson's prophecy that art will be about itself, but as in the gothic, the surface and the superficial often *mean* as much as the depths and the substantial, just as Tennant's parade of tricks and tricksters often points to a real people, real pain, and a real past even as they destabilize notions/genres of the real and of history. If, as Jameson says, we are "condemned to seek the historical past through our own pop images and stereotypes about that past"—that is, through our simulations or pastiche recreations of it—this does not necessarily mean that the past "remains forever out of reach" ("Postmodernism" 116). At the same time, I again hasten to emphasize that Tennant's pastiches do not signify a resolved, positive relationship with history, and with literary history especially: they do not dramatize or endorse a sense of progress. As shown throughout this thesis, Tennant's rewritings are profoundly ambivalent about the progressive nature of reimagining previous texts. In *Tess* and *Felony*, "the paradox involved in repetition, travesty, parody, and pastiche" is not a "decisively progressive movement to explain and interpret the present" (Middeke 18-19) but rather indecisive, ambivalent, and often regressive with regard to the past. These texts that most explicitly play with double voices, stylistic echoes, impersonation, and disguise explore not only the anxiety of influence (overcoming and outdoing female and male predecessors) and fears about women's monstrous creativity, but also the long shadow of old stories that retain their potential to do real harm, and commit real felonies.

¹ The term *biofiction* is from Middeke and Huber and is discussed later in this chapter.

² Hutcheon argues that historiographic metafiction “reinstalls historical contexts as significant and even determining, but in so doing, it problematizes the entire notion of historical knowledge” (89).

³ With the exception of *An Unequal Marriage*, since it begins twenty years after the Darcy marriage, and is actually a sequel to Tennant’s *Pemberley*.

⁴ Tennant claims: “I am not taking any liberties. *Emma* is known as the lesbian book in Jane Austen’s oeuvre. It has strong lesbian overtones and undertones” and adds, “I am not the first to draw out her lesbianism. Serious academics have found many clues to it in *Emma*” (Reynolds). Tennant may be referring to E. Wilson’s and/or Page’s essays on *Emma*.

⁵ New York: HarperCollins, 2002. Subsequent references are to this edition. Antoinette asks this question, reminding Adèle of her mother’s parrot in Paris. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette’s mother Annette has a parrot named Coco that asks “*Qui est là? Qui est là?*” Later Annette also asks this question (22, 25).

⁶ Thus endorsing the legal system that is the source of Bertha Mason’s rage in *Jane Eyre* (Spivak 901). Fairfax’s “cruelty toward Bertha Mason during her years of incarceration” is hardly different from Rochester’s treatment, although Adèle does not acknowledge this explicitly.

⁷ Comprising of Heathcliff’s account, “Isabella [Linton]’s Story,” and “Nelly Dean’s Statement.”

⁸ Leyburn: Tartarus, 2005. Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁹ Charlotte Brontë may have burned a second novel by her sister. See Barker 579 and Chitam 191-200.

¹⁰ Gaskell’s *Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857) was published shortly after Charlotte’s death.

¹¹ As Spivak argues, Rhys’s allusion to the “cardboard” covers of Brontë’s book and her shift to the marginalized location of the island highlight that *Jane Eyre* and “England” alike are fictions (902). Tennant retropes Rhys’s allusion to books as an allusion to the stage in order to make a similar move.

¹² See, for instance, my discussion in Chapter 3 of *The Bad Sister*’s simultaneous displacement and repetition of Hogg’s *Confessions* and allusions to other gothic texts, such as *Jane Eyre*.

¹³ These are actual characters from the Brontës’ juvenilia. Branwell’s pseudonym, Lord of Northangerland, alludes to Jane Austen’s gothic parody *Northanger Abbey* (1818).

¹⁴ The reference to Hogg recalls Newby’s advice to Henry about reading Scott as a model for his own writing. In “Heathcliff’s Tale,” Heathcliff visits the Borders and identifies it as the location of his early childhood. The identities of Branwell, Heathcliff, and Henry are confused in the same way identities are confused in Hogg’s *Confessions*.

¹⁵ This is not only about women’s bodies but about “other” bodies, too. In Heathcliff’s description of his years as a child slave, voicelessness and inscription are bound up with bodily violence: “remaining unaddressed in human language and knowing only

the voice of a leather strap descending on my back or the sentence of a shoe stamping on my sleeping body [. . .] [I] was as wordless as I had been when first captured and taken out to the West Indies” (61).

¹⁶ Tennant’s Acknowledgements include the 1984 Penguin English edition of *The Aspern Papers*, which reproduces the revised version from New York edition of *The Novels and Tales of Henry James* (1907-09). (In the original 1888 version, Miss Tina was called “Miss Tita.”) Subsequent references to *The Aspern Papers* are to the 1984 Penguin edition.

¹⁷ The U. S. edition (New York: Holt, 2001) is titled *Sylvia and Ted: A Novel*. The U. K. is titled *The Ballad of Sylvia and Ted* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 2001).

¹⁸ “Using the tale of ‘Bluebeard’ as a pathway to disclosing motives of which she was conscious only in retrospect, Tennant illuminates not only a recognizable aspect of a certain kind of female subjectivity, but also a motif of the folktale that—before feminism, before women’s liberation from ‘girlitude’—had escaped the scholars’ inquiries and categories” (Middlebrook 46).

¹⁹ As examples, Middlebrook cites Capote’s position as an “investigative journalist upholding a professional standard of objectivity” in *In Cold Blood* and Coover’s “venerable stance” of the satirist, “wielding exaggeratedness as a weapon against folly and vice” in *The Public Burning* (49).

²⁰ Middlebrook argues that to retain its aesthetic value and avoid crossing any ethical lines, the narrators of “non-fiction novels” must be “uncompromised” (49).

²¹ London: Cape, 2002. Subsequent references are to this edition.

²² Like his narrator, James longs for people to die so he can obtain his “spoils”: “Henry knows himself a murderer, willing the deaths of Edward Silsbee, Shelley scholar, bore; and the vulgar Paula with the unpronounceable Hungarian name, niece of the misguided Claire. Without them, the true story of the woman who lived with the two greatest poets of the Romantic age could be told” (50).

²³ “Her response to Cooper, James, and other male literary giants was as critical and analytical as it was admiring; by appropriating and transforming some of their key images and themes, she critiqued and revised their work” (Weimer, “Introduction” x). Leon Edel argues that Woolson also depicted James himself in her stories “Miss Grief” and “A Florentine Experiment” (*Conquest* 417-20).

²⁴ Tennant recreates the scene imagined in the opening of Lyndall Gordon’s biography. While this calls attention to the way biography fictionalizes events, it also destabilizes the notion of plagiarism. Gordon’s book is singled out as Tennant’s primary biographical source. James takes inspiration from an element of Clairmont’s biography, although the Silsbee story is related as gossip; Tennant takes inspiration from an element of James’s biography, although the Woolson story is related as fiction.

²⁵ Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005. Subsequent references are to this edition.

²⁶ London: Flamingo-HarperCollins, 1993. Subsequent references are to this edition.

²⁷ Names have a similar double function in Hardy’s text: “It is Hardy’s genius that the duality of names is used throughout the novel to invoke simultaneously the authority of the past and the death of the originary authority” (Shideler, 140).

²⁸ In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, the revelation of d'Urberville ancestry on the paternal side sets Tess's fate in motion. (For a discussion of the role of paternity in Hardy's text, see Shideler.) Liza-Lu's counter-narrative emphasizes the maternal line, tracing Mary Hewitt's ancestry through gypsies and pagans. At one point Liza-Lu comments that gypsies "aren't prone to register their children" (148) and so her mother is a "figment of the imagination," a "lost child" who cannot exist for anyone "who believes in hard, cold facts and in facts only" (148). Unlike John Durbeyfield's daughter, Mary's children can cast off their paternal surnames: "Like you, Baby Tess—and like my sister Tess before you—these babies are babies of dreams, spirit-babies, love-children—never recognized or registered under law, but there all the same" (152). In a similar gesture, Tennant removes the d'Urberville surname from Hardy's title in naming her own text *Tess*.

²⁹ Sadoff and Kucich argue: "The period has been marked by major critical texts that claim to have found in the nineteenth century the origins of contemporary consumerism (Baudrillard), sexual science (Foucault), gay culture (Sedgwick et al.), and gender identity (Gilbert and Gubar, Showalter, Armstrong). Ethnography, economics, science studies, the history of medicine, and other popular areas of scholarly inquiry have focused on the nineteenth century materials that they view as anchoring their respective disciplinary paradigms" (xiii-iv); "Rewritings of Victorian culture have flourished, we believe, because the postmodern fetishizes notions of cultural emergence, and because the nineteenth century provides multiple eligible sites for theorizing such emergence" (xv).

³⁰ Beer argues that Hardy's "malign and entrapping" plots are generated by an awareness of laws beyond human control that prioritize "the longer needs of the race and are part of a procreative energy designed to combat extinction, not the death of any individual" (239-40).

³¹ Boumelha argues that Darwin's theories "imparted a new momentum to biologically deterministic views of the female 'nature'": "The appeal to science shifts the site of the disabilities of women from history to nature, and in doing so, it undercuts the struggle of women against their oppression" (15-16).

³² For a reading of the relationship between the sexualized spectacle of Tess's body in Hardy's text and tourism see Nunokawa. Tennant reverses this relationship, replacing Hardy as the tawdry *commoditized* object of spectacle.

³³ See Sternlieb's discussion of Hardy's "redundant women." In *Tess*, Liza-Lu is sympathetic toward "poor Retty" and promises, "I will make it up to you, Retty, for all the unhappiness you suffered" (44-45). Even Hardy's mother is reincarnated as a second Mrs. Hands, who runs the local shop (211-212).

³⁴ However, it does not invalidate Liza-Lu's narrative as "crude feminism," as Gutleben argues (92-93). The text is deliberately ambiguous, refusing to fully endorse or dismiss any particular discourse.

CONCLUSION

“In my case, there seems to be always a left and a right, a double kind of thing and a circle in some way” (Tennant, “Women Talking” 153).

As shown in the preceding chapters, all of Tennant’s rewritings challenge concepts of originality and authenticity, offering counter-stories that undermine “authentic” and authoritative discourses, exploring the loss of national or cultural origins, and emphasizing repetition, simulation, and intertextuality. Tennant’s play with signifiers is central to this project, since it destabilizes language itself as a point of origin:

Tennant replaces apparently stable signs with endless metonymical chains that defer and destabilize meaning; she deliberately confuses the rhetorical and the literal in order to blur the boundary between actual and representational; and she populates her fictional landscapes with simulacra—copies of copies—that suggest origins and authenticity are impossible. Like so much postmodernist fiction, Tennant’s rewritings refuse master narratives (especially those that justify patriarchy, imperialism, and capitalism) while at the same time revealing how deterministic such narratives can be, despite our insistence, as postmodern subjects, on the fictionality of such discourses. Of course, in Tennant’s texts, this goes the other way: if official histories can be dispelled as fictions (and therefore rewritten into counter-fictions), then fictions can just as easily become master narratives. We are haunted as much by “unreal” stories—literature, fairy tales, and myths—as we are by “official” ones. Even Tennant’s most self-reflexive, self-consciously artificial rewritings, her pastiches of Hardy, James, Austen, and others, insist on this, as demonstrated in the preceding chapter.

Overreading Tennant's representations of language and textuality throughout this thesis, I have shown how her play with language and text generates ambivalence and ambiguity. Ambivalence and ambiguity characterize her texts' plots as well as their political stance and belief in the progressive possibilities of revision or writing back. Deterministic narratives can be playfully or critically rewritten to expose their fictionality, and to initiate an endless free play of signifiers, but there are always, also, vestiges of what has been rewritten. Tennant's texts magnify and perpetuate the plots they rewrite, and this repetition is often troped as the uncanny. Not only in her rewriting of well known gothic texts, but across all of her fiction, gothic tropes evoke excess, obscurity and repetition, and an undercurrent of paranoia and complicity that seems at odds with both the texts' feminist themes and their postmodernist play with language. As I have emphasized throughout this thesis, rewriting is never as simple as correction; at the same time, it is not reducible to a transcendence of discourses. More than anything else, Tennant's texts show how swiftly and frequently resistance lapses into entrapment, and how closely art and life, and felony and fidelity, are intertwined.

I began by arguing that Tennant's fiction has been underread, and by pointing out the problematic implications of models of influence and intertextuality that prematurely foreclose the possibility of agency in rewriting. Overreading Tennant's texts, however, we see that rewriting *can* be an act of resistance or survival: of seizing power, of speaking out and writing back. Tennant's fiction does displace the male-centeredness of predecessor texts, in order to allow female characters to tell their own story. By tracing the signature of Tennant's texts, we see

the emergence of an active female agent, an emergence troped as the development of a reading and writing subject, as discussed in Chapter II. Like Miller and Friedman in their critical approach to texts, Tennant returns the author to the story, and also insists on the historical specificity of that author. In “The Rise of Capitalism and the Fall of Woman,” for instance, there would be no new story to tell if a gendered subject had not taken it upon herself to reread “the rise of capitalism,” and rewrite it as “the fall of woman.” Intertextuality can be used as a strategy.

However, it is important to acknowledge that the return of this writing subject is never a definitively triumphant narrative. To enter into rewriting is to enter into the indeterminacy of language itself: to be caught by its tricks and puns, subjected to repetitions and interruptions, or to lose oneself, as Jane Wild does, in the endless field of shifting signifiers. Rewriting is an attempt to seize language, to wrest control from existing narratives and discourses and make them mean differently, but there is always the danger that someone or something else—terrifying supernatural forces, crazed radicals with dubious motives, nebulous but powerful empires—speaks through you. Ventriloquism is playful and parodic, and can allow for a delegitimation of authoritative discourses: a displacement to the other side of the story, as in *Tess*, or a challenge to notions about creativity and originality, as in *Felony*. But it can also be dangerous. As Chapters IV and V show, the possibility of perpetuating problematic stories disturbs and haunts rewriting, because some stories refuse to be rewritten.

Tennant’s fiction navigates between these possibilities without settling on any given one, just as her characters seize agency through writing and rewriting but

ultimately never find themselves in a stable place. In seeking profit or fame, on journeys to “find oneself” or return home, or, more simply, in trying to escape one’s fate as another “daughter of the house,” Tennant characters enter into ambiguous territory where meaning itself is always on the move. Often, there is no “self” to discover, and the return to home, or escape from it, is impossible. Whether Tennant’s characters succeed or fail in their plans is less important than the way they never write themselves into narratives of closure. In this sense, Tennant’s texts both explore and epitomize the process of transposition Kristeva calls intertextuality. Always *in process* (although in “process” that moves forward *and* regresses, operates through repetitions *and* interruptions), these texts resist stabilization and determinacy at the same time that they depict a world of changing realities and unfixed signifiers. If Tennant’s rewritings depict the return of the author to intertextuality, it is at least a double return, a qualified return, and often an impossible return. To rewrite is not always, and not only, to correct, subvert, repeat, or perpetuate, but to resist even these categories: to leave ambiguous and ambivalent signatures.

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