

Tesis Doctoral

GOTHIC FICTION IN AN AUSTRALIAN
LANDSCAPE: AN ANALYSIS OF GABRIELLE
LORD'S *TOOTH AND CLAW*, ELIZABETH
JOLLEY'S *THE WELL* AND TIM WINTON'S *IN
THE WINTER DARK*

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Gothic Fiction in an Australian Landscape:

An Analysis of Gabrielle Lord's *Tooth and Claw*, Elizabeth Jolley's *The Well* and Tim Winton's *In the Winter Dark*

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I. INTRODUCTION

I.1. METHODOLOGICAL INTRODUCTION

Gothic literature has attracted a vast and varied readership over the centuries. The key to its success seems to lie in its ability to hint at issues intrinsic to every human being and its flexibility to adapt to any social and spacial situation. The spectres, monsters and mysteries of the gothic hide deeper cultural and psychological meanings which are worth exploring. From a cultural perspective, the evolution of this literary genre parallels the development of the history and ideas of the society where it is produced. Thus, through the distorted language of the gothic, it is possible to discern the history of a culture or country. Besides, the gothic can go against established rules, offering the marginalised sectors of society an appropriate set of tools for criticism and struggle. From a psychological perspective, the gothic opens a window onto the dark secrets of our unconscious, our “other” selves, which sometimes haunt us unacknowledgedly. Blending the social and the psychological, the unconscious that the gothic unravels is not only personal, but also collective, as it reveals the psyche of a whole community.

Australian (post)colonial history can be read in gothic terms. It may not be coincidental that both gothic literature and Australian settlement began in the same century. From its inception, the gothic has shared many concerns and anxieties with this British ex-colony. Although the scary tale is as old as the hills, it was not established as a genre in Britain until the eighteenth century, with the rise of the novel. At that

time, traditional values and new ideas were brought into conflict, creating the contradictory atmosphere that gave birth to the gothic. This tension was taken to the Australian colonies where it was aggravated by a sense of disorientation and complete isolation from the civilised world. The way Australia was constituted as a colony and nation explains why Australian writers were highly influenced by the gothic, whether they recognised it or not. Furthermore, the relevance of the genre goes beyond early colonial writing, as it helped to shape the ensuing postcolonial discourse.

The aim of my thesis is to study the use of the gothic mode in an Australian setting. Among all the gothic fiction published in Australia, I have selected three contemporary novels written by white authors: Gabrielle Lord's *Tooth and Claw* (1983), Elizabeth Jolley's *The Well* (1986) and Tim Winton's *In the Winter Dark* (1988). My analysis has two main objectives: the general exploration of the distinctive characteristics of the gothic genre in these works, and the foregrounding of the specific qualities and meanings that an Australian context provides. Each novel emphasises different aspects, but on the whole, their gothic conventions address, intentionally or not, some common themes. Firstly, white (post)colonial fears, traumas and anxieties, and how Australians deal with them. Secondly, the difficult relationship between humans and nature, and the often unacknowledged close connection between them. And thirdly, the role and representation of women in patriarchy, criticising, defying or conforming to this ideology. In particular, what these novels share is that they are written in the gothic mode by white

authors, they are set in a non-urban Australian environment, they portray white Australians, the past haunts the characters, nature is associated with the female and there are no Aborigines.

I also intend to explore the affinity of this genre and Australia's (post)colonial conditions. Featuring only white characters and written by white authors, these works reflect (post)colonial Anglo-Celtic tensions and fears, and how the protagonists handle them. I will highlight the malleability of the gothic, able to change in accordance with time and space, and thus express in a distorted form current fears, traumas and concerns, both individual and collective. In the case of Australia, the most important are related to the land and the concept of *terra nullius* —empty land— which allowed free European colonisation. Although the process of colonisation happened a long time ago, contemporary white Australian society still feels uneasy. There are feelings of guilt and shame, but also fear about the possibility of recolonisation and retribution by the native inhabitants and the natural landscape. Moreover, land appropriation generates feelings of unbelonging and unsettledness. The simultaneous quality of belonging and alienation marks the Australian (post)colonial condition as uncanny in a Freudian sense, the boundaries between the familiar and the unfamiliar being all but static. I will also pay attention to the relevance of the natural landscape, whose peculiarity still haunts white Australians today, bringing to the fore traditional images of the Antipodes as a dark and evil place, an unconquered territory overbrimming with dangerous secrets. The female role in an Australian

gothic context will also be studied. The land has traditionally been feminised, a fact that acquires higher relevance in a colonising enterprise as it is possible to draw a parallel between the tyranny of colonisation and patriarchy. The gothic has been an important instrument for women to show the darkness of patriarchal ideologies. Hence, in a country which has been notorious for its misogyny, I find it essential to analyse female representation by female and male authors alike. Despite the use of the gothic by Aboriginal writers as a contesting weapon, I will only study the gothic produced by Anglo-Celtic authors in order to focus on white views and fears. However, Indigenous absence will not be overlooked, since their absence can be as revealing as their presence.

My approach to the gothic element in these texts will be socio-historical, psychological and feminist. The approach will also be individual —regarding the characters— and collective —regarding Australian society as a whole. My thesis will begin with an approach to gothic literature, tracing its evolution in history from its official recognition as a genre in Britain to the present. Then, its main characteristics will be analysed from a socio-historical, psychological and gender perspective. After this introduction to the gothic mode, I will contextualise it in Australia. Since this contextualisation cannot be fully understood outside a historical frame, I will start with an account of Australia's origins and history before studying the development of gothic literature in this country. In addition, I will consider the construction of the Australian national identity as it seems to be

pervaded by a gothic aura. In sections II, III and IV, I will study the gothic in *Tooth and Claw*, *The Well* and *In the Winter Dark*, taking into account their Australian setting and focusing, above all, on the points mentioned previously. Alexandra Rombouts already tackled the gothic elements in *The Well* and *In the Winter Dark* in her doctoral thesis “Admitting the Intruder. A Study of the Uses of the Gothic in Five Contemporary Australian Novels” (1994). My aim is to carry out a more in-depth analysis, which expands some of the points developed in her thesis and deals with other gothic components it overlooks.

Australian gothic has raised little academic interest until recently. The purpose of my thesis is to demonstrate the relevance of the gothic in this former British colony, since it is able to give expression to significant issues such as (post)colonial wounds, tensions and fears. My research stems from Gerry Turcotte’s argument that there exists a remarkable amount of gothic literature in Australia and that this genre is inherent to its (post)colonial circumstances. Turcotte, a pioneer researcher of this subject, met smiles and disbelief when he told people about his research interest (1993; 1993b). Critics claimed that there was no gothic in Australia, a claim that proved to be wrong. As he puts it: “we often miss what is beneath our very noses” (1993: 26). The resistance to admit the existence of a specific Australian gothic started to change in the 1990s. Apart from the valuable work carried out by Turcotte, some theses on Australian gothic have been written —such as the one mentioned above or “Antipodean Gothic Cinema. A Study of the (Post)modern Gothic in Australian and New Zealand Film since the

1970s” (2005) by Romana Ashton— and stacks of Australian gothic stories have started to be unearthed and published —such as *The Anthology of Colonial Australian Gothic Fiction* (2007) by Ken Gelder and Rachael Weaver, or the numerous tales gathered by James Doig in several collections: *Australian Gothic: An Anthology of Australian Supernatural Fiction 1867-1939* (2007), *Australian Nightmares: More Australian Tales of Terror and the Supernatural* (2008), *Australian Ghost Stories* (2010) and *Australian Hauntings: Colonial Supernatural Fiction* (2011). I hope that my research will also contribute to filling the academic gap in Australian gothic fiction.

I.2. THE GOTHIC

The secret to the longevity of the gothic genre, which originated in England back in the eighteenth century, relies on its ability to address in disguise some fundamental themes of humankind, from the inner and mental, to the social and cultural. The main staples of the genre include: terror, horror, the supernatural, the return of the past, suspense, ambiguity and uncertainty —especially regarding the distinction between reality and imagination—, an emphasis on boundaries, gloomy, remote or decadent environments, stereotyped characters, etc. Nevertheless, the gothic is more than a mere combination of characteristics. Ghosts, monsters and other sources of unspeakable terror and horror all hide more profound and relevant meanings which make the reading of gothic fiction particularly rewarding.

Gothic literature, according to David Punter (1996: 183-184), is concerned with three vital elements “to which the gothic constantly, and hauntingly, returns”: paranoia, barbarism and taboo. Paranoia raises ambiguity, doubt and uncertainty. Barbarism creates anguish as it places the conventional world against a distorted one, thus emphasising the boundaries of the civilised. This can result in fear of the past, fear of aristocracy, fear of racial degeneracy, or fear of the barbaric in the past and even the future. As for taboo, the gothic approaches those areas of life which are suppressed for the sake of social and mental balance.

Before tackling the deeper implications of the gothic, I would like to make a little history of the genre.

I.2.1. The Birth and Evolution of Gothic Literature

The gothic as a genre emerged in England in the eighteenth century against a complex background: “Intellectual, technical and commercial developments all play[ed] a part”, states Punter (1996: 40). Within that background, the following events must be highlighted:

the appearance and early growth of the novel form itself; the attendant emphasis on realism, and the complicated relationship which that bears to rationalist philosophy; Augustan cultural thinking and the view of human psychology which it entails; the emergence of an emphasis on extreme emotionality which produces sentimental fiction; rival views of the relevance to contemporary writing of immediate and distant history; and the developments in poetic practice and theory in the mid-eighteenth century. (Punter, 1996: 40)

The eighteenth century has come to be known as the century of the Enlightenment or Neo-Classicism, due to its strict adherence to the tenets of Classicism. It was, above all, the Age of Reason. It encouraged values such as conformity, moderation, balance, severity, decorum and hierarchy. This century witnessed a great shift in the social structure, especially with the appearance of a new trading class: the middle-class. The bourgeoisie spurred the birth of the novel. They also helped to increase, and socially diversify, the number of readers as books acquired the status of commodities. The proliferation of circulating libraries, which lent out books for a membership fee, contributed highly to the spread of literature (Punter, 1996: 21).

The gothic is believed to have been born in opposition to the dominant culture: “the rebellion of the imagination against the tyranny

of reason” (Kilgour, 1995: 3). The gothic showed the dark side of eighteenth-century rationality and morality. It threatened its values in the shape of “supernatural and natural forces, imaginative excesses and delusions, religious and human evil, social transgression, mental disintegration and spiritual corruption” (Botting, 1996: 2). Frederick R. Karl talks about the gothic in Oedipal terms: “In the eighteenth century, Gothic is a rubric for many kinds of forces that were gathering together to chip away at the Augustan ideal. Not surprisingly, in many Gothic tales, fathers and sons are, often literally, at each other’s throats” (1974: 235). Leslie A. Fielder refers to the gothic in the same terms: “the guilt which underlies the gothic and motivates its plots is the guilt of the revolutionary haunted by the (paternal) past which he has been striving to destroy” (1997: 129). Moreover, the spread of literacy, the increasing female and middle-class readership, and the larger power of the press caused anxiety and debates about the revolutionary influence of literature on society. Reading gothic fiction was considered to be particularly dangerous because it portrayed an imaginary world that deviated from the established order and norms. These contemporary debates are even reflected in gothic fiction:

The ill consequences of reading works which fill ‘the mind with extravagant thoughts and too often with criminal propensities’ are dramatised in numerous gothic stories in which the heroine is the victim of her own imagination and sensibility, indulged in reading, through which she loses the ability to differentiate between art and life. (Kilgour, 1995: 7)

Although the gothic seems to be a sign of rebellion, it can contradictorily be construed as conservative. Transgressions are usually punished in the end and order is restored, reaffirming the status quo.

As Fred Botting asserts: “Gothic novels frequently adopt this cautionary strategy, warning of dangers of social and moral transgression by presenting them in their darkest and most threatening form. [...They are] examples of what happens when the rules of social behaviour are neglected” (1996: 7). Apart from the paradoxical function that gothic novels seem to perform, they help to produce and spread ways of perceiving the world. For example, they help to define what is evil and what is good, what is monstrous and what is normal, or what should be hidden and what should be shown (Gelder, 2000: 1).

Within the literary field, the gothic opposed the tradition of the realistic novel. The gothic shaped itself “between the development of the novel and the exhaustion of traditional forms (epic, drama, satire, burlesque, et al.), and then, in turn, between the realistic novel and a subgenre based on extravagance, disorder, frenzy, and the irrational” (Karl, 1974: 237). The gothic was influenced by a considerable number of literary sources, such as British folklore, ballads, chivalric romances, Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, Oriental and Near Eastern tales, Graveyard poetry, the concept of the sublime, Rousseauistic ideas, sentimental novelists, Renaissance ideas of melancholy, Milton, Spencer and the German tradition (Kilgour, 1995: 4; Karl, 1974: 237). This rich mixture of influences leads Maggie Kilgour to declare that the gothic genre is “itself a Frankenstein’s monster, assembled out of the bits and pieces of the past. [...] it is, at its best, a highly wrought, artificial form which is extremely self-conscious of its artificiality and creation out of old material and traditions” (1995: 4). It is a hybrid form which does not

only incorporate other literary forms, but also changes and develops its own conventions in relation to newer types of writing (Botting, 1996: 14).

Gothic features are a constant throughout the history of literature. The qualities ascribed to the gothic are not exclusive to the genre as it came out in the eighteenth century. Rather, its roots come from a long literary tradition whose aim was to provoke fear. Typical gothic traces can be found, for instance, in Greek and Roman mythology, the Bible, *Beowulf*, some of Shakespeare's plays, etc. The tradition of the tale of terror is as old as the history of humankind, asserts Edith Birkhead (1963: 1): "All tale tellers know that fear is a potent spell [...]. Human nature desires not only to be amused and entertained, but moved to pity and fear" (1963: 3). Nevertheless, it was in the eighteenth century that this genre consolidated. It seems that the religious, political and social atmosphere was the right one to encourage its consolidation. Changes in thought, in particular the weakening of religion, destroyed the illusion that the world was in order and under control. With reference to fantastic literature, Jean-Paul Sartre offers a similar view:

Whilst religious faith prevailed, [...] fantasy fulfilled a definite, escapist, function. [...] In a secular culture, fantasy [...] does not invent supernatural regions, but presents a natural world inverted into something strange, something 'other'. It becomes 'domesticated', humanized, turning from transcendental explorations to transcriptions of a human condition. (In Jackson, 1991: 17)

This was precisely what gothic fiction suggested: a chaotic world where the only order was that imposed by humankind.

The first work to call itself "A Gothic Story" was Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764. Besides giving birth to a new genre, Walpole is responsible for the revival of gothic architecture in Britain.

The earliest example of this is his mansion Strawberry Hill near London, which he restored in that fashion. This interest in gothic architecture went along with a general revision and appreciation of the art and culture of the Middle Ages (Punter and Byron, 2004: 34). The gothic revival sparked by Romanticism could be seen in all kinds of art, but it was literature that really encouraged it. Antiquarianism, the fashionable Graveyard poets and the interest in the sublime helped to foster this revival. While the gothic was still constructed as the lower opposite to the Enlightenment, it also started to be valued rather than regarded as a sign of bad taste and inferior to classical modes. The Enlightenment and Romanticism coexisted during that time, and as Fred Botting asserts, the gothic “became the shadow that haunted neoclassical values, running parallel and counter to [...] ideas of symmetrical form, reason, knowledge and propriety” (1996: 32).

The new literary mode that Walpole began exploded during the Romantic period —approximately from the 1790s to the 1830s— throughout Britain, Europe and the rest of the world. The main stream of gothic romance that stemmed from Walpole’s work split into three parallel branches: the Gothic Historical, the School of Terror and the School of Horror (Varma, 1987: 206). In the Gothic Historical, historic supernatural agents were set against “an authentic background of chivalrous pageantry”. This branch was developed by Clara Reeve and the Lee sisters —Sophia and Harriet—, culminating in the *Waverley Novels* of Walter Scott. The School of Terror was characterised by the constant suggestion of the supernatural, but it was always rationalised

and explained away in the end. This school was led by Ann Radcliffe, the author of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). The School of Horror was distinguished by violence and crudity. A representative work of this school is Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796). Afterwards, the gothic lost quality and remained dormant owing to popular prejudice, "the pedantry of reviewers, and the vagaries of the producers themselves" (Varma, 1987: 207). Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, a parody of gothic fiction, reveals the situation the genre was going through at that time. Although it was published in 1818, it was actually written in 1798, when the gothic was at its highest popularity, but was already beginning to be attacked and satirised by critics (Punter and Byron: 2004: 80). There is no agreement on the exact moment when the "classic" gothic novel came to an end. Some critics point at the publication of either Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in 1818 or Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* in 1820. However, it did not vanish completely. During the nineteenth century, it continued to appear as a mode scattered in different fictional forms (Punter and Byron, 2004: 26). After this period of decadence, it successfully resurged in the 1890s with unforgettable works such as Robert L. Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hide* (1886), Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890-91) or Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) (Hogle, 2002: 1-2). The gothic also appeared in other sorts of fiction which were not classified as gothic. Authors such as Charles Dickens often employed characteristics attributed to this genre, as can be appreciated, for instance, in *Great Expectations* (1861) (Victor Sage in Mulvey-Roberts,

1998: 85). In the first half of the twentieth century, during the period of Modernism, gothic literature seemed to decline, since it came to be regarded as “creaky and hollow”. In sharp contrast, it was in the world of the cinema that the gothic then flourished.¹ Nevertheless, gothic influences can also be discerned in works such as Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899), James Joyce’s *Dubliners* (1914) and T.S. Eliot’s poem “The Waste Land” (1922). Finally, the 1960s brought the revival of popular literary forms, including the gothic (Spooner, 2009: 39-40). Since then, the gothic has remained a popular and successful genre. Every bookshop keeps a special section for gothic fiction and it has also seen its widest expansion into films, television, theatre, musicals, comics, videogames, etc.

Although gothic literature has always enjoyed great popularity among the reading public, at the beginning it was marginalised and ill-treated by critics. They found it “crude, exploitative, even sadistic, and that it pandered to the worst in the popular taste of its time” (Punter, 1996: 8). Fortunately, this attitude changed and the gothic became the focus of well-deserved critical attention. Among the first studies to take gothic fiction seriously are Edith Birkhead’s *The Tale of Terror* (1921), Eino Railo’s *The Haunted Castle* (1927), Montague Summers’s *The Gothic Quest* (1938) or Devendra Varma’s *The Gothic Flame* (1957).

¹ Well-known films of that period are: Robert Wiene’s *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1919), Paul Wegener and Carl Boese’s *The Golem, How He Came into the World* (1920), F.W. Murnau’s *Nosferatu* (1922), Tod Browning’s *Dracula* (1931) and James Whale’s *Frankenstein* (1931).

I.2.2. A Socio-historical Approach to the Gothic

The gothic is a literary genre that adapts to the specific socio-historical situation in which it is generated. That is why it has proved to be so enduring. As Dani Cavallaro asserts:

Horror, terror and Gothicity cannot be explained away as forms of escapism, if what is meant by escapism is a total retreat from society [...]. The socio-historical circumstances [...are] vital to acknowledge the prominent part played by class tensions, uncertainties about the relation of the present to a nebulous past, and apocalyptic anxieties about the future [...]. The dream-like journey undertaken by many heroes and heroines as they descend into the Gothic building and hence into its owner's seedy secrets is also a descent into history —an attempt to understand and come to terms with social reality rendered urgently necessary by intimations of crisis and change. The political implications of the discourse of darkness should not be underestimated. (2002: 38-39)

The birth and development of the gothic in English literature are evidence of its malleability. In order to illustrate the flexibility of this genre more clearly, let us trace the changing settings of the gothic throughout part of its literary history. Gothic locations are used to comment on social classes, gender and other structures of power and knowledge. For instance, the transition from the castle to the house, and from the exotic to the domestic, is not a question of authorial preference. It actually mirrors shifts in society and ideology. This transition occurs at the time when a new social class, the bourgeoisie, gains power, and thus gothic literature reflects the values and fears of this new social class, which is also the primary consumer of the gothic.

In early gothic literature, the action takes place in medieval buildings set in exotic or remote environments. The castle is the commonest setting. It embodies the sins that the rising middle-class associates with the aristocracy. Devendra Varma provides a good explanation of the purpose of the castle:

[It] is an image of power, dark, isolated, and impenetrable. No light penetrating its impermeable walls, high and strengthened by bastions, it stands silent, lonely and sublime, frowning defiance on all who dare to invade its solitary reign. [...] Even when presented in decay, the castle is majestic and threatening [...]. The grandeur of these relics recall [sic] the scenes of ancient chivalry and whispers a moral of departed greatness, inspiring us with a feeling of melancholy awe and sacred enthusiasm. It awakens musings on those who lived there in former times: if those walls could speak, they could tell strange things, for they have looked upon sad doings. It is an emblem of life and death, and the ruinous walls seem still to echo tremors of life. [...] This ruined edifice is the symbol of joy and mourning and human passions, of hopes and fears, triumphs and villainy, of the extremes of princely grandeur and domestic misery, of supernatural power and mortal weakness, the embodiment of all emotions and themes displayed in the Gothic novels. (1987: 18)

Ambiguity lies at the core of this building. It can be both prison and protection from the outside world, where the most ordinary and extraordinary events occur. It is also related to the struggle for power. David Punter and Glennis Byron highlight these features in their definition:

The castle is a labyrinth, a maze, a site of secrets. It is also, paradoxically, a site of domesticity, where ordinary life carries on even while accompanied by the most extraordinary and inexplicable of events. It can be a place of womb-like security, a refuge from the complex exigencies of the outer world; it can also —at the same time, and according to a difference of perception— be a place of incarceration, a place where heroines and others can be locked away from the fickle memory of ‘ordinary life’. The castle has to do with the map, and with the failure of the map; it figures loss of direction, the impossibility of imposing one’s own sense of place on an alien world. The castle represents desubjectification: within its walls one may be ‘subjected’ to a force that is utterly resistant to the individual’s attempt to impose his or her own order. (2004: 261-262)

In Victorian times the gothic suffers a process of domestication as the action moves into the world of the contemporary reader/author. Castles are gradually replaced by less archaic locations which are “more disturbingly familiar: the bourgeois domestic world or the new urban landscape” (Punter and Byron, 2004: 26). When the house, as a representative of the bourgeois private world, takes on the role of the castle, it acquires the frightening features of the latter in order to reflect the new anxieties of the middle-class: the possible challenge and

destruction of its values. Dani Cavallaro (2002: 85) contends that “although the haunter of many dark spaces is proverbially the ghost, the Gothic vision is also haunted by the derogatory connotations carried by ‘Gothic’ as a stylistic term”. Gothic architecture is imbued with “disquieting undertones due to its conventional connection with barbarity”. The buildings classified as typically gothic are the ones built in the Dark Ages out of the remains of classical civilisations. As an architectural term, “gothic” was introduced in the eighteenth century when the notion of home was beginning to embody the values of the emerging middle-class. Therefore, it came to signify the opposite of the ideal sheltering home of the bourgeoisie, that is, “discomfort, coldness, extravagance, unclear boundaries between the inside and the outside, and, above all, sprawling structures suggestive of lack of control over one’s space” (2002: 86). At the same time, the city emerged as a new scenario for the gothic to criticise the damaging effects of capitalism, turning it into the centre of evil, crime and moral decadence (Punter and Byron, 2004: 21). From its inception, gothic fiction had actually suffered a progressive internalisation of evil. However, this internalisation reached its completion with renewed emphasis by the mid-nineteenth century. The appearance of the ghost story serves as evidence. In ghost stories, evil gets much closer to the self as the threatening element—the ghost—lives with you, invading the privacy of your home (Smith, 2007: 87).

The gothic was also affected by industrialisation and advances in science, especially as the nineteenth century progressed. Industry

transformed deeply the structure of society as it changed from agricultural to industrial. The vast majority of the population moved from rural to urban industrial areas and new types of work and social classes sprang. Capitalism brought about a sense of alienation because, firstly, mechanisation prevented workers from feeling any attachment to the products they made, and secondly, cities separated people from nature. Consequently, “the very ideas of what it meant to be human were disturbed” (Punter and Byron, 2004: 20). The developments in science aggravated this feeling of alienation and the already crumbling notions of human identity. Science contributed to moving the locus of gothic representation to the human body, a further step in the internalisation of evil. Scientific discourses caused anxiety about the nature of human identity, which was reflected in the obsession of Victorian fiction with the non-human in oneself. The roots of this tendency can already be discerned in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) as it shows the doubling between Victor and his monster. Some decades later, Freud’s discovery of the unconscious became the most influential factor.

History plays a central role in the choice of gothic settings. Robert Mighall emphasises the importance of anachronism in the gothic —that is, the return of the past— as a pivotal element of the genre throughout its development. Gothic settings are selected with the aim of opposing the present to the past: “the past is resurrected for the present age to illustrate what has been gained, and as a reminder of what could easily be lost” (2003: 10). In early gothic fiction, locations from the Middle

Ages evoked landscapes that Protestant England had inhabited a long time ago, but they were obsolete, and thus inadequate in the eighteenth century. In the same way, Victorian gothic regarded rookeries as part of the Catholic landscape of medieval cities: “a criminal, who ‘would have [...] been in harmony with his environment, in a barbaric age, or at the present day in certain parts of Africa . . . cannot be tolerated now as a member of a civilised society’” (Daniel Tuke in Mighall, 2003: 251). Anachronism mixed with geography as the expanding Empire brought the Western world into contact with the so-called savages. As a result, it was similarly held that “savages were perfectly natural in their rightful place, and even allowed anthropologists to ‘peer backwards’ into their own evolutionary history”, but they posed a threat outside their environment (Mighall, 2003: 251).

The return of the past is one of the main topics of the gothic. The past can never be recovered, so the gothic reimagines it to symbolise present anxieties, and even prejudices. This fear of regression is also transferred to the evolution of the human mind as a reflection of the anxiety generated by scientific discourses in Victorian times. In order to illustrate this point, I will choose the curious conclusion drawn by the combination of biology, psychiatry and criminology: mental disorder and nervous illnesses occur because the individual’s brain is not fully developed, that is, the brain is stuck in the past (Mighall, 2003: 255). This belief was applied to the minds of criminals and savages to explain their uncivilised behaviour. For the criminologist Cesare Lombroso: “the criminal reverted to an earlier prehistoric or even pre-human stage of

phylogenetic evolution. [...] the primitive status of the individual criminal (his affinity with the savage as type) is reinforced by what [...] is perceived to be its childlike propensities" (2003: 257).

The flexible nature of the gothic extends even to etymology. The meaning of the word "gothic" has suffered several transformations over the centuries. The gothic age was related to a period of barbarism, anarchy, cruelty and superstition caused by the Goths, an invading Germanic tribe. They conquered and precipitated the fall of the Roman civilisation, so they were blamed for the darkness and ignorance that followed. The lack of information about this period made the Renaissance brand it as the Dark Ages. The word "gothic" came to qualify anything medieval in opposition to the classical. During the eighteenth century, gothic represented the barbarian forces that had destroyed a civilisation, but, antagonically, it also began to be linked to an ancient sense of Englishness and the usurpation of that identity by invading forces. As Ian Duncan explains:

An official, oppositional movement, populist and proto-nationalist in its appeal and with its ideological roots in the radical Whiggery [i.e. progressive politics] of the last century, was reclaiming "Gothic" culture as the ancient constitutional source of British liberties usurped by the Norman Conquest and subsequent aristocratic rule... At the same time, the establishment conception of "Gothic" was that of barbarian forces that had overthrown a civilization, and the long cultural darkness haunted by despotism and anarchy, superstition and enthusiasm, out of which the present British dispensation, modelling itself on classical principles, had only lately emerged. (In Heiland, 2004: 129)

Therefore, on the one hand, the gothic stood for the primitive, the obsolete and the uncivilised, and on the other hand, it stood for the lost, but true pillars of English culture: "The Gothic past is consequently seen as retaining not only more power and vigour than the present, but

also, in a strange way, more truly civilized values” (Punter and Byron, 2004: 5). Along with the development of the meaning of gothic, Horace Walpole was crucial in connecting the gothic with the supernatural:

Walpole meant simply to classify *The Castle of Otranto* as a medieval story when he wrote *Gothic* into his title. Since his medieval, or Gothic, story was so thoroughly saturated with the supernatural, however, the word *Gothic* took unto itself the connotation of ghostly [...] As writers tended to over-emphasize the supernatural, *Gothic* gradually strengthened its connection with *ghostly* at the expense of weakening its affiliation with *medieval*. (Mary Muriel Tarr in Turcotte, 2009: 39-40. Original emphasis)

These stories were more concerned with the arousal of terror and horror than with the medieval —or gothic— settings they employed. Accordingly, gothic became the term by which this kind of literature is known.

I.2.3. Gothic and the Psyche

Sigmund Freud was one of the first to notice the relevance of literature as a key to psychology. Gothic literature and psychoanalysis share indeed many a concern. Some recurrent motifs in both are: repression, the irrational, obsession, fragmented identities, the past and its return, emotions —especially fear—, dreams or dream-like situations, etc. The gothic seems to materialise, usually in distorted forms, what lurks in our unconscious, that “deep repository of very old, infantile, and repressed memories or impulses, the archaic underworld of the self” (Hogle, 2002: 3), central to Freudian psychoanalysis. As Michelle Massé asserts, the first generation of psychoanalysts “drew upon literature both for examples of psychoanalytic insight and as prior statements of what they themselves were struggling to understand. All literature is subject to such analysis, but in the compressed, time-honed forms of

myth and fairy tale, they often saw the nuclei of our most abiding concerns” (2000: 229).

Western thought held the belief that the human mind was a unified whole fully aware of itself. The ability to think made the human being unique, different from animals, which could not control their own instincts. This belief was shaken up by Freud and the emergence of psychoanalysis at the beginning of the twentieth century. He discovered that the conscious is a tiny part of a person’s mind, and that the unconscious exercises much more power in human emotions and behaviour. Freud asserted that when children grow up, they learn to repress their instinctual drives —aggressive and sexual impulses as well as a primary narcissism— so that they can adapt to the demands of social life. Such repression results in “a second self, a stranger within” that hides in the unconscious. This discovery had a great impact because it implies that “the highest achievements and ideals of civilization are inseparable from instinctual urges toward pleasure, constancy, and the release of excitation and energy” (Rivkin and Ryan, 2005: 389). It seems that humans do not have absolute control over themselves, and consequently, they are not so far away from the irrational animal kingdom. The unconscious is not easily apprehended, but it can be discerned in such phenomena as dreams, abnormal behavioural patterns and extreme emotions. The unconscious that gothic fiction represents is not only individual, but collective too, since literature is created by an individual affected by their specific culture and time. Jerrold E. Hogle significantly calls this social reading the

“second unconscious” (2002: 3). In this way, the psychological approach mingles with the social, providing a broader and richer reading of gothic works.

The unconscious plays a vital role in gothic fiction. Significantly enough, many writers confess that the inspiration for their gothic novels came in a dream. Two famous examples are *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*. Mary Shelley dreamed of the idea of *Frankenstein* while she was competing with other Romantic writers to create the scariest tale, and Bram Stoker came up with the story of *Dracula* when the author suffered turbulent dreams after indigestion. We bury in our unconscious everything we want to forget or keep secret because it is too difficult for us to handle. However, these repressed memories can involuntarily intrude into our conscious at any time. Quoting Joyce Carol Oates: “In the Gothic imagination, the unconscious has erupted and has seeped out into ‘the world’. As if our most disturbing, unacknowledged dreams had broken their restraints, claiming autonomy” (1999: 32). Freud called this the return of the repressed. It is interesting to notice how gothic spaces in fiction parallel the human mind. A gothic story normally takes place in an old, or seemingly old location, or a new location with some old element in it. Secrets from the past hide in those spaces. They come to the surface to haunt the characters psychologically and/or physically. These hauntings can take different shapes, usually ghosts, monsters or other disturbing spectres. These beings stem from our repressed past, disturbing the present in order to uncover conflicts or crimes that cannot remain buried any

more (Hogle, 2002: 2). In other words, what haunts us is our repressed side, our own unconscious. Dani Cavallaro contends that the gothic employs the phenomenon of haunting to remark the inevitable confrontation between humans and those events that cannot be explained by human logic. The confrontation is inevitable because the non-human is intrinsic to being human. To put it differently, what haunts us is a part of ourselves and we find it dark, confusing or threatening because we have rejected —or repressed— it in favour of reason, often labelling that haunting force as “a symptom of moral and mental degeneration”. That is why the boundaries between the outside and the inside are not clear at all, since the external turns out to be in our own minds. As a consequence, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly where the feeling of menace starts: “who is being haunted and who is haunting”. Thus, uncertainty and uneasiness are generated and both are “primary ingredients of spectrality” (2002: 61).

The trespassing and demarcation of boundaries are pivotal themes of the gothic. This genre explores borders and border-states, real or imaginary. To mention only a few: the border between life and death, good and evil, dream and reality, sanity and madness, innocence and guilt, humans and animals, humans and machines, man and woman, the civilised and the savage, etc. Michelle Massé affirms that we incessantly try to keep “a simulacrum of congruence” between reality and fantasy, but boundaries sometimes become confused in our everyday routines, in daydreams, for instance, or occasional dissonances between what we want to hear and what other people mean.

When we cannot reconcile those breaches, according to Freud, the uncanny is called forth: “[The uncanny] is easily and often produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced” (2000: 230). Hence, uncertainty always increases the level of fear. Remembering H.P. Lovecraft’s words: “The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown” (1973: 12).

Following Mircea Eliade’s research on myths, Manuel Aguirre explains the use and nature of thresholds. Archaic cultures imagine a Sacred Mountain at the centre of the world, an axis mundi which links heaven, earth and the lower world —death, hell or the land of the ancestors. It is the threshold between the human world and the numinous, the realm of reason and the irrational. It can be either sacred or haunted because it is polluted by the numinous other. A temple, a palace or even a city can function as an axis mundi. Gothic spaces in literature carry out this archaic function of threshold, showing numinous attributes (2006: 16). The threshold is a site characterised by asymmetry, instability and a potential for disorder. It does not only demarcate, but it can also expand and colonise. This trend to colonise its own borders means that it is not a neutral territory. It is actually part of the other dimension it delimits, and as a result, it is “touched with Otherness” (2006: 31). The gothic castle —as an example of a gothic space— can successfully be compared to a black hole. Rather than places, the castle and the black hole are events or forces:

Like the gothic castle, it [the black hole] is the spacetime ‘crunch’ where the laws of the rationalist universe break down; [...] it signifies either

destruction or transformation; [...] it is a site associated with energy, darkness and loss, and so it is the negation of the ordered cosmos, a non-religious, non-spiritual version of the Christian Hell. Above all, it shares [...] its postulation of a radical unrest at the 'end' —on the threshold— of an all-too-stable universe. (2006: 29)

Both the castle and the black hole are spaces of no return, variable and turbulent territories characterised by ambiguity, fluidity and power.

The uncertainty intrinsic to the gothic is produced not only through the content of the text, but also through its form. A basic narrative feature of the gothic is the creation of prolonged suspense, favouring an aesthetic or pleasure principle rather than a moral or reality principle. As Maggie Kilgour explains:

Conscious of the delicious aspects of suspense and the disappointing nature of certainty, gothic narratives [...] create a tension between a desire to prolong and defer the inevitable and an impulse towards the revelation of mysteries, between the indulgence of curiosity and its satisfaction. While gothic narratives move towards the revelation of the mystery, they also defer it [...] the suspense of the plot, rather than the final moment of revelation, is the focus of attention [...]. In doing so, they seem to suggest a contradiction between a moral principle, expounded in the conclusion, and an aesthetic one, created through suspense; or between what Freud would call a reality principle, which pushes the narrative forward to get to the truth, the moment of revelation, and a pleasure principle, which attempts to defer this moment, to enjoy the aesthetic experience of suspense itself. (1995: 32)

Consequently, gothic narratives —like the mind— usually deviate from a linear development through embedded plots, interruptions, digressions, and so forth, moving the story backwards and forwards (1995: 32). These formal devices reflect the close relationship between the gothic and the psyche. This literary mode uses different techniques “to lead us into the landscape of the mind”:

Through their closed, isolated worlds they deal with psychological reality. The mind is turned in on itself. [...] The closed world is not entirely cut off. Indeed, its effect often depends on the sense of moving in and out of it. Narrators and characters move from one closed world to another, or from the open, everyday world into a closed one or vice versa. Such movements enhance the sense of the static and the strange. (MacAndrew, 1979: 110)

This effect is basically achieved through a spiral narrative structure: there are multiple tales —“the tale within a framework or the tale within a tale” (1979: 110-111). In this way, a deeper secret is revealed each time, resulting in an inward spiral towards the truth. *Frankenstein*, for instance, follows this embedded structure typical of the gothic, as Elizabeth MacAndrew observes:

The concentric, nested system of narration leads from the everyday world of Walton's sister to the frozen wasteland of Walton's scientific pursuit to Frankenstein's closed worlds of benign Sentimentalism and tormenting self-isolation, until buried in the very center we come to the strangest world of them all, that of the monster's account. The effect is one of penetrating deeper and deeper into a mystery. (1979: 145)

The sense of uncertainty is also brought about by an unstable narrative voice:

Gothic subjectivity has early shaken the belief in a competent and controlling narrative centre: narration —and/or focalisation— occurs through one or several characters whose identity is disrupted and whose limited perception effects the typical gothic distortions and ‘excesses’. (Becker, 1999: 41)

Gothic stories are often first-person accounts (MacAndrew, 1979: 111). The instability of gothic narrators derives, firstly, from their status as fragmented beings. They are characterised by what Barbara Godard calls the “decomposition of the persona” as it “places the emphasis on deconstruction, rather than on madness” (in Becker, 1999: 41).² Secondly, gothic narrators are unreliable. According to Rimmon-Kenan, the main sources of unreliability are: “the narrator's limited knowledge, [...their] personal involvement, and [...their] problematic value-scheme” (2001: 101). Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) is an ambiguous narrative that perfectly illustrates the uncertainty created

² Susanne Becker points to the relevance of this idea because it leads to view feminine gothic narratives as subversive instead of pathological (1999: 41).

by the narrator: “The governess [...] can be seen as a reliable narrator telling the story of two haunted children, but she can also be considered an unreliable, neurotic narrator, unwittingly reporting her own hallucinations” (Rimmon-Kenan, 2001: 103).

Another recurrent formality of the gothic that links it to psychology is that the landscape reflects the events and the feelings of the characters. This technique is known as pathetic fallacy, a term coined by John Ruskin in 1856. As he explained, the pathetic fallacy hides the “true appearances of things”, showing instead the “extraordinary or false appearance, when we are under the influence of emotion of contemplative fancy” (in Cuddon, 1992: 692).

Gothic literature produces fear. According to Ellen Moers, this is the most basic ingredient of the genre:

In Gothic writings fantasy predominates over reality, the strange over the commonplace, and the supernatural over the natural, with one definite auctorial intent: to scare. Not, that is, to reach down into the depths of the soul and purge it with pity and terror (as we say tragedy does), but to get to the body itself [...] quickly arousing and quickly allaying the physiological reactions to fear. (1985: 90)

Studies have shown the tendency to fear strange objects and situations, especially when the familiar is affected. Our control over them seems to be crucial to arouse a greater or lesser degree of fear. In addition, pain and its prospect generate fear on account of their link with survival and extinction, either total or partial (Grixti, 1989: 150). We react to given situations according to how we perceive them. Jean-Paul Sartre, in his *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions* (1940), explained that we make sense of the world using “hodological maps”, mental constructions of reality built through our experience, that “allow us to chart out the

paths which we need to follow in order to reach our goals” (in Grixti, 1989: 150). When we come across something unexpected and our “hodological map” cannot come to terms with it realistically, we resort to magic to fill in that gap. Emotional reactions, particularly fear, are the result of magical beliefs. Hence, it can be said that fear derives from the loss of control and helplessness felt in situations when “the cognitive system can neither assimilate the environment into its own structure, nor adapt itself to the structure of the environment” (Grixti, 1989: 153).

Fear is closely linked to the concept of the uncanny developed by Sigmund Freud in his 1919 essay of that name. He uses the word uncanny —*unheimlich*— to signify things that frighten. *Das Unheimlich* occurs when something familiar, *heimlich*, turns unfamiliar, *unheimlich* (Freud, 1985: 341). Some factors that usually contribute to the appearance of the uncanny are: animism, magic and sorcery, the omnipotence of thoughts, involuntary repetition and the idea of the double, death and dead bodies, the return of the dead, ghosts and spirits, and the damage or loss of one’s eyes. Freud also remarks that the uncanny is connected with the old animistic conception of the universe. In the animistic stage, humans believed in magic, the omnipotence of thoughts, spirits, etc. This is how they explained the world that surrounded them. This animistic phase had to be superseded so as to enter the scientific phase, and the primitive views had to be alienated through repression. There are, however, still traces in our minds that surface upon coming across something that awakens uncanny sensations:

It seems as if each one of us has been through a phase of individual development corresponding to this animistic stage in primitive men, that none of us has passed through it without preserving certain residues and traces of it which are still capable of manifesting themselves, and that everything which now strikes us as “uncanny” fulfils the condition of touching those residues of animistic mental activity within us and bringing them to expression. (Freud, 1985: 363)

The awakening of human primitive beliefs implies the return of the repressed, and since these beliefs have been ostracised and thus made unfamiliar, they provoke fear. This is exactly how Schelling defines the term *unheimlich*: “everything is *unheimlich* that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light” (in Freud, 1985: 345). One of the concerns of the gothic is precisely to bring to light the taboos that culture represses, as critics such as David Punter (1996: 183-184) and Dani Cavallaro (2002: 48), among many others, have noticed.

Given that death, animism and involuntary repetition are issues that appear in the novels that I analyse in this thesis, I will explain these uncanny phenomena in more detail. Freud contends that all those issues related to death —the return of the dead, ghosts and spirits— bring about uncanny sensations in the highest degree. Our attitude towards death has changed very little since our primeval stage. The main reasons for this are, on the one hand, the huge power of such an old emotional reaction and, on the other, the scientific gap there still exists in our knowledge about death. We do not officially believe in spirits and the return of the dead. We consider these phenomena to be highly improbable. Like any other primitive belief, these original anxieties have been repressed by the civilised world, but they still remain at the back of our minds: “the primitive fear of the dead is still so strong within us and always ready to come to the surface on any

provocation. Most likely our fear still implies the old belief that the dead man becomes the enemy of his survivor and seeks to carry him off to share his new life with him” (1985: 365). Moreover, the return of the dead is connected with animism. According to Jentsch: “a particularly favourable condition for awakening uncanny feelings is created when there is intellectual uncertainty whether an object is alive or not, and when an inanimate object becomes too much like an animate one” (in Freud, 1985: 354). Therefore, ghosts involve a double feeling of uncanniness. Ghosts are people who have died, so they should be still, inanimate. However, they might mysteriously come to life, become animate.

Another important source of uncanniness is repetition and the figure of the double. Freud asserts that involuntary repetition arouses uncanny sensations. It “forces upon us the idea of something fateful and inescapable when otherwise we should have spoken only of chance” and, under certain circumstances, it generates a sense similar to that of “helplessness experienced in some dream-states” (1985: 359-360). The idea of the double has evolved since the time of primitive humans. At the beginning, the double symbolised the denial of the power of death. It was a way of preserving humans against extinction. The notion that people have an immortal soul is based on this belief, and it was probably the first double of the body. Another case is found in Ancient Egypt, where images of the dead were made of long-lasting materials. Nevertheless, once human beings surmounted their stage of primary narcissism, the double reversed its positive meaning: it no longer

assured immortality, but became “the uncanny harbinger of death” (Freud, 1985: 357). This reversal is linked to the evolution of the human species. The double belongs to a primeval human stage that was overcome a long time ago for the sake of evolution. On these grounds, in an act of self-defence against a backwards movement, the double is regarded as something foreign to oneself, ascribing to it the quality of uncanny.

One of the basic ingredients of the gothic is darkness. Edmund Burke in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757) reminds us:

To make anything very terrible, obscurity seems in general to be necessary. When we know the full extent of any danger, when we can accustom our eyes to it, a great deal of the apprehension vanishes. Every one will be sensible of this, who considers how greatly night adds to our dread, in all cases of danger, and how much the notion of ghosts and goblins, of which none can form clear ideas, affects minds. (1844: 74)

In order to achieve disturbing darkness, the gothic makes use of: spooky, remote, badly-lit landscapes and buildings, poor weather conditions, winter, the night and moments of transition such as dawn or sunset, which blur clear distinctions: “the darkest times are often disorientingly crepuscular rather than pitch black” (Cavallaro, 2002: 21). Nonetheless, darkness is not only external, but internal as well. Dark environments often reflect the characters’ dark psyche: “In this mental realm, the night is always dark regardless of the amount of moonlight shed upon it [...]. As landscape and architecture, climate and seasons, thoughts and emotions collude to evoke a tenebrous universe, paradoxically light ultimately proves as impenetrable as darkness itself” (2002: 21). Since darkness stands for evil, it might seem logical that

light —its opposite— symbolised good. Nevertheless, light can be evil as well: “Figures of light [...] are not often benevolent. Many popular spectres are not rendered any less malicious by their paleness, luminescence of pearly-white translucence”. Besides, anthropology and the analysis of folklore have shown that black is unevenly recorded as the most frightening colour. In fact, the scariest colour of all is the absence of it, that is, white (2002: 23). For instance, ghosts are usually described as white beings, the devil can have white skin —like Lucifer in Lewis’s *The Monk*— and one of the most famous incarnation of evil in English written literature is the white whale Moby Dick.

Darkness is normally invested with unfavourable connotations: the basic instincts, lack of clarity and order, fear, sorrow and absurdity, “the condition created by impotent minds seeking meaning in a meaningless universe”. In Christianity, for example, the devil belongs to the dark kingdom; in Hinduism darkness stands for Time the Destroyer; in Iranian mythology it is linked to Ahriman, the Lord of Lies; in Islamism it symbolises indiscretion (Cavallaro, 2002: 21-22). From a psychological perspective, darkness is where the rejections of civilised society are placed. Paradoxically, “the more intensely the shadow is repressed, the more powerful and energetic becomes”. Thus, everything that has been labelled as dark can also be enlightening. Although apparently a negative force, darkness can prove to be quite positive. It can help us “to open our eyes to valuable experiences and submerged levels of reality” (2002: 24). Accordingly, gothic fiction can be read as cautionary tales about the dangers of neglecting the unconscious, our

dark side. The gothic works in a similar way to nightmares: it brings to the surface the unconscious disguised in hideous images. If we pay attention to these nightmarish distortions, we can benefit from them, guaranteeing a balanced and healthy psyche. But if we ignore them, they can eventually turn destructive.

I.2.4. Terror, Horror, the Sublime and the Abject

Although critics such as David Punter consider the distinction between them as irrelevant (1996b: 146), I believe my analysis of the novels will profit from exploring their different connotations. It is essential to clarify that terror and horror are not considered exact synonyms. In an oft-quoted passage of her essay *On the Supernatural in Poetry* (1826), Ann Radcliffe explains the difference between these two terms:

Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them. I apprehend, that neither Shakespeare nor Milton by their fictions, nor Mr. Burke by his reasoning, anywhere looked to positive horror as a source of the sublime, though they all agree that terror is a very high one. But where lies the great difference between horror and terror but in the uncertainty and obscurity that accompany the first, respecting the dreaded evil? (In Williams, 1995: 73)

Therefore, terror is associated with the soul, the mind and the concept of the sublime as understood by Romanticism, that is, as that force that enhances one's own faculties by making you feel smaller and aware of your own weakness as a mere human being in the face of nature's might. Among the many essays written on the concept of the sublime, Edward Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757) was the most influential. He was one of the first to relate the sublime to terror:

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, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. (1844: 51)

As causes of the sublime, he lists, for example, vastness, power, privation, infinity and obscurity. The natural environment is one of the most important sources of the sublime. During Romanticism, nature began to be seen with different eyes. For instance, the feelings mountains could arouse changed. As Fred Botting explains:

Mountains, once considered as ugly blemishes, deformities disfiguring the proportions of a world that ideally should be uniform, flat and symmetrical, began to be seen with eyes pleased by their irregularity, diversity and scale. The pleasure arose from the range of intense and uplifting emotions that mountainous scenery evoked in the viewer. Wonder, awe, horror and joy were the emotions believed to expand or elevate the soul and the imagination with a sense of power and infinity. Mountains were the foremost objects of the natural sublime. (1996: 38)

Gothic architecture also has the power to evoke the sublime. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's description of his feelings as he goes into a gothic cathedral serves as a magnificent example: "On entering a cathedral, I am filled with devotion and awe; I am lost to the actualities that surround me, and my whole being expands into the infinite; earth and air, nature and art, all swell up into eternity, and the only sensible impression is that 'I am nothing'" (in Kilgour, 1995: 30).

In contrast with terror, horror is connected with death, the body and physical responses. As Fred Botting states:

The cause [of horror] is generally a direct encounter with physical mortality, the touching of a cold corpse, the sight of a decaying body. Death is presented as the absolute limit [...]. It is the moment of the negative sublime, a moment of freezing, contraction and horror which signals a temporality that cannot be recuperated by the mortal subject. Horror marks the response to an excess that cannot be transcended. (1996: 75)

Horror is close to the concept of the abject. The abject is related to the evolution of the psyche and the socialisation of an individual. Jacques

Lacan calls this process “the mirror phase”. He declares that there are three orders in the psyche: the real, the imaginary and the symbolic. All of them are important for the development of the self. The real does not actually exist. It would exist if there were no language. The moment it is mediated by language, it becomes the truth and ceases to be the real because what is the truth for someone may not be true for another. What exists is the imaginary, a state of being which is imagined as real but which actually consists of images, fantasies and memories. This stage occurs in early infancy. The child imagines itself in total unity with its mother and the world. There is no language yet, only images. The founding moment of the imaginary is “the mirror phase”, when the child sees its reflection in the mirror and identifies itself with it. This self-image dictates the efforts of the subject towards wholeness and autonomy. Thus, the newly formed specular “I” precedes the social “I”. The symbolic takes place when the child starts to speak. It constitutes the system of symbolisation into which the child’s body must translate itself. The symbolic marks the entrance into culture. It is at this moment that the child sees itself as an autonomous being, that is, different from its mother. The social “I” appears and the child has to comply with social rules (in Leitch, 2001: 1281).

Erich Neumann explains that this psychic evolution, like physical formation and maturation, is archetypal, in other words, it is directed by natural forces which are inherent to the human species. The first stage is dominated by the archetype of the mother: the child is “nature” and develops as nature. The next stage is ruled by the archetype of the

father. In this stage, “an increasing importance is given to will, activity, learning, and values, and to integrating the child into the traditional cultural canon of its group [...]. This development is already underway in the ‘matriarchal’ phase, since [...] phases overlap” (1994: 236). The child’s urge to separate itself from the mother and mature out of this security is archetypal as well. It is a guiding force that lies within the child: “the archetype of wholeness, the Self” (1994: 237-238). Moreover, while the self disguises itself as the archetype of the phase the child is moving towards —the patriarchal—, the previous archetype —the matriarchal— turns negative. Not only does it become everything that must be overcome —“the lower, infantile and archaic”—, but also “the abysmal and chaotic”, “the devouring feminine ‘Dragon of the Abyss’” that leads to “stagnation, regression and death”. Paradoxically, although these attributes do not involve action, this negative mother is active because she is an attractive force that pushes the individual downwards (Neumann, 1994: 241).

There are traces of this process of maturation and socialisation that “the encultured adult world” is unable to understand and insert into language. They elude meaning because they straddle the pre-linguistic imaginary and the symbolic without being completely assimilated by either. Significantly enough, the gothic deals with all this: “the Gothic vision proposes that what is ultimately most intractably monstrous about our encounters with darkness is their exposure of troubling leftovers which come across as horrifying due to their

stubborn materiality and terrifying due to our inability to comprehend their scope” (Cavallaro, 2002: 199).

Abjection is a potential source of horror. To put it in a nutshell, it is the process whereby an individual must distinguish itself from the (m)other by repressing or casting out everything that culture considers to be dirty, improper or unacceptable. The abject comprises all the stuff that must be excluded on account of the threat it poses to the right construction of the self. In her book *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982), Julia Kristeva analyses how abjection, as a source of horror, works in patriarchal societies as a means of detaching the human from the non-human, that is, the fully from the partially formed subject. According to her, the abject does not respect borders, positions or regulations, and consequently stirs and threatens “identity, system and order” (1982: 4). She stresses the figure of the (m)other, who comes to represent the imaginary, as the primary generator of abjection because she is rejected by the child in favour of the father, who epitomises the symbolic. As a result, “the abject is placed on the side of the feminine: it exists in opposition to the paternal symbolic, which is governed by rules and laws” (Creed, 1994: 37). It is important to bear in mind that terror and horror are both concerned with the formation of the self and its preservation, but in different ways:

Anything that threatens our existence is capable of evoking terror and hence the sublime. But in contrast to “abjection”, a process buried in the archaic processes of the not-yet-self, the sublime is a function of consciousness. Unlike horror, which threatens corporeal integrity—one’s being as a body—the sublime overwhelms the self with the *idea* of an overwhelming power. (Williams, 1995: 76. Original emphasis)

Therefore, it can be said that mothers are horrible because they evoke horror, and fathers are terrible because they evoke terror (1995: 77).

Hoffman Baruch describes the abject as: “something that disgusts you, [...] an extremely strong feeling that is at once somatic and symbolic, which is above all a revolt against an external menace from which one wants to distance oneself, but of which one has the impression that it may menace us from the inside” (in Cavallaro, 2002: 199). For Kristeva, the most usual objects that cause repugnance are filth, waste, dung or food that, for whatever reason, provokes nausea. The body also holds and produces abject substances: urine, faeces, spittle, sweat, blood, pus, tears, semen, milk, etc. These substances put our integrity to the test because they are neither external nor internal, they fluctuate in between both realms. Moreover, they make it clear that the abject does not only come from the outside, but also from the inside. For this reason, the orifices of the body are our most vulnerable points. The key manifestation of the abject is the corpse:

[Bodily] wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit —*cadere*, cadaver. If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer I who expel. I' is expelled. (Kristeva, 1982: 3-4)

As a result, the corpse does not only cause anxiety because it stands for death, but also because it reminds us of our inevitable fate. It is the final stage of the physical evolution that the body experiences in life, that is, the culmination of our corruption and decay. Furthermore, the fact that the body produces polluting substances which must be abjected in order to survive means that we are permanently in danger of

being corrupted, of being infected by death in life (1982: 3-4). In religion, the corpse is abject because it symbolises the main type of pollution: the body without a soul, the opposite of the spiritual (Creed, 1994: 10).

The ambiguity of abjection should also be taken into consideration. To begin with, abjection can be a significant source of enlightenment. Everything that threatens life also contributes to shaping it. The abject is essential for individuals to take up their proper position in society, to better understand themselves and the world:

By communing with the fearful and the abject, rather than devoting ourselves to their annihilation, we may develop unexpectedly capacious sensibilities, insofar as their persistent evocation of paradoxical affects is likely to expand the territories of both our vigilant consciousness and our dormant unconscious fantasies. (Cavallaro, 2002: 206)

In addition, abjection brings about contradictory feelings: fear and attraction. It is impossible to break away from the abject. Despite its horrible nature, it will always be there, tempting us. Individuals are constructed through language, “through a desire for meaning”. At the same time, they are seduced by the abject, “the place of meaninglessness”, but this attraction must be shed for survival, “for fear of self-annihilation” (Creed, 1994: 10). For this reason, abject images like blood, excrement, vomit, etc, can inspire both disgust and elation. The former because they are culturally constructed as an enemy able “to engulf and disintegrate our identities and our boundaries” (Cavallaro, 2002: 201). The latter because they represent the return to a time when mother and child were together in a safe and wonderful fusion, when those substances were not embarrassing and revulsive. Last but not least, the breaking of taboos and social

conventions, which this attraction might involve, can also become a source of pleasure.

The female body has traditionally been imagined as the main expression of the abject in a phallogentric world, which takes the male body as the standard. In contrast with a man's, a woman's body is "fluid, sprawling and leaky". Thus, it is seen as lacking a fixed shape, wholeness and clear boundaries from nature (Cavallaro, 2002: 204).

Woman's mutability is more visible during pregnancy:

The womb represents the utmost in abjection for it contains a new life form which will pass from inside to outside bringing with it traces of its contamination —blood, afterbirth, faeces. [...It] is viewed as horrifying [...] because of its essential functions —it houses an alien life form, it causes alterations in the body, it leads to the act of birth. The womb is horrifying *per se* and within patriarchal discourses it has been used to represent woman's body as marked, impure and a part of the natural/animal world. (Creed, 1994: 49)

This explains why this interpretation of the female reproductive functions caused the founders of the Church to be horrified at the idea that man was born of woman. Besides, in the Bible the image of the birthing woman as unclean is very often equalled to images of impurity and decay (1994: 47).

Mothers are ambiguous in a non-psychological level as well. They are nurturing beings because they provide the child with food, shelter and protection. However, they can conversely turn deadly because they have the power to cut off those vital supplies. This, together with the mother's interference in the normal formation of the child's psyche, helps to partly explain the double nature that patriarchy has ascribed to women in general, "an attitude which is also represented in the various stereotypes of feminine evil that exist within a range of popular

discourses” (Creed, 1994: 164). It must also be noted that, even when the personal mother may pay all the necessary attention to her child, she may not succeed in protecting it. The mother is also a human being, “an integral part of her group, her times, and her destiny” (Neumann, 1994: 234). If she experiences anxiety due to illness, war, hunger, or any other reasons, she may transfer that anxiety onto her child. She may also be unable to protect her child from factors such as fate, the child’s own physical constitution, etc. In all these cases, although the mother is blameless, from an archetypal perspective, she is found guilty and condemned.

I.2.5. Female and Male Gothic

Concomitant with the distinction between terror and horror, there exists a distinction between male and female gothic. Ellen Moers, in her book *Literary Women* (1976), was the first to coin the term female gothic. She defined it simply as “the work that women writers have done in the literary mode that, since the eighteenth century, we have called the Gothic” (1985: 90). She also highlights the role of Ann Radcliffe as the precursor of this kind of gothic, where “the central figure is a young woman who is simultaneously persecuted victim and courageous heroine” (1985: 91). Since the publication of Moers’s book, there has been an ongoing debate about whether female gothic constitutes a separate genre. It has been argued that both female and male gothic modes reflect how the idea of the traditionally divided spheres —public

for the male and private for the female— turns the goals of men and women into antithesis:

While the male moves through the standard Bildungsroman towards personhood and individuation, the female is never independent, and achieves her goal by entering into a new relation through marriage. Male identity, thus, is based on autonomy, while female identity [...] is conceived of as essentially relational. (Kilgour, 1995: 37)

Female and male gothic may differ because women and men occupy different cultural positions: “it is all in the ‘I’. [...] I’s/eyes might *not* be the same” (Williams, 1995: 107. Original emphasis). Men and women find themselves in dissimilar positions because they are assigned different roles in society. As happens with all cultural constructions, these values are transmitted through socialisation. Socialisation is a process through which people are taught the values and roles they are expected to comply with in their own culture. This process is carried out through conscious and unconscious messages conveyed by several socialising agents. Although the whole society is actually involved, there are some institutionalised sources which are vital, such as the family, the school, language —whose omnipresence makes it one of the most compelling actors—, religion and the mass media (Poal, 1993: 76-77). It is by means of differential socialisation that women have traditionally been trained for the private sphere —domesticity, affection, reproduction, etc.—, while men have been trained for the public sphere —politics, science, culture, etc.

The world seems to be conceived through a system of binaries which opposes what is considered to be normal against the other, the abnormal. The gothic represents the other, a relative concept, as it is

culture specific. The flexibility of the gothic thus contributes to the appearance of various others depending on historical and spatial circumstances. The gothic is still connected with the earliest types of otherness in civilisation. Aristotle said that, according to the Pythagoreans, reality is composed of these ten couples of opposites: male/female, limited/unlimited, odd/even, one/many, right/left, square/oblong, at rest/moving, straight/curved, light/darkness and good/evil. The first element of the couples constitutes what is known as “the line of good” and the second “the line of evil”, which significantly starts with “female” and also has elements commonly related to the gothic (Williams, 1995: 18-19). In other words, it is the line of otherness. The female is the oldest and most powerful other. Hélène Cixous asserts that patriarchy is grounded on a series of binary oppositions which always relegate women to the negative side: activity/passivity, culture/nature, father/mother, head/heart, intelligible/palpable, logos/pathos, day/night, sun/moon, etc (1992: 146). Therefore, differential socialisation brings about a more serious problem: the subordination of women to men. Consequently, everything belonging to the sphere of women is undervalued and discriminated against due to its presumed inferiority.

In addition, personal identities are constructed in our society through binary oppositions. In order to explain this further, I will return to Lacan’s mirror phase. What the child sees in the mirror is an other — the image of the mirror— as the self. It is a reflection of difference imagined as the same. The child recognises itself as what it is not and

what it desires to be. When the child enters the symbolic, it takes an identity built through language, a language that takes the masculine as the standard. In phallogentric societies, the feminine only exists in relation to the masculine, so the ideal desired self is masculine. Once the child can speak, it assumes a position as male or not-male. That is to say, women only exist as not-men, and then they are “produced as wives, mothers, lovers, daughters and sisters rather than subjects in their own right”. Women are the other: what men are not. However, identities are never fixed. They evolve throughout a subject’s life: “[They] are negotiated as individuals experience themselves through relations of similarity with and difference from others. The mirror phase of identification and the acquisition of language together inscribe the self, whether male or female, as a split-subject, a subject in process” (Schaffer, 1988: 10).

Regarding the specific characteristics that make male and female gothic different, it seems that the basic difference lies in the way they describe the relationship between the protagonists and the gothic spaces in which they move. While the protagonist of the male gothic tries to enter some space, the protagonist of the female gothic tries to escape from a suffocating interior (Punter and Byron, 2004: 278). Supporting this theory, Kate Ferguson Ellis states that the gothic worries about the home. It focuses on the “failed home”: “the place from which some (usually ‘fallen’ men) are locked out, and others (usually ‘innocent’ women) are locked in. The theme of ‘paradise lost’ links the paired strands of literary Gothicism [...] identified as Radcliffian and

Lewisite, 'feminine' and 'masculine', 'terror Gothic' and 'horror Gothic'" (1989: ix). Besides, male and female forms seem to differ in plot, their use of terror and horror, how they deal with supernatural elements and narrative techniques.

Male gothic deals with the protagonist's transgression of taboos and his confrontation with several social institutions, such as the law, the Church and the family (Punter and Byron, 2004: 278). This gothic specialises in horror. It is particularly haunted by the horror of the female, above all her manifestation as mother. Male gothic displays the abject, the otherness of the mother who threatens to annihilate the speaking subject. As an extension, "whatever is culturally feminine, including women and nature, may bear the burden of this obscure will to revenge, serving as an object to the controlled, violated, desecrated" (Williams, 1995: 107). This results in the male gothic focus on female suffering, usually positioning readers as voyeurs who may take pleasure in female victimisation. For this reason, it has sometimes been accused of being pornographic. In early gothic, this pornography takes the shape of the virtuous woman threatened and often violated. Once her virtue is destroyed, she is blamed and punished as a fallen woman. She is portrayed as the product of a culture that "reifies her 'female nature' as curious, inconstant, disobedient, weak, and that places her in a situation where those qualities lead her into danger" (1995: 105). The role of the male gothic heroine is thus inseparable from her sexuality, that is, she is just a sexual object. In addition to offering readers different points of view, these texts resist closure since the supernatural

is never explained. In fact, it is presented as a reality. The ending is tragic. The male protagonist fails or dies as he is punished for the violation of the law of the father (1995: 102-103). These male gothic conventions can be found in classic works such as Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), and also in more modern instances like Ira Levin's *Rosemary's Baby* (1965) or Stephen King's *Carrie* (1974).

By contrast, female gothic emphasises terror —the fear of the father. It creates “a Looking-Glass World where ancient assumptions about the ‘male’ and the ‘female’ [...] are suspended or so transformed as to reveal an entirely different world, exposing the perils lurking in the father's corridors of power” (Williams, 1995: 107). Here the other is man, the representative of patriarchy. The woman is imprisoned in a mansion or castle under the authority of a man or his female surrogate. The heroine's experiences, fears and anxieties are the main focus. Her experiences are pictured either as a quest to get some kind of power in the patriarchal world, or as a search for an absent mother. As the story is exclusively focalised by the heroine, it produces suspense since the reader's vision is limited (Punter and Byron, 2004: 279). Anne Williams describes the female gothic plot as highly formulaic. The protagonist is usually alone and poor. She finds a job as a governess in the house of a rich family. The owner of the house is a distant, mysterious, scary, but also attractive man. She feels supernatural phenomena coming from the house. She thinks that somebody or something wants to kill her. The menace is normally connected with a female force. At the end of the

story, the heroine learns that this danger can be overcome because the supernatural is explained away as the result of human action. She also learns that the master loves her and they get married (1995: 101). These conventions can be seen in works like Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938) or Victoria Holt's *Mistress of Mellyn* (1960).

It is important to point out that the female and male division mentioned above cannot be taken as absolute. Despite their biological sex, women and men authors sometimes select and combine motifs of both male and female gothic, Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) being an illustrative example. Women can even write male rather than female gothic novels. One can name, for instance, Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya, or The Moor* (1806) or Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). Similarly, men can produce female instead of male gothic. Sheridan Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas* (1864) or Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1860) are just but two examples (Punter and Byron, 2004: 279-280; Alison Milbank in Mulvey-Roberts, 1998: 54).

Female gothic does not only show the dark side of patriarchy, but it also offers its heroines adventure and the chance to travel freely, both outdoors and indoors. Ann Radcliffe was the pioneer of this trend:

For Mrs. Radcliffe, the Gothic novel was a device to send maidens on distant and exciting journeys without offending the proprieties. In the power of villains, her heroines are forced to do what they could never do alone, whatever their ambitions: scurry up the top of pasteboard Alps, spy out exotic vistas, penetrate bandit-infested forests. And indoors, inside Mrs Radcliffe's castles, her heroines can scuttle miles along corridors, descend into dungeons, and explore secret chambers without a chaperone, because the Gothic castle, however much in ruins, is still an indoor and therefore freely female space. In Mrs. Radcliffe's hands, the Gothic novel became a

feminine substitute for the picaresque, where heroines could enjoy all the adventures and alarms that masculine heroes had long experienced, far from home, in fiction. (Moers, 1985: 126)

For instance, in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* —whose castle “has become metonymic for the terrors of confinement we associate with the genre” (Ellis, 2000: 260)— the female protagonist spends most of the novel travelling, and relatively very little in the castle. In contrast with today, indoors travelling was “a more serious affair” because, at Radcliffe’s time, it represented female reality more acutely. These first gothic heroines left an important mark on future women writers, such as those in the nineteenth century:

the whole thrust [...] toward physical heroics, toward risk-taking and courage-proving as a gauge of heroism, long after male writers had succumbed to the prevailing antiheroic, quiescent temper of the bourgeois century, and admitted, with whatever degree of regret or despair, that adventure was no longer a possibility of modern life. Latecomers to literature as they were, and still bedazzled with the strengths of feminine self-assertion, women writers of the nineteenth century were long reluctant to succumb to the ennui, the spleen, the *tedium vitae* of the *mal du siècle*. (Moers, 1985: 131)

The female gothic plot, especially its happy ending in marriage, can be understood as both conservative and subversive. It can be seen as conservative because the final marriage does not challenge patriarchy, but reintegrates the heroine into society. In that way, it reaffirms the ideology which has been suggested as the cause of all her troubles and suffering. As Maggie Kilgour argues:

In the female gothic, the private world is turned temporarily into a house of horrors; the domestic realm appears in distorted nightmare forms in the images of the prison [...]. But this transformation cannot serve as an exposé of the fundamental reality that the bourgeois home is a gothic prison for women, for at the end of the text life returns to a normality [...]. The gothic forms of domesticity evaporate, enabling the heroine to return to the real version, now purified of its contaminated forms, so that women’s continuing incarceration in the home [...] is assured. (1995: 38)

On the other hand, female gothic can be subversive. Female gothic exposes phallogentric societies as destructive and oppressive. It expresses women's fears, fantasies and the restrictions that patriarchal systems impose on them. Diane Long Hoeveler favours above all the function of female gothic "as a coded and veiled critique of all of those public institutions that have been erected to displace, contain, or commodify women" (1998: xiii). Not only does female gothic react against patriarchal assumptions, but it also rewrites them, succeeding in the representation of the female self as fully human, not as a mere object. In disagreement with conservative readings, Anne Williams contends that:

the most crucial aspect of female gothic is its constructive and empowering function for its female readers. Its comic plot, its emphasis on terror rather than horror, and its insistence on the possibilities of female "reason" (implied by, among other things, its convention of explaining the ghosts) not only affirm the possibilities of "feminine" strength; they also sketch in the outlines of a female self that is more than the 'other' as purely archetypal or stereotypical. (1995: 138)

A woman may have different experiences from a man —whose experiences are usually taken as the norm— both in life and in the constitution of the self. Female gothic offers an alternative to the traditional male Oedipal struggle, portraying "a subject with different desires, who sees the world with a different eye/I" (1995: 139). Moreover, Williams does not read female gothic strictly as a mirror of a socio-historical environment. She reads it more as dreams, which problematises the relation of fiction to social circumstances, "far from offering a simple and direct reflection of historical conditions" (1995: 138). Marriage, one of the oldest metaphors of literature, should be

regarded as such. She adds that the heroine's gaze is, unlike the male's, creative rather than destructive:

Unlike the male plot, which demands our acceptance of a supernatural realm far beyond us (the Super-Law of the Super-Father who exacts terrible punishments), the female plot validates the experience of the heroine's senses and their power to 'make sense' of the world. By the end the heroine 'masters', in effect, what Freud calls the reality principle. Her conventional marriage to the 'master' of the house expresses this idea symbolically. (1995: 145)

Her perception broadens her world and enables her to discover good. She is able to see the true nature of the male other, who so far had been depicted as monstrous, and to turn him into a loving husband. Hence, marriage may symbolise the heroine's success in transforming patriarchy, which is personified in the male character. At the same time, she manages to develop her own individual consciousness.

The patriarchal family is a strong pillar on which the structure of society rests. Its influence even extends to psychology, where Freud recognised that psychic drives and individual development occur within the dynamics of the patriarchal family, a structure he regarded as natural (Williams, 1995: 245). Gothic literary conventions are a reflection of the norms that organise this type of family. The gothic represents the symbolic order that rules our society, the patriarchal family being a sort of microcosm. According to Anne Williams, the traces of this family as an organising principle of gothic fiction can be observed everywhere: "in the architecture of the haunted castle or house, in the experience of horror and terror, in the sublime and beautiful landscape, and in the specifically literary conventions most characteristic of Gothic, the dynamic of the 'male' signifier and the 'female' signified" (1995: 87). The patriarchal family is an idealised

model that structures human life and experience at different levels. It basically establishes values as well as cultural power relationships of mastery and subordination. This model comprises the hierarchical division between the male and the female mentioned before, and keeps it “in tension, in a balance that may be disturbed, in a distribution of powers that may be defied, and perhaps even invite defiance” (1995: 22), a defiance carried out by the same gothic fiction that reproduces them. The organisation of the patriarchal family creates gothic plots as it forces a personal, social and political balance of power, “which may redound through the generations as surely as fortunes —or family curses— may be inherited” (1995: 22). Therefore, gothic plots are family plots both literally and metaphorically. In other words, “the Gothic myth is itself the patriarchal family” (1995: 87). The house “with its built-in darkneses” symbolises the structural design of patriarchy (1995: 86). Through the gothic mode, the dark corners of the house are emphasised to expose that “‘the Law of the Father’ is a tyrannical *paterfamilias* and that we dwell in his ruins” (1995: 24). Patriarchy pushes women to the confining walls of the house —the domestic sphere. Trapped inside, this space becomes their first battleground against this ideology. One of their weapons is gothic literature, in which the darkness of the house gains strength and threatens to overthrow male authority. Whatever the end of the confrontation, the gothic serves to display the potential of darkness to question, and perhaps defeat, the established system.

People have always enjoyed scary tales. Even before the gothic genre had emerged, gothic elements pervaded many stories. It was in the eighteenth century, with the rise of the novel, that the gothic established itself as a proper genre in England. Throughout its history, it has suffered ups and downs, but it has never disappeared, thanks in part to its ability to adapt to any social circumstances. It has functioned as a kind of repository of ideologies and historical changes. That is to say, the history of humankind is somehow coded in gothic fiction. The interpretation of this genre has been double-edged. While it has sometimes been considered revolutionary because it departs from standard rules and favours chaos, other times it has been regarded as conservative because it sides with orthodoxy and works for the preservation of the status quo. Nevertheless, marginalised social groups have used it to attack the ruling system that oppresses them. Women, for instance, have found in this genre the perfect instrument to criticise patriarchy, resulting in a distinctive tradition of female gothic. Apart from dealing with the social and the cultural, the gothic also deals with the psychological, our inner selves. It tackles emotional reactions, especially fear, and expresses the mysterious —or rather the unconscious— ways in which the human mind often works. The gothic has turned so popular that it has gone beyond the literary and affected other cultural fields such as the cinema, theatre, television, music and computer games, among others, and nowadays it is a highly valued genre.

I.3. AUSTRALIAN GOTHIC

Australia's (post)colonial history seems to invite reading in gothic terms. Significantly enough, gothic literature and Australian settlement started in the eighteenth century. From the very beginning, the gothic has dealt with anxieties and themes which are concomitant with this former colony, such as isolation, confinement, the encounter with the unknown, hostile environments, disorientation, boundaries, persecution, fragmented identities and the search for the self. The gothic was born in the eighteenth century out of the contradictions and tensions of that time. While traditional values were defended, there was also a desire for innovative and progressive ideas. This "instability, curiosity and sense of disjunction" were transported to the colonies where they were "supplemented by a further sense of spiritual and physical alienation in the so-called barren lands" (Turcotte, 2009: 17). Due to the nature of Australia's formation, the gothic was an early influence on Australian writers. Their literature seems to express "that grimness of perspective often associated with a 'Gothic sensibility'" (2009: 17). Gerry Turcotte suggests that the gothic is in part "a by-product of colonisation". The gothic generated in Australia is socio-historically contextualised and cannot be wholly apprehended outside its historical frame. For this reason, the study of Australian gothic literature requires the consideration of the country's origins and history.

I.3.1. The Colonisation of Unknown Australia

In the sixteenth century the Dutch, Portuguese and Spanish had already reached the Australian coast and had charted much of it. Moreover, Macassan sailors had traded and mixed with the Indigenous people of northern Australia. In 1770 James Cook arrived and annexed the eastern part of the continent to the British Crown and named it New South Wales.³ He did so under the apparent belief that there were few Aborigines and that, as they did not use the land in the European fashion, that is, cultivating it, they did not own it. Consequently, Australia was settled under “the legal fiction” that it had no owners, that it was terra nullius, a declaration which was not overturned until 1992 by the Mabo decision⁴ (Webby, 2000: 6-7).

This is how the colonisation of Australia began, bringing about the near extinction of Aborigines. Since they were regarded as “inevitable losers in the evolutionary race”, the colonisers tried to preserve human evolution through annihilation, dispossession and attempts to cleanse the race by removing mixed-blood children from their biological parents to raise them in institutions or by foster families (Webby, 2000: 10). Colonisation also had a tremendous impact on the Australian environment. The new settlers changed the land according to their necessities, such as the building of towns and farms, or the introduction of new animals and plants:

³ At that time, voyages of discovery pursued scientific as well as commercial and imperial interests. That is why Cook’s primary purpose was to observe the transit of Venus from Tahiti, and then to explore the South Pacific (Bird, 1998: 22).

⁴ The Mabo High Court decision recognised prior Aboriginal ownership of the land and invalidated the doctrine of terra nullius that had justified the British colonisation of Australia (Webby, 2000: 17).

Australia's unique fauna [and flora] has evolved in isolation, without competition from animals from other continents for thousands of years. This lack of competition has resulted in animal and plant communities being very susceptible to the impacts of invasion. Humans are almost entirely responsible for the transcontinental movement of animals. Some were brought as livestock (goats and pigs), pets (cats and dogs), transport (camels and horses), biological controls (Cane toads) or just to make Australia feel a bit more like home (rabbits and foxes). Somewhere along the line they have managed to escape human control and live on their own in the natural environment.⁵

Human interference with autochthonous Australian nature was an attempt to transform an alien landscape, to make it more like home. Eighteenth-century Europeans had a very clear vision of what the landscape should look like to be beautiful. Australia was ugly because it did not fulfil European standards. It “failed the test, and was looked upon as a second-class environment at whose demolition the world would shed no tears” (Vandenbeld, 1988: 260). The aftermath of this acclimatisation was suffered and is still being suffered by many endemic species. A good example is the extinction of the popular Tasmanian tiger or thylacine.⁶ The disturbances caused by Europeans dramatically altered nature in further ways. For ages, Aborigines had kept the forest ground clean of scrub and dry litter by means of regular burning. When they were moved out, scrub and litter started to build up. Thus, any event or person, accidentally or intentionally, could start a fire without much effort. Bushfires are common in Australia during the summer, but notoriously remembered as national disasters are, for instance, Black Thursday in 1851, Black Friday in 1939, Ash Wednesday in 1983 (Vandenbeld, 1988: 261), and Black Saturday in

⁵ “Human Impacts on Catchments. Topic: Exotic Pests”: n.p.

⁶ “The Thylacine”, 2009: n.p.

2009, which is so far the worst fire in Australian history as a total of 173 people died.⁷

The settlers' contempt and violent behaviour towards their surroundings can be explained as their effort to come to terms with their strange new world. In order to defeat the sense of alienation they had to dominate this fear of the unknown by destroying everything unfamiliar (Collingwood-Whittick, 2007: xv). It did not matter whether the object of their attack was nature or the Indigenous population since they were regarded as part of the environment, that is, indistinguishable from the fauna and flora (Bird, 1998: 23). The colonisers' reaction to their geographical and cultural ostracism in an unknown territory, and the difficulties they experienced to adapt themselves is what Germaine Greer calls "the pain of unbelonging". She affirms that this "pain" is to blame for the violent relationship between non-Aboriginal Australians and the land: "If we truly felt that this country was our home we could not despoil it in this manner; we are trashing it because we suspect it belongs to someone else" (in Collingwood-Whitick, 2007: xvii).

An important fact in Australian history is its foundation as a penal colony. In 1788 the first ship of convicts dispatched by the British government arrived in New South Wales to found a penal settlement. Although there has been much debate about the reasons for this action, it is generally held that Britain took this decision because its prisons were overcrowded. The loss of the American colonies was decisive. Until

⁷ "Australian Fires Toll Passes 100", 2009: n.p.; Malkin, 2010: n.p.

then, most prisoners sentenced to transportation had been sent to America, so when it became independent, Australia turned into its substitute as a prison. Some historians declare that there are other reasons for the establishment of a penal colony in that location. It has been argued that it was established there as a British strategic point on the commercial routes via the Pacific, especially in competition with France, while others have contended that the British wanted to exploit the pines and the native flax plants on Norfolk Island (Hughes, 1988: 108, 161). The purpose of deportation was to eradicate the source of moral corruption that criminals represented and ship it so far away that it could not contaminate the rest of the British society (1988: 168). To put it differently, Australia became “the geographical unconscious” where the hideous refuse of Britain were sent.

The number of sentences of transportation increased as capital punishment became less and less popular in Britain. It was a way of dealing with rising poverty and the severity of the sentences for larceny. Once in Australia, the convicts were assigned to work for either the government or free settlers. Whatever their crime, they were employed according to their education and skills as brickmakers, carpenters, farmers, nurses, servants, clerks, etc. As regards women prisoners, marriage often set them free because they were thought to be more useful as mothers and wives. Convict labour was considered a good system to develop and improve the Australian colonies. For instance, it was convicts that mainly built the public facilities of Australia, such as roads, bridges, courthouses and hospitals. The majority of the

Australian population consisted of convicts, and the disproportion between men and women was huge. Most came from Britain and Ireland, but there were also prisoners from other British outposts like India, Canada, New Zealand, Hong Kong or the Caribbean. Convict life in Australia was hard and discipline was severe. Some of them eventually got their freedom, even ended up occupying positions of trust and responsibility, and were also given some land. Freedom could be obtained if the convict showed good behaviour. However, freedom was rather limited since they could not return to Britain, although some were allowed to go to New Zealand. There was controversy over convict transportation at the time. After much pressure, transportation was abolished between 1850 and 1853. The main reason was the increasing demands of a bigger Australian population, and as only a small percentage was actually in jail, many thought that transportation was not an exemplary kind of punishment.⁸ The Gold Rush played a fundamental role in the definite abolition of transportation. The discovery of gold encouraged many people in Britain to travel to Australia in search of a wealthier and better life, which significantly multiplied the population of the colony. Therefore, the government found it absurd to send convicts to the place where almost everybody wanted to go (Hughes, 1988: 571). Although Australia emerged as a penitentiary, a fact that remained as a disturbing shadow and a source of shame until recently, most Australians do not actually descend from these convicts, but from free settlers who arrived later during the Gold

⁸ "Convicts and the British Colonies in Australia", 2010: n.p.

Rush or in subsequent periods of migration fostered by the Australian government (Wells, 2007: n.p.; Elder, 2007: 129).

From a Western view the Antipodes have traditionally been imagined as grotesque.⁹ Even before the existence of this land was confirmed by explorers and cartographers, it was believed to be a dark place inhabited by monsters. There were some old rumours and legends that contributed to creating preconceptions about Australia. Scientists of classical Greece had fostered the myth that there had to be an austral continent for symmetrical reasons. The earth was a sphere made up of two similar hemispheres, so in order to keep the balance of the northern hemisphere, another land-mass of equal size had to lie in the south (Brady, 1996: 10). Hence, the idea of a Great South Land — Terra Australis Incognita— was imagined as a completion of the north. The fantasies about this land were contradictory. On the one hand, this territory was invested with vast resources of gold, precious stones, timber and spices. It was a sort of Eden. On the other hand, it was imagined as a land of monsters, a hell on earth. It was believed that the land was increasingly grotesque as you went farther to the south (Hughes, 1988: 72). This partly explains why Australia has been labelled as “a country of the mind” because, even before its discovery by Europeans, it had already been invented (Brady, 1996: 9). Moreover, both the process of colonisation and the subsequent construction of a new nation by the European colonists have contributed to this labelling

⁹ The word “grotesque” is not used here with the sense of “ridiculous”, but with the meaning of “bizarre, extravagant, freakish and unnatural; in short, aberrations from the desirable norms of harmony, balance and proportion” (Cuddon, 1992: 393).

because, as is the case with any settler society: “after the rupture of migration one of the main tasks is to imagine themselves into existence in this new place” (1996: 28).

When the British settlers arrived, they found a land which was completely different from what they had always known. They saw it as the reversal of the world. It inspired fear and uncertainty because nature was strange, chaotic, too exuberant: “its trees shed their bark, swans were black rather than white, and the seasons were reversed” (Turcotte, 1998: 1). These physical features were also seen as signs of spiritual “dis-ease”. The new settlers’ attempt to carry with them their British customs and lifestyle in order to recreate a home in such a peculiar place, led to the familiar becoming unfamiliar, thus allowing uncanny feelings to emerge. Regarding the connection between uncanniness and the colonial situation, Gerry Turcotte declares:

Freud meditates on the way place and experience may be rendered unhomely or unfamiliar precisely by the simultaneity of overlapping or competing moments —particularly where the familiar is made unfamiliar and both conditions co-exist simultaneously [...]. It is precisely this quality of belonging and alienation that marks the colonial condition as uncanny —and which sees the postcolonial function similarly. (2004: 5)

The darkness of Australia was greater emphasised by the transportation of convicts from Britain. Then, Australia definitely became the dark, unconscious of Britain, that is, the repressed other where all sins and fears were relegated and projected. In a literal sense, Australia turned into “the dungeon of the world” (Turcotte, 1998: 1).

The feeling of uncanniness is aggravated by the extreme geography and climate of this continent:

Australia is both the flattest continent and, except for Antarctica, the driest. In the centre and the west there are vast stony and sandy deserts;

in the east, sweeping plateaus and plains flank narrow coastal slopes. Australia's coast features broad sandy beaches and lush vegetation. [...] About 70 per cent of the country is arid or semi-arid [...]. More than one-third of the continent is virtually desert owing to low rainfall [...which] varies greatly each year and is distributed unevenly [...]. Australia has fertile areas close to the coast, where the bulk of the population lives. Here Australians experience a range of climates, from wet and humid tropical conditions in the far north, through warm and temperate on the central east and west coasts, to cooler conditions on the southern coasts and in Tasmania. [...] All regions in Australia enjoy warm summers and relatively mild winters.¹⁰

Australia is highly influenced by the Southern Oscillation known as El Niño, which causes “major droughts interspersed with extensive wet periods. Frequencies of tropical cyclones, heat-waves, bushfires and frosts are also linked to the Southern Oscillation”.¹¹ In addition, Australia is a remote island in the middle of the South Pacific, far away from the main civilisations of the world. In the past, this isolation allowed the fauna and flora to evolve independently from the rest of the world. Similarly, it allowed the native people to live untroubled by invaders for a long time and to develop their own unique cultures. As a result, the idea of isolation, of being “at the edge of the world”, has been predominant in Australian culture:

Separated both physically and culturally from the Europe which they thought of as home, white Australians saw themselves as isolated, displaced and on the very margin of the European world [...]. Even a view which sees Australia as part of Asia must still accommodate the geographical reality that Australia is on the edge of Asia. (Quin, 1998: 2)

The explorer has been an important figure in colonial Australian history. They even acquired the status of heroes. They helped the settlers to make sense of the new environment. They travelled across

¹⁰ “Australia in Brief”, 2008: n.p.

¹¹ “Australia - Climate of Our Continent”, 2010: n.p.

It must be noted that there are two distinctive areas of wilderness in Australia: the bush and the outback. The bush is the area covered with vegetation where very few people live. The outback is the unpopulated desert area of central Australia. However, both terms are often used interchangeably to refer to the Australian countryside in general.

the land mapping, describing and naming it. They actually began “the long process by which non-Aboriginals would first occupy, and then attempt to understand and internalise the new space” (Genoni, 2004: 31). The action of naming was an effective tool for explorers to claim possession, imbuing the landscape with references to their own culture. Naming allowed them to connect newly discovered places with other better-known ones. Thus, the strange territory was made more homely, “closer to the heart of the empire” (2004: 30). For this reason, many locations were named after regions or geographical features of the old Europe. Furthermore, the names of certain locations are descriptive of the alien and hostile character of the land, and the explorers’ desperation as they tried to advance. One can find, for instance, such peculiar names as Mount Hopeless, Forlorn Hope Range, Mount Misery, Refuge Rocks, Mount Disappointment or Mount Barren (2004: 34). The action of naming also involved an underlying kind of resistance. Giving British names inserted those places into the British discourse of history. However, those names referring to defeat, despair, or even sometimes to local myths or designations evince the existence of a world perspective different from the British. As Dorothy Seaton says:

The very multiplicity of the names must act as counter-discourse to the English language used by the explorers to colonise the land within English constructs of understanding [...]. The suggestion also made by the existence of non-English names is that the land is not the uninscribed blank conceptualised in the very act of writing the exploration narratives, but might instead be already inscribed with a different history. The land thus becomes the site of inter-historical, inter-discursive contention. (1989: 9)

One of the main goals of exploration was to find the utopian centre of Australia, widely symbolised in the belief of an inland sea. It appears

that the essence of the land is always mythically placed in its geographical heart (Genoni, 2004: 12).¹² The nothingness found at the centre came to embody the failure of white Australians to ever identify that territory as their own. They failed to grasp the spirituality of the land. Accordingly, the explorer became a failing hero: “a portent of the inability [...] to occupy the land to its full extent, and a reminder of the ongoing need for ‘discovery’ and understanding of the barren Australian heartland” (2004: 16). In this light, exploration can be construed as an allegory of personal search, both collective and individual.

Colonial explorers produced an extensive body of literature through their journals, in which they described the severity of their adventures.¹³ The next fragment written by Charles Sturt¹⁴ serves as a vivid example:

It is impossible for me to describe the kind of country we are now traversing, or the dreariness of the view presented. The plains are still open to the horizon, but here and there a stunted gum-tree, or a gloomy cypress, seemed placed by nature as mourners over the surrounding desolation. Neither beast nor bird inhabited these lonely and inhospitable regions, over which the silence of the grave seemed to reign. (In Haynes, 1998: 79)

¹² The streams of domestic and international tourists that visit Uluru —Ayers Rock—, a reddish rock monolith located in the middle of the country, shows that this belief is still very strong. As Catriona Elder asserts: “To travel to the red centre is often represented as going to the heart of Australia. Tourist information is often couched in these terms [...] The centre is represented as the source of the lifeblood of the nation. Words such as ‘heart’, ‘soul’ and ‘heartbeat’ are commonly used to describe the geographic centre of Australia. And [...] the tourist experience of [...] the heart of Australia is represented as the real Australia” (2007: 213).

¹³ Although it is true that the explorers suffered a great deal in their expeditions, it must be said that their interest in establishing themselves as heroes often led them to emphasise in their accounts the adverse nature of the Australian land (Genoni, 2004: 35).

¹⁴ Charles Sturt (1795-1869) was a British explorer. In Australia, his expedition down the Murrumbidgee and Murray rivers is regarded as one of the most important in the history of the nation, since it opened new areas for future development. He is also remembered because his party was the first one to enter the core of the continent, though they had to return due to heat and scurvy (Safra and Aguilar-Cauz, 2007: 336).

These explorers sometimes showed mixed feelings about the landscape. In the following description, Edward John Eyre¹⁵ clearly expresses sublime feelings, a sensation of wonder and terror:

Distressing and fatal as the continuance of these cliffs might prove to us, there was a grandeur and sublimity in their appearance that was most imposing and which struck me with admiration. Stretching out before us in lofty unbroken outline ... and glittering in the morning sun which had now risen upon them, and made the scene beautiful even amidst the dangers and anxieties of our situation. (In Genoni, 2004: 55)

Colonial explorers usually employed gothic imagery to describe their surroundings, as can be seen in the previous examples. Rosslyn Haynes, examining the representation of the Australian desert in art and literature, asserts that the vastness of the interior was perceived “in Gothic terms of enclosure and entrapment”, which is paradoxical since the desert is an open space. It appears that the physical and psychological experiences of the desert explorers ran parallel with the sources of gothic literature:

The fears exploited by Gothic writers were analogous to those that Edmund Burke had identified with the sublime. In European Romanticism the immensity of Nature, the essential ingredient of the sublime, was provided by precipitous mountains —the Alps or the Pyrenees— or by the ocean. In Australia the central desert was cast as the scene of such immensity, rendered more acute by its association with waste and void. (1998: 77)

In a colonial context fear was generated by the immensity, strangeness and hostility of the land, intensified by the presence of Aborigines and escaped convicts. The desert just added new anxieties. The typical elements of gothic imprisonment in Europe —castles, convents, ruined abbeys, burial vaults or subterranean passages— were replaced by the

¹⁵ Edward John Eyre (1815-1901) was a British explorer, after whom Lake Eyre and the Eyre Peninsula in Australia were named. He also explored the Australian desert. He is notoriously remembered for crushing the 1865 Jamaican rebellion when he was governor there (Safra and Aguilar-Cauz, 2007: 642).

Australian landscape, which embodied “the physical barriers erected by a seemingly hostile Nature”, and by the hard experiences of drought, heat, thirst and losing one’s physical or spiritual bearings (1998: 77).

The special relationship between colonial gothic and the Australian landscape is evoked in Marcus Clarke’s well-known preface to a posthumous collection of poems by Adam Lindsay Gordon, an adventurer and horseman whose debts had driven him to shoot himself some years earlier. Clarke recognises Gordon’s melancholy and projects it onto the Australian land, summoning a “Weird Melancholy”. The following passage gets gradually gothic, depicting the bush as a nightmarish setting:

The Australian mountain forests are funereal, secret, stern. Their solitude is desolation. They seem to stifle, in their black gorges, a story of sullen despair... In the Australian forests no leaves fall. The savage winds shout among the rock clefts. From the melancholy gums strips of white bark hang and rustle. The very animal life of these frowning hills is either grotesque or ghostly. Great grey kangaroos hop noiselessly over the coarse grass. Flights of white cockatoos stream out, shrieking like evil souls. The sun suddenly sinks, and the mopokes burst out into horrible peals of semi-human laughter. The natives have that, when night comes, from out the bottomless depth of some lagoon the Bunyip rises, and, in form like monstrous sea-calf, drags his loathsome length from out the ooze. From a corner of the silent forests rises a dismal chant, and around a fire dance natives painted like skeletons. All is fear-inspiring and gloomy. No bright fancies are linked with the memories of the mountains. Hopeless explorers have named them out of their sufferings —Mount Misery, Mount Dreadful, Mount Despair. (In Gelder and Weaver, 2007: 3-4)

As Gelder and Weaver observe, this preface may seem unusual for a posthumous book of colonial poetry, but it is common to find this kind of gothic depiction in colonial narratives about Australian wilderness (2007: 4).

Colonisation is a socio-historical event that involves the drawing and crossing of boundaries, a common theme of the gothic. The coloniser —who is always understood as Western, white, male and

heterosexual— draws a line that separates him from the colonised, who is seen as the other, the unknown, the outside, the wild, in contrast with the normal, the known, the inside, the civilised. This is complicated by the fact that what is colonised is identified with the feminine, so the line that divides man and woman can be added too. Sneja Gunew highlights the liminal nature of Australia and the relevance that boundaries have always had in the lives of Australians:

the political and social nature of the country, ranging from colonisation and penal settlement to post-World War Two immigration, the policies of White Australia (current refugees and migrants issues could even be added), led to the establishment of boundaries as standard procedures of normalisation. (In Ben-Messahel, 2006: 127)

Otherness is not only ascribed to the native inhabitants, but to the environment as well. The Australian landscape was the other of the European one. In order to overcome this perturbing otherness the settlers reproduced another Britain in the colony, “sanctuaries of Englishness, islands of the home country in a sea of unfamiliarity” (Clark, 2007: 435). This results in the drawing of another borderline between the inside and the outside, that is, between the British home built in the colonial territory and the wilderness that lies outside that homely reproduction. In her autobiography *Half a Lifetime* (1999), poet Judith Wright writes about this demarcation. As Gary Clark relates:

in her childhood she referred to the English plants and trees around her house, which were her familiar surroundings, as the ‘Inside’. Beyond this island of Englishness was the ‘Outside’, the otherness of the Australian ecology where ‘eucalypts and wattles might flower.’ As a child immersed in the sights and scents of a transplanted English garden, to venture beyond its boundaries ‘to see plants and landscapes so unlike those of our home, was in itself a joy of unfamiliarity’. (2007: 433)

The city/country division is connected with the inside/outside boundary. The fact that in much fiction city-dwellers often find

themselves in danger when they leave their familiar city and go into the unknown wilderness seems to confirm it. In Australia this division acquires greater relevance due to the negative connotations of the countryside. Nevertheless, boundaries do not completely succeed in keeping dangerous unfamiliarity outdoors and one's mind at peace. Conversely, they can turn into a suffocating source of anxiety: "one tragic irony of the frontier dream is that its proponents can never cease to feel surrounded. For, however far back the frontier dream is pushed, there is always something threatening on the other side" (Paul Carter in Ben-Messahel, 2006: 238).

Colonisation is linked to patriarchy and the traditional attitude towards the land. The land has usually been imagined as feminine, a construction which implies that the ambivalent attributes applied to women are also applied to it: attractive but scary due to its power to castrate; the giver and the usurper of life. This also happens as far as the Australian space is concerned. As a result, the land is regarded as an Edenic place waiting to be conquered, possessed and tamed, but it is also loathed and feared because it has the power to bring about defeat, madness, despair, isolation and death (Schaffer, 1988: 22-23). Although the concept of the land as mother earth is universal, since the Australian landscape is so harsh and hostile, this idea becomes problematic here. Thus, white Australians have defined their landscape as a cruel and castrating mother, something/somebody "dangerous, non-nurturing and not to be trusted" (1988: 62). However, it is necessary to clarify that this peculiar relationship with the land affects

white Australians mainly. The Australian Aborigines' connection with the land is fundamentally different from that of the white colonisers. They do not regard it as property. They are linked to it spiritually. Indigenous Australians have never felt the Australian land as a hostile force, but as an ally: "Aborigines, encouraged by the respect they feel towards the world and the environment, and their concern for survival, discern in nature the signs of complicity and get closer to the art of wisdom" (Crossman and Barou, 2007: 267. My translation).¹⁶ The land provides them with everything they need to live: "The Australian desert is a bottomless barn, a store without walls, unlimited fields" (2007: 279. My translation).¹⁷ In return, they respect and look after it.

It is worth noting the number of contradictory images and reactions that Australia has produced from the very beginning. As mentioned earlier, before European ships reached its coasts, Australia was imagined as both paradise and hell. This ambiguity continued even after the arrival of Europeans. The following example illustrates very clearly two traditionally opposite angles. William Dampier found the west coast known as New Holland in 1688. In his journals he depicted the land as unproductive and inappropriate for habitation. He referred to its inhabitants as "the miserablest People in the world" since they did not have the physical and spiritual symbols of seventeenth-century European civilisation, namely clothes, houses or religion. When James

¹⁶ "El aborigen, animado por el respeto que siente hacia el mundo y el medio ambiente y a su preocupación por sobrevivir, distingue en la naturaleza los signos de una complicitad y se acerca al arte del saber" (Original quotation).

¹⁷ "El desierto australiano es un granero inextinguible, una tienda sin paredes, pasturas sin límites" (Original quotation).

Cook arrived almost one century later, his view differed radically from his predecessor's. He thought that the land was good for future settlement and that the Indigenous population was free from the corruption of Western civilisation, and consequently, much happier (Bird, 1998: 22-23). Cook's perception of Aborigines relates to the idea of "the Noble Savage", which was engendered by Enlightenment thinkers "not so much to dignify native peoples as 'to undermine the idea of nobility itself' and thus subvert the Old Regime". It is the antithesis of "the Wild Man", a concept that "tends to discredit nature and emphasises the notion of God's sovereign judgment and power which decrees that some are to be saved and others damned" (Brady, 1996: 17). English culture often ascribed double meaning to the barbarous or the primitive. On the one hand, it meant chaos and original sin, and on the other, innocence and a source of creativity. In colonial fiction, this contradiction comes up in the sense of optimism and hope for the promised land, and pessimism in the face of frustrating reality (Bird, 1998: 26). This ambivalent attitude has been ongoing in Australian history until the present. It has played a remarkable role in shaping the country, and thus has also been reflected in its literature as literature is a cultural product that exposes the values of the society in which it is generated at the same time as helps to construct them.

I.3.2. Australian Gothic Literature

Australia began to be settled when the gothic novel appeared and consolidated itself as a distinctive genre in Britain. Hence, Australian colonisation followed the gothic revival that was taking place in the mother country. Architecture was the first area where the gothic established itself. One of the main tropes of the gothic is the ruin. For the Australian colonies it became a way of transferring the old world to the new one. It was “a way of re-invoking origins”, as Gerry Turcotte puts it, “an emblem of the Old World that could be transported —or more accurately, erected— in the New World, in much the same way that a flag could be raised over conquered territory” (2009: 80). Examples of gothic influence can be seen in the design of many buildings, such as St Mary’s Cathedral in Sydney, the ANZ Bank in Melbourne or the University of Sydney with its unique kangaroo gargoyle (Gelder, 2009: 115), which illustrates graphically the gothic ability to adapt to any kind of environment. It is interesting to point out that the similarities of many colonial reproductions to the ones of the old world were only superficial. Huge differences could hide below the surface. A good example can be found in the kind of material used for construction, which represents, in this case, a secret sign of convict rebellion:

In Port Jackson, Australian Gothic consisted mainly of Australian sandstone. [...] sandstone can be a rather yielding material, and [...] there are several ways to cut it —one guaranteeing its longevity, the other its disintegration. Closer study might reveal that convict stone masons, supervised by people who knew less than they, could deliberately cut the stone improperly, thereby guaranteeing its eventual deterioration. One would have, in other words, a wonderful metaphor for political subversion —one that did indeed occur. Revenge would be slow in coming, true: but it would occur nonetheless. (Turcotte, 2009: 83)

The gothic caught up quickly as far as architecture is concerned. However, with regard to literature, it was rejected at the beginning, as will be explained.

The gothic is an essential genre in Australian literature. Not only was it central to early colonial writing, but it also helped in the formation of the subsequent postcolonial discourse. Gerry Turcotte (2009: 233) identifies three types of gothic in the movement from colonial to postcolonial gothic. Firstly, an “Old World Gothic” inherited from the metropolis. It represents “the ruin, sterile antiquity and even the superficial ghosts” used by colonial writers as they tried at first to create and name their milieu. Secondly, a “New World Gothic” which clings to nostalgia as “a soothing syrup in aid of a dying colonialism”. Finally, this gothic gives way to postcolonial gothic, a subversive mode employed as a counter-discourse against the so-called “normal” white male Western voice. That is why postcolonial gothic has appealed to marginalised groups —such as women, Aborigines or migrants, among others.

Although the gothic shares many concerns with the colonial situation, at the beginning colonial writers rejected this genre. A newly-born colony, especially a penal colony, might find unsettling a genre that usually celebrates the impossibility of success (Turcotte, 2009: 70). This partly explains the early adherence to neo-classical tenets which promised the triumph of civilisation: its “ability to ward off the evil of barbarity” and “the ability of the refined to exorcise whatever

destructive and even evil potential lay in nature”. Another reason for the colonial preference for Neo-Classicism while Romanticism was in vogue in Europe might have been the long distance that delayed the reception of new literary movements (2009: 70-71). Consequently, the initial efforts to interpret the new land displayed the incongruence between the assumed universal landscapes and the ones found in Australia. Thus, interpretations were “if not decidedly neo-classical, then at least bogus, in as much as they imposed European ways of seeing upon a landscape that was ‘always-already’ written in a language that sought to familiarize the unfamiliar” (2009: 72). The struggle of early colonial writers to negotiate the old and new world, their imitation or modification of old perspectives, and sometimes their prejudices against the new land can be seen, for instance, in the first two Australian novels: Henry Savery’s *Quintus Servington: A Tale Founded Upon Incidents of Real Occurrence* (1830-31) and Anna Maria Bunn’s *The Guardian: A Tale by an Australian* (1838) (Turcotte, 1998: 4).

Despite the sometimes gothic aura of some works —like the novels mentioned above—, Australia was normally considered unsuitable for gothic literature owing to its historical immaturity. It lacked the antiquity of Europe and thus the essential qualities to inspire gothic fiction. In his essay “The Fiction Fields of Australia” (1856), Frederick Sinnet defended this opinion:

we are quite debarred from all the interest to be extracted from any kind of archeological accessories. No storied windows [...] cast a dim, religious light over any Australian premises. There are no ruins for that rare old plant, the ivy green, to creep over and make his dainty meal of. No Australian author can hope to extricate his hero or heroine [...] by means of a spring panel and a subterranean passage, or such like relics of feudal

barons. [...] There may be plenty of dilapidated buildings, but not one, the dilapidation of which is sufficiently venerable by age, to tempt the wandering footsteps of the most arrant *parvenu* of a ghost that ever walked by night. It must be admitted that Mrs Radcliffe's genius would be quite thrown away here [...]. (In Turcotte, 1998: 3)

Nonetheless, there were people who disagreed with this view. Writer Marcus Clarke, for instance, affirmed that:

The notion that [...] our colony contains no poetry and no pathos, is, of all notions, the most foolish. In no condition of human society can poetry and pathos be wanting; for, to eliminate them from a record of human struggles, it would be necessary to annihilate human feeling. But in a new country, where the breaking down of social barriers, and the up-rooting of social prejudices, tend to cultivate that incongruity which is, in reality, the very soul of pathos, there are opportunities for fresh and vigorous delineation of human character which the settled society of the old world does not offer. [...] Australia has strange and marked features in her young civilization, which have never yet been touched upon by the writers of fiction. (In Turcotte, 2009: 111)

A growing taste in gothic literature emerged and many texts were produced to fill such demand. Although many imitated the European tradition, Mary Theresa Vidal's *Bengala: Or, Some Time Ago* (1860), Rosa Praed's *Outlaw and Lawmaker* (1893) and the racially offensive *The Squatter's Ward* (1919) by Edward Sorensen are examples worth mentioning (Turcotte, 1998: 4). Newspapers and periodicals also played an important role in the development of a unique Australian gothic literature because they were the means by which most early Australian authors published their stories. Some of these periodicals were: *Australasian* (1864-1946), *The Australian Journal* (1865-1962), *Queenslander* (1866-1939), *Australian Town and Country Journal* (1870-1919), *The Bulletin* (1880-2008), *The Boomerang* (1887-1892) and *The Lone Hand* (1907-1921) (Doig, 2010: x).

Australia developed a local variant of the gothic genre which was in tune with the unique landscape and colonial circumstances. James

Doig highlights the way in which Britain's traditional gothic stock was adjusted to the new challenging space:

the haunted house is no longer a rambling manor, but an abandoned shanty or rundown homestead; the English wood, shadowy lair of ancient evils and creatures from folklore, becomes the oppressively hot, fly-infested bush; and the wind-swept moor is the empty, endless Australian outback with its blood-red sands and emaciated myall tress. [...] Writers, no less than explorers, artists and settlers, were challenged by the environment, and this is reflected in many of the [...] stories. (2007: 8)

One can name as examples Marcus Clarke, Barbara Baynton, Henry Lawson or William Astley —“Price Warung”— among others. Despite their insistence on the realistic side of their writing, the topics they chose for their stories were substantially gothic and in every respect Australian: “the anxieties of the convict system, the terrors of isolated stations at the mercy of vagrants and nature, the fear of starvation or of becoming lost in the bush” (Turcotte, 1998: 3). In that way, the gothic was used to invest Australia with a history.¹⁸ As a result of the gradual birth of an autochthonous gothic, the hybrid and ambivalent nature of this genre surfaced, exposing the antithetical views of the colony and the metropolis. Furthermore, colonial writers took up a stance with respect to imperialism, either supporting it or condemning its brutal practices (Turcotte, 2009: 106). In other words, the gothic contributed to providing the colony with its own voice.

During the second half of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, the gothic was popular in Australian fiction. Afterwards, it went through a period of low activity until the 1970s. In

¹⁸ It must be said that Australia already had a history, but of a different kind and thus not appreciated by Europeans. To call Australia a new world or to say that it lacks history and antiquity shows a narrow-minded Western vision, since it conveniently ignores the history of the Aboriginal cultures which had populated the continent for a long time. Besides, if we take geology into account, Australia is ironically the oldest continent.

spite of this decline, several remarkable novels were produced. To name but a few: Christina Stead's *The Man Who Loved Children* (1940), Hal Porter's *Short Stories* (1940), Kenneth Cook's *Wake in Fright* (1961), Thomas Keneally's *The Fear* (1965) or Joan Lindsay's *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1967). Patrick White is perhaps the most outstanding author because he developed his own brand of gothic with works such as *Voss* (1957) or *The Eye of the Storm* (1973) (Turcotte, 1998: 6-7). His work is thought to have pushed Australia to the literary experimentation which detached colonial fiction from its ties with the old world (Turcotte, 2009: 163).

In the 1970s the gothic flourished again. Peter Carey and Louis Nowra, two well-known writers who often use the gothic, started their careers at this time. In the 1980s gothic literature increased considerably its number of female authors. Elizabeth Jolley, Gabrielle Lord, Kate Grenville, Barbara Hanrahan, Janette Turner Hospital or Glenda Adams are just some of them. The gothic's potential for subversion has helped women writers to call into question the patriarchal structure of Australian society. Gerry Turcotte contends that part of the success of the postcolonial lies in the feminist re-appropriation and re-invention of colonial and masculine fabrications of origin, language, form and place (2009: 22). Postcolonial literature normally makes use of the gothic to rewrite homogenising imperial discourse. In that way, it unsettles the "grand narratives of colonial mastery/degeneration", relocating the source of fear from the colonised to "the violence and abuses perpetrated by empire" (Procter and Smith,

2009: 96). The term “postcolonial” does not have a chronological meaning in this context. Rather than simply meaning the time after the Empire, “postcolonial” refers to the sort of literature that analyses and criticises the whole colonial process. This literature resists and reshapes those images imposed by colonialism and mainstream/canonical texts. Peter Carey’s *Jack Maggs* (1997), a revision of Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations* (1861), serves as an illustrative example in an Australian context. Aboriginal writers have often avoided the gothic genre because it has traditionally presented them as the hideous other who evilly haunts the Australian land, posing a threat to settlers and their civilised world. Nevertheless, postcolonial gothic has enabled Aborigines to denounce the colonial enterprise and the barbarities committed upon them (Turcotte, 1998: 9-10). For instance, Mudrooroo’s novel *Doctor Wooreddy’s Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* (1983), Alexis Wright’s *Plains of Promise* (1997) or Vivienne Cleven’s *Her Sister’s Eye* (2002).

Gothic literature was exported to Australia. But once there, despite European and American influences, it quickly changed and acquired specific local features as it accommodated to the new environment. Australian colonial gothic is a counter-narrative of the traditional tale of colonial promise, hope and optimism. It is an account of colonial anxieties and failure, both “weird and melancholic”, and sometimes “desolate and destructive” (Gelder and Weaver, 2007: 9). Ken Gelder suggests that the melancholy reflected in Clarke’s preface mentioned

above can be understood as the loss of colonial optimism, “the ‘Weird Melancholy’ of settler colonialism itself” (2009: 117).

The gothic, and in particular colonial gothic, presents two primary fears: the fear of nothingness and the fear of non-separation. The fear of nothingness is experienced in a colonial situation when somebody is pushed into the wild. It is “a fear of being negated, stripped of identity, or blanked out in a land ‘without history’”. The fear of non-separation derives from the inability, if necessary, to break away from the metropolis, that is, the European centre. It is “a fear of dismemberment, of being pulled apart between two worlds, old and new, without hope of fullness in either world” (Turcotte, 2009: 57). The gothic represents these fears through disoriented characters in a distanced and strange location. In Australian gothic, wilderness means disorientation and death, “as if promise of settlement can never be fully realised”. The protagonists are lost or abandoned, placed outside civilisation and facing extraordinary events (Gelder and Weaver, 2007: 5).

A prevalent characteristic of Australian gothic fiction is the confrontation with supernatural dangers that lurk in the wild. Not only are the characters trapped there, but they are normally pursued by unknown entities too, which turn even more frightening as they cannot be properly identified. The gothic supernatural also adjusted to its new surroundings. A good example of an original spectre is the mythical Bunyip, which belonged to Aboriginal folklore and was then appropriated by the colonisers. The Bunyip, whose descriptions are varied and sometimes contradictory, is a nocturnal amphibian that lives

in waterholes, swamps, riverbeds, creeks or similar areas. It gives off a terrible cry and devours anyone who approaches its home. Rosa Praed's "The Bunyip", published in the collection *Coo-ee: Tales of Australian Life by Australian Ladies* (1891), is just one example of how this legendary creature became part of the gothic stock. The story begins by claiming that Australia has its own genuine brand of gothic: "Everyone who has lived in Australia has heard of the Bunyip. It is the one respectable flesh-curdling horror of which Australia can boast. The old world has her tales of ghoul and vampire, of Lorelei, spook, and pixie, but Australia has nothing but her Bunyip" (2010: 85). With regard to the title of this collection of stories, the cry of "coo-ee" is a commonplace in Australian gothic. It is actually a call used in the bush, but in fiction it is a premonition or a warning against death (Breznay, 2008: n.p.). In contemporary gothic, extraordinary adventures in the wilderness are often lived by inexperienced city-dwellers who get lost or trapped in the bush (Gelder, 2009: 121). In this way, the divisory line between the civilised city and the uncivilised country is emphasised, generating a deeper feeling of uncanniness and anguish.

The trope in (post)colonial texts of uncanny beings that haunt the land can be understood as the representation of the colonisers' misrecognition of the Indigenous landscape and population. As Ken Gelder asserts: "occupation is replaced by *preoccupation*, by a bothersome sense of something that is already there before them" (2009: 119. Original emphasis). This trope can also be explained as the settlers' guilt and shame for having invaded Australia in such a violent way.

Australia's origins as a penal colony and its history of colonisation have shaped its society and culture. Their disturbing influence can still be felt since they constitute a fundamental part of the Australian collective unconscious. As gothic characters perfectly know, the past can never be left behind. David Punter and Glennis Byron have argued that:

The very structure of the term 'postcolonial' itself, its apparent insistence on a time 'after', on an 'aftermath', exposes itself precisely to the threat of return, falls under the sign of an unavoidable repetition; the attempt to make, for example, the nation in a new form is inevitably accompanied by the traces of the past, by half-buried histories of exile, transportation, emigration, all the panoply of the removal and transplantation of peoples which has been the essence of the colonial endeavour. (2004: 55)

Judith Wright acknowledges the twisting of "two strands", which have become part of her: "the love of the land we have invaded, and the guilt of the invasion. It is a haunted country" (in Crouch, 2007: 94). In a (post)colonial context, the desire for belonging to a stolen space —the neverending "pain of unbelonging"— gives way to the apparition of ghosts, spectres that return from the past symbolising traces of historical traumas and fears, "often exposed in expressions of apprehensive (un)settlement". Therefore, Australian haunting is not only metaphorical. It is a real shadow that disturbs the national consciousness (Crouch, 2007: 94). Significantly, the white population sometimes experiences haunting as punishment for something bad that they, their ancestors or other intruders have done to the land or the Aborigines (2007: 100). In contrast, ghostly presences can also be construed to legitimate colonisation and white settlement. Imbuing the landscape with ghosts means inserting Australia into Western mythology (2007: 96), that is, hushing the native presence.

The anxieties produced by the Australian traumatic past cannot be buried through reconciliation. Spectral beings prevent the non-Indigenous from forgetting the past, while they allow the Indigenous, though in a phantasmagorical way, to inhabit their own land and have a voice. As David Crouch contends:

The idea of a perfect and conclusive reconciliation is a fantasy that effectively works to erase history. A search for legitimate non-indigenous belonging should not attempt to put to rest the unpleasant ghosts of the past in favour of more soothing spirits. Rather, their unsettling presence should be seen as structuring an ongoing negotiation, a constant movement between possession and dispossession. By offering negotiations with the past which express a collective sense of (dis)possession these architectures should thus allow sameness and difference to spill across each other's edges in a productively unstable dynamic. (2007: 101)

White Australians are still looking for a way of belonging to a land they feel as strange. Sometimes this feeling can be apprehended by a desire to reconcile with the Aboriginal population, and in other cases by a desire to return the whole land, its flora and fauna to their pre-European state. However, there are those who still deny the colonial abuse of the Indigenous land and its inhabitants:

On the other side of the debate are those who argue that evidence of massacres of Aboriginal people, for example, has been fabricated, or at least exaggerated. The repudiators protest loudly that the Australian conscience is clear, but the very fact that such repudiations are attempted, and the heat of the ensuing debate, together indicate a continuing uneasiness. The confidence of rightful possession is absent. (Merrilees, 2007: 67)

The gothic has appropriately echoed these anxieties, making the past return in distorting and unsettling forms. (Post)colonial spectres do not only refer to the harm caused to Aborigines, but also to the natural environment in general. Today the acknowledgement of this damage is still contentious and politically unpopular. That is why Margaret Merrilees suggests that allegory is ideal to express it, since this literary

style manages to slip it “past the gatekeepers, providing a safely distanced examination of the collective conscience” (2007: 68).

An essential feature of Australian gothic literature, in contrast with the European line, is that the threatening object is not fictional, but quite real. Edmund Burke declares that terror “produces delight when it does not press too closely” (1844: 59). This partly stems from the fact that it is not happening to us. Nevertheless, in colonial Australia it was really happening to them. The colonists were exiles, living in a landscape that was the actual source of all their fears and worries. Most gothic fiction shows readers a chaotic world that it then restores to order. This does not happen in colonial gothic: “how much stronger must the angst be in Colonial Gothic, where that panacea—that same promise of the restoration of normality— cannot be offered, or cannot be made” (Turcotte, 2009: 60). The author’s personal involvement in the gothic narrative contributes to emphasising the colonial anxiety of exile and explains the gothic atmosphere that pervades mainstream colonial texts. As a reflection of that period of colonial adaptation, colonial gothic “is a darker literature, if not in its subject matter, then at least in its grim fatalistic undertones” (2009: 60).

The disorientation the first settlers experienced when they faced a new and strange environment, including their attempt to define it through their inherited but inappropriate language, has been labelled as “the inescapable doubleness of vision” by Canadian writer Margaret Atwood. They found themselves stranded between two worlds: the old Europe and the new colonial territory. In Australian literature, this

condition surfaces as “a source of anxiety and as a need for reconciliation. Not surprisingly, it is also inextricably affiliated with the idea of the (re)making of identity” (Turcotte, 2009: 62). The search for identity, for one’s roots, is a commonplace in gothic fiction. This search can be regarded as an attempt to impose order upon chaos. In (post)colonial writing, the quest for national identity is a constant. This implies transcending the old identity and embracing the new one. (Post)colonial gothic mirrors the anxiety of this negotiation, “of having double vision and of being made vulnerable as a result of this” (2009: 63). Despite the colonists’ attempt to reconcile these two different visions of the world, (post)colonial gothic exposes the impossibility of overcoming the circumstances of the new environment. The gothic never leads to the centre (2009: 237), or rather, reveals it to be a chimera, always out of reach. Paul Genoni comments that Australia is “a country bedevilled with a paradox: on the one hand there is the obsessive search for a national identity and the ‘real’ Australia, and on the other hand the lingering belief that such goals are as uncertain or unreachable as those mirages that lured explorers ever further into the deserts” (2004: 245).

The fact that the gothic never gives a resolution to the antithetical elements it presents does not mean that it is a “defeated literature”.

Reading the nature of the gothic as a maze, Gerry Turcotte explains:

the maze, which constitutes the Gothic’s formal map, is not merely a complicated path toward a centre, but one which reveals, while leading to a plethora of paths and while interfering with the journey, even if all it opens up is endless ambiguity. [...] If the Gothic offers an exciting discourse through which to speak, it is because of its access to open-endedness, to a type of fragmentation that enriches rather than weakens.

[...] the value of the Gothic is in its ability to move outside the privileging, monomythologizing and homogenizing framework. To approach the Gothic is to enter the maze in the hope of getting lost. (2009: 236)

The gothic is actually illuminating. By introducing hesitation and uncertainty in the reader's final judgements, the gothic succeeds in bringing to light the complexity of both the action of seeing and the structure of what is being seen. That is to say, what someone takes as the norm is relative and always open to contestation. Getting lost in the maze provided by gothic fiction is beneficial since it broadens one's mind to new perceptions of the world. This is also the main concern of most postcolonial literature.

I.3.3. Australian National Identity: A Phantomatic Return

A nation can be defined as a group of people who share a similar culture, and nationality is the feeling of belonging to a particular nation. National identity is an imaginary construction as critics Benedict Anderson (1983), Kay Schaffer (1988) and Stuart Hall (1997), among others, have claimed. The concept of nationality started to take shape in nineteenth-century Europe, "resulting from an ideological revolution that took place at the end of the eighteenth century when the notion of the sovereignty of the people replaced that of the sovereignty of the monarch and the principle of social division into discrete orders was challenged" (Anne-Marie Thiesse in Ryan-Fazilleau, 2007: 117). Ernest Gellner also stresses the importance of the Industrial Revolution, since it made people organise themselves into "large, centrally educated,

culturally homogenous units” which gradually fostered the notion of nationalism:

new skill demands and urbanisation [...] encouraged higher levels of education and increased geographic mobility amongst people who previously had been more settled and physically isolated. This mobility led to increasing social and economic connections between previously fragmented or separated communities. As a result, the emerging ‘national’ governments had to devise ways in which to control and connect the increasing number of urban-based communities distanced from their traditional affiliations. Governments placed more emphasis on the need for a common language and common values to help facilitate these connections. (In Elder, 2007: 24)

A common cultural heritage was produced on the grounds of national history —based mainly on the distant past, heroic feats and national heroes—, monuments, popular customs and distinctive landscapes. A common language was an essential bond, spread through the educational system and art. This artificial cultural heritage created a sense of belonging and cohesion among the people of a nation-state.¹⁹ In Australia the government tries to promote the idea of a unified identity among a diverse population with a view to raising “a feeling of national togetherness over land above any differences” (Elder, 2007: 24).

People create stories to make sense of the world. National stories convey the values, desires and experiences of a nation. However, these stories do not totally represent the wide variety of the population. They only reflect the views of the most powerful group, turning them into official discourses. Australia’s official (hi)story is male, heterosexual and Anglo-Celtic:

¹⁹ Although the words “nation” and “state” are used indistinctively today, there is a slight difference. In the past, “nation” did not have a political meaning, but a cultural one. It referred to “a group of people who had a shared ethnicity, language and culture”. In contrast, “state” referred to “a sovereign political entity with set territorial boundaries that has to answer to no higher political power”. Nowadays, “nation” and “state” are usually linked by a hyphen —“nation-state”— to suggest both a political territorial entity and a common culture (Elder, 2007: 23).

stories of Australian-ness are told as if all Australians are equally invested and everyone reaps equal rewards. In truth, these stories suit dominant groups —groups with the most power to produce and sustain their own stories and to overwhelm (though not necessarily end) other stories. Importantly this dominant [...] story encourages a sense of consensus and insists that the shared national story is the most pertinent one for all Australians. Given that consensus necessarily depends on omission, this has meant that women, Indigenous people, gay men and lesbians and non-white migrants have frequently been marginalised or omitted [...]. A national story is not an innocent reflection of a state and its peoples; rather, it is a way in which complexity and differences can be silenced by reference to a 'bigger' unifying story. (Elder, 2007: 27-28)

These stories communicate what it is to be Australian and what it is not, a notion that has been, and is still, organised around “a desire for the land, a fear of others who may claim the land and, as a result of this, a deep ambivalence about belonging to this space” (2007: 6). Kay Schaffer explains that national identities are built through a binary system of oppositions of what it is not: “a system of differences (of relations between things) within an order of sameness” (1988: 13). Australian national identity has mainly been defined through these polarities: white/black, Anglo-Celtic/non-Anglo-Celtic, heterosexual/homosexual, man/woman. The first elements of these pairs have been privileged over the “others”. Therefore, the story of the “others” has been eradicated from what constitutes the image of the real Australian. In *The Australian Legend* (1958), Russel Ward describes the stereotypical Australian as:

a practical man, rough and ready in his manners and quick to decry any appearance of affectation in others. He is a great improviser, ever willing to 'have a go' at anything, but willing too to be content with a task done in a way that is 'near enough'. Though capable of great exertion in an emergency, he normally feels no impulse to work hard without good cause. He is a 'hard case', sceptical about the value of religion and of intellectual and cultural pursuits generally. He believes that Jack is not only as good as his master but, at least in principle, probably a good deal better [...]. He is a fiercely independent person who hates officiousness and authority [...] yet he is very hospitable and above all will stick to his mates through thick and thin, even if he thinks they may be wrong [...]. He swears hard and consistently, gambles heavily and often, and drinks deeply on occasion. [...]

He tends to be a rolling stone, highly suspect if he should chance to gather much moss. (1958: 16-17)

Although many Australians would find this description derisive, as Catriona Elder contends, “aspects of this idea —however mocked— still circulate today when generalisations are made about Australian-being” (2007: 4).

The myth of an imaginary unified community is an ongoing production that is built officially —through the government and social institutions, the legal system, education, etc— and popularly —through the media. The process of telling what constitutes the nation is necessary to bring the nation into existence, to reinforce its values and erase differences. If the concept of being Australian is not continuously narrated, it will fade away (Elder, 2007: 29). However, this narration is not complete because, as a fabrication, it is subject to change, and there are always counter-narratives that challenge the dominant discourse, opening the door for change and diversity.

One element against which Australia’s colonisers started to form their own national identity was Britain. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Australia wanted to make itself in opposition to its mother land. Those inherited aspects —such as class division, the authority of the ruling class, religion, intellectual and cultural goals— were imbued with negative connotations (Schaffer, 1988: 21). It was then that one of the most defining characteristic of Australianness was born: the myth of egalitarianism —the so-called “fair go”— opposing the strict British class system. In Australia a better social structure was expected to develop, so the ideas of caste and class had to disappear:

Many of the stories of national identity in Australia are structured in terms of this relationship to Britain, which is often seen as both the place of the origin of the nation (hence the mother country or home), and as the place against which Australia has to mark itself as different and better. It was argued that this was achieved through the evolution of a non-Indigenous but local Australian culture from the bottom of Australian society rather than the top. Unlike Britain, where the aristocracy set the tone of the nation and its culture, in Australia it was argued that this came from the workers. (Elder, 2007: 49-50)

The idea of egalitarian and classless Australia versus class-stratified Britain survives today. It must be said that despite the attempt to build a national identity different from the British, Australian identity is still connected with the mother land. To begin with, when the British colonisers arrived, the cultural baggage they brought contributed to the formation of an Australian nationality. As Richard White asserts, highlighting the flexibility of national identities:

Not only is the very idea of national identity a product of European history at a particular time, but each addition to the Australian identity has reflected changing intellectual needs and fashions in the West. In other words, not only is the idea of 'Australia' itself a European invention, but men like Charles Dickens and Rudyard Kipling have contributed as much to what it means to be Australian as Arthur Streeton or Henry Lawson. The national identity is not 'Born of the lean loins of the country itself', as one ardent nationalist put it, but is part of the 'cultural baggage' which Europeans have brought with them, and with which we continue to encumber ourselves. (2001: 24)

Western influence continues because Australia has depended on Britain for years, and although its population has become more multicultural thanks to migration, those in power have, more often than not, Anglo-Celtic origins. Even nowadays, in spite of the fact that Australia has an independent government, there remains a small link through the figure of the monarch. A proposal to become a republic, and thus completely cut the ties with Britain, was defeated in a referendum in 1999 (Saфра and Aguilar-Cauz, 2007b: 430-431). In the same way as the past can

never be left behind in a gothic work, colonial experience and the presence of the mother land still haunt Australian national identity.

Australia is a country of migrants. The Aborigines were the first to arrive, followed much later by the British and other nationalities. A 2001 campaign against racism claimed: “We are all boat people” (Elder, 2007: 128). Nevertheless, from the very beginning, hierarchies and differences between British and non-British immigrants were established, the British becoming the “real” Australians. The “white Australia” story is antagonistic at its core. It revolves around both the independence from Britain and the love of British Heritage. As Marilyn Lake explains:

Colonial men in white settler societies everywhere sought to assuage their resentment at imperial subordination by insisting on their status as ‘white men’. As colonizers and colonized both, Australians of British descent committed themselves to the establishment of a White Australia. This necessitated a denial of the existence of Aboriginal Australians who were cast in the role of a ‘dying race’ and severe restrictions on the entry into Australia of non-white foreigners. (1992: 306)

Australians have pictured themselves not only as part of the British Empire, but also as native to Australia, “a new version of British-ness” (Elder, 2007: 118-119). This has led to the negative portrayal of everything non-Anglo-Australian. The closeness of Asia has produced anxiety over an imminent invasion. Asia’s vast population in comparison with Australia’s has been regarded as a constant threat (2007: 125). Although this “invasion complex” has changed throughout the years and has concentrated on different groups, it prevails, as the “hysterical response” to boats of refugees in the 2000s illustrates (2007: 122).

Multiculturalism opposes the idea of “white Australia”:

[It is a] progressive story [...which] takes into account the fact that all citizens do not come from Britain [...], with a cultural history that links them to the English Westminster system of government and the Magna Carta. The multicultural story acknowledges the cost of the white Australia story for many immigrants, and works to undo the inequalities set in place by that story. (Elder, 2007: 129)

Multiculturalism began in the period after the Second World War. Australia planned to reconstruct and expand itself through industry. This required more and cheaper labour. As not enough British people wished to emigrate to Australia, other nationalities were encouraged. The nation's population passed from being basically British-derived in 1945 to comprising people from over 220 countries in 1990 (2007: 129). However, although twenty-first-century Australia focuses on multiculturalism, it remains a country "overwhelmingly white [...], ancestrally British, [...and] a persistent echo of the 'old memories'" can still be heard (Feingold, 2007: 70). Prejudices against non-Anglo-Celtic descendants persist and policies are designed by the government to restrict the entrance of "unwanted" migrants. A major shift seems necessary to really defeat underlying conservative ideologies.

The myth of terra nullius, which means that Australia was erected on a land belonging to no one, has erased Aborigines from national stories. Their prior and continuous presence is unsettling, so, if they do not exist, they cannot challenge white occupancy. Nevertheless, in national stories, Aboriginal power over the land remains unacknowledgedly, a ghostly form (Elder, 2007: 30). Thus, it can be said that the Indigenous population haunts Australian nationality. In this context, Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's concept of the transgenerational phantom becomes quite illuminating, since it helps to

explain the influence of the past on present feelings, actions and behaviour in the Australian nation, especially as far as Aborigines are concerned. In what follows I will provide a brief explanation of the main points of their theory.

Abraham and Torok assert that the phenomenon of haunting is performed by a phantom unwittingly inherited from one's ancestors' lives. This phantom, passed from generation to generation, implies the existence of a collective unconscious within an individual's own unconscious. What returns to haunt is not the dead, but their unfinished business. The phantom is a metaphor, "under the guise of individual or collective hallucinations", for "the gaps left within us by the secrets of others" (Abraham and Torok, 1994: 171). The words—or the shapes—adopted by the phantom refer to a gap, "the unspeakable" (1994: 174). In a "radical reorientation" and complementing Freudian and post-Freudian theories, this phantom does not derive from the subject's own life experiences, but from someone else's psychic conflicts, traumas and secrets (Nicholas T. Rand in Abraham and Torok, 1994: 166). The phantom works in the same way as Freud's description of the death instinct: "in silence", with "no energy on its own", giving "rise to endless repetition, and, more often than not" eluding rationalisation (Abraham and Torok, 1994: 175). The alien characteristics of the phantom are also similar to those of phobia:

Phobia-inducing phantoms haunt in order to move the haunted persons to expose a concealed and unspoken parental fear. This type of phantom produces a sleeplike state during the visitation and replays the fearful scene according to the laws of dream-work (staged by visualization, distortion, etc.). The waking dream imitates the very fact and effect of the parental repressions or else it stages the parents' concealment of

something. It should be added, however, that phobic haunting also exhibits a measure of loyalty toward the parents, since it confines the genuine object of fear to the child's unconscious. (Abraham and Torok, 1994: 181-182)

To put it differently, the phantom epitomises “the interpersonal and transgenerational consequences of silence” (Nicholas T. Rand in Abraham and Torok, 1994: 168). The phantom does not function like the repressed, but like a ventriloquist, a stranger within oneself (Abraham and Torok, 1994: 173). Its multifarious manifestations are not connected directly with one's instinctual life. Rather, it hinders instinctual life (1994: 181). The idea of the phantom goes beyond individual or familial psychology, as Nicholas T. Rand contends, providing a clearer comprehension of the origins of cultural patterns, social institutions and political ideologies:

Abraham and Torok's work enables us to understand how the falsification, ignorance, or disregard of the past —whether institutionalized by a totalitarian state (as in former East Germany) or practiced by parents and grandparents— is the breeding ground of the phantomatic return of shameful secrets on the level of individuals, families, the community, and possibly even entire nations. (In Abraham and Torok, 1994: 169)

The process of moving Aborigines from their land underwent three stages: violent eradication, protection —when the survivors became regarded as part of an exotic and primitive dying race overwhelmed by the new technologies and more complex life of the colonisers' modern world— and finally assimilation —an attempt to make them disappear into the white population, eliminating their original rights to the land (Elder, 2007: 150, 157, 159). The Stolen Generation was the product of assimilation policies:

Indigenous people who were old and could not adjust to the new Australia would be protected (kept on reserves) and eventually disappear or die out. Those who were judged as too young to be marked by Indigeneity and capable of what was called uplift were to be assimilated into the white

Australian nation. [...] Children were taken from communities where their life chances were considered minimal and placed in children's homes to be educated and eventually made part of the nation. (2007: 160)

Many white Australians ignored the policies of Aboriginal children removal until the National Inquiry report *Bringing Them Home* exposed them in 1997, which caused a general sense of guilt and shame (2007: 160).

The Aboriginal people have not stopped fighting for their rights. An important achievement was the Mabo decision in 1992, which annulled the notion of Australia as terra nullius. This split the non-Indigenous sector in two. There were those who saw it as the opportunity to undo the injustice of stealing the land from the natives and to find a way of living together with equal rights, and thus, in an unhierarchical relationship. There were others who considered any feeling of guilt unfair because they had not personally stolen the land, even though, as Catriona Elder states, "they still benefit from this historic injustice and Indigenous peoples still suffer as a result" (2007: 176). Some panicked because they thought that Aborigines were going to take freely "the backyards of innocent Australian suburbanites" (2007: 175), but that has never happened.²⁰ Behind this fear of losing their property lies a stronger but unacknowledged reason: the land they own corresponds to the land stolen from the natives, and regardless of whom did it or when it was done, "the land did and does belong to Indigenous peoples [...and] was taken [...] without compensation" (2007: 310). This kind of

²⁰ Legislation actually limits Aboriginal land claims. The condition for Aborigines to claim land is to show an unbroken physical bond to that land. This is really difficult for two reasons. First of all, due to the very process of colonisation, and secondly, because in contrast with Western thinking, the Australian Aborigines' connection with the land is spiritual, not necessarily physical (Elder, 2007: 164).

decolonisation raises a sense of uncanniness, as Ken Gelder and Jane Margaret Jacobs assert: “what is ‘ours’ is also potentially, or even always already, ‘theirs’: the one is becoming the other, the familiar is becoming strange” (1998: 23). The uncanny also flourishes in the simultaneous feelings of innocence and guilt:

Paradoxically the former position casts non-Aboriginal Australians as ‘out of place’, uninvolved in those formative colonial processes; while the latter position would conceive of non-Aboriginal Australians as [...] too involved, too embedded in place, in the sense that every one of them, even the most recent immigrant, automatically inherits the (mis)fortunes of Australia’s colonial past. (1998: 24)

These “in place” and “out of place” positions are simultaneous, which “is entirely consistent with postcoloniality as a contemporary moment, where one remains within the structures of colonialism even as one is somehow located beyond them or ‘after’ them” (1998: 24).

Together with Aboriginal exclusion from the national identity, there is a white desire for the Indigenous to be part of that identity. The roots for this desire are double. It is a wish to make amends, and along the way, the inclusion of the Indigenous can legitimise white occupancy of the land. This selfish inclusion brings about the cultural appropriation of the native:

If, as an outsider or newcomer, one can indigenise oneself [...] then one can claim equal status with *other* Indigenous peoples. [...] Indigenous peoples are often understood as the real connection non-Indigenous peoples have with Australian-ness. As a result, aspects of Indigenous cultures are appropriated or used by non-Indigenous peoples to help create a feeling of belonging. (Elder, 2007: 147-148. Original emphasis)

Moreover, through this connection, the white may reach a purer truth which their modern lives deny them: “Aboriginal sacredness retains its other-worldly, residual features, but it is also activated as something emergent, as integral to what we might (or should) ‘become’. It [...]”

appears so out-of-step with modernity that it is able to be identified as the very thing modernity needs” (Gelder and Jacobs, 1998: 1). The recognition of Aboriginal culture is biased by non-Indigenous interests, since it is not usually represented by the Indigenous themselves. Besides, indigeneity is understood as authentic as long as it corresponds with stereotypes —black skin, speaking an Indigenous language, living in the country, intimate acquaintance with the Dreaming,²¹ etc (Elder, 2007: 162-163).

Concomitant with the appropriation of the Aboriginal is the process of reconciliation and the notion of settler envy. Reconciliation, which can be defined as “a communal awakening to the more unpalatable aspects of the nation’s past, triggered by the release of disquieting information”, is a phenomenon which has influenced the Australian psyche since the late 1980s (Delrez, 2010: 55). The appropriation of Aboriginal culture, which has taken place within an atmosphere of reconciliation, has been labelled as “settler envy”. The white population in search of reconciliation feel that they do not rightly belong to the land. In contrast, Aborigines are imbued with the qualities the settlers lack, those which confer “authenticity and continuity of occupation” on the Indigenous population (2010: 56). Marc Delrez contends that: “empathy

²¹ According to Aboriginal tradition, ancestral spiritual beings inhabited the land during the period of creation or Dreamtime which preceded humankind. These beings created the natural world and they were the ancestors of everything living. They could adopt different shapes, but they behaved like people. When they travelled, they left marks to indicate where they had been. These ancestors grew older and finally returned to the dream from which they had woken up. Their spirits remain in this world like eternal forces that give life and influence natural events. Every ancestor’s energy flows along the path it travelled during the Dreamtime and acquires special power at certain points where it left physical traces of its actions. These points are sacred places for Aborigines (Vaisutis et al., 2008: 46).

with Aboriginal suffering [exhibits] the desire to take possession of the wound itself". That is to say, settler envy comprises trauma envy:

There may well be, as a further aspect of settler envy, such a thing as trauma envy, a notion actually envisaged by John Mowitt who refers to 'the gain of pain' that accrues as an effect of the link established between traumatic injury and moral authority. In the context of the Australian predicament, it seems evident that trauma has come to be invested with such a capacity to produce empowerment that it elicits a desire to have suffered from it —if not because of the event of invasion itself, then as an aspect of the discursive aftermath it has produced, notably in the years of the Reconciliation. Clearly, [...] all this makes for the emergence of a self-seeking discourse which obfuscates the materiality of exploitation in the present and allows the speakers [...] to achieve legitimacy by proxy, through the pursuit of an experiential equivalence with the victims. Thus it can be shown that a form of trauma envy traverses an incredibly large proportion of today's discursive production in Australia. (2010: 57)

The current atmosphere is one of reconciliation, of righting the wrong. A vivid example of today's spirit of reconciliation is the long-awaited "Sorry Speech" by former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in 2008, where, for the first time, he apologised on behalf of Australia's past and present governments for all the injustices and suffering they have inflicted on the Aboriginal population:

We today take this first step by acknowledging the past and laying claim to a future that embraces all Australians. [...] These are uncomfortable things to be brought out into the light. They are not pleasant. They are profoundly disturbing. But we must acknowledge these facts if we are to deal once and for all with the argument that the policy of generic forced separation was somehow well motivated, justified by its historical context and, as a result, unworthy of any apology today. Then we come to the argument of intergenerational responsibility, also used by some to argue against giving an apology today. [...] As has been said of settler societies elsewhere, we are the bearers of many blessings from our ancestors; therefore we must also be the bearers of their burdens as well. [...] Until we fully confront that truth, there will always be a shadow hanging over us and our future as a fully united and fully reconciled people. (Rudd, 2008: n.p.)

The speech ends with the promise of action: "unless the great symbolism of reconciliation is accompanied by an even greater substance, it is little more than a clanging gong. It is not sentiment that makes history; it is our actions that make history". The official recognition of the ill-treatment suffered by Aborigines since colonial

times is an important step to the equal integration of the Indigenous population in Australian society, although there is still a long way to go.

Last but not least, gender also plays an important role in the making of national stories. Australian national identity has strongly been defined by virility:

the image of the ideal or typical Australian associated with the new nationalism of the 1890s was a decidedly masculine one, whether conceived as a pioneer, gold-miner, or bushman. The figure of the soldier or digger was added to this list by the coming of World War I, and particularly events at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915, subsequently enshrined in the Australian calendar as Anzac Day. (Webby, 2000: 9)

Australia is a nation organised by homosociality, that is, mutual gender segregation: men socialise with men, and women with women. Various authors such as Anne Summers (1975), Kay Schaffer (1988) and Miriam Dixson (1999) have reached this conclusion after tracing the power of male views back to early colonial times, when there were more men than women and the workplace was radically gender-divided. In her book *The Real Matilda* (1976), Miriam Dixson deals with women's position in Australian life and national identity. She states that: "men like women less in Australia than in any other community I know" (1999: 17). In the preface to the 1999 edition, she stresses the ongoing influence of masculinity on Australian identity: "At the time the book was written national identity meant male identity and to some it still is" (1999: 2). It must be noted that homosociality does not erase the presence of the feminine completely, since it needs it for its proper construction and working:

the proliferation of images of women in spaces dominated by men emphasises the erotic or sexualised side of being Australian through representations of heterosexual romantic desire without the space needing to be filled with *actual* Australian women. This works in two ways. First, it

allows a space dominated by men [...] to still be imagined as gender-neutral—just Australian—even though it is filled only or mostly with men. Second, it works to allow the participants in these male-dominated or male-only spaces the pleasure of homosociality without the spectre of homosexuality. (Elder, 2007: 99. Original emphasis)

Fears of low birth rates and an increasing need to populate Australia—emphasised by a fear of foreign invasion, mainly Asian—helped to emphasise the importance of motherhood:

In response to the declining birth rate, the regulation of the availability of contraceptives, an emphasis on the noble nature of motherhood, and social incentives to encourage the ‘cult of motherhood’, all played their role in constructing the notion of the heterosexual family, with a large brood of children as the national ideal. (Elder, 2007: 84)

Having children was not something personal, but national, leading to the constant monitoring of women and their sexual activities (2007: 82). Besides, only white women were suitable for being a “mother of the race” (Lake, 1992: 307). It is important to point out that although it was women who biologically gave birth, it was men who claimed to give birth to the nation: “Men appropriated and denied women’s procreative capacities and fashioned a state that turned sexual difference into political difference and confirmed motherhood as subjection” (1992: 319). The idea of women’s contribution to the Australian nation as mothers still circulates and sometimes comes to the surface. For example, in the early 2000s, the government supported a program that authorised Australian women to stay at home and increase the birth rate (Elder, 2007: 92), and in 2004, statements such as the following could be heard: “If you can have children, you should have one for your husband, one for the wife and one for the country”, pronounced by the federal treasurer and supported by the Prime Minister, who added: “Come on, come on, your nation needs you” (in Elder, 2007: 84).

Therefore, masculine views and experiences persist in the concept of Australianness. Women are necessary to increase and perpetuate the “true” Australian race. The fact that in 2010 a woman became Prime Minister —Julia Gillard— is indicative of some progressive changes in the Australian mind, but there is still a long way to go to overthrow deep-rooted patriarchal ideologies.

II. *TOOTH AND CLAW*

II.1. NOTES ON GABRIELLE LORD

Gabrielle Lord is best known for her crime fiction. She has even been labelled as Australia's First Lady of Crime (Pressley, 2007: 22). She has published fifteen novels—including two series: the Gemma Lincoln and Jack McCain series—, two novels for young readers—one of them published as a twelve-month series on the Internet—, various short stories, non-fiction, and two of her novels have been adapted for the cinema and television. In 2002 she was given the Ned Kelly Award for best crime novel for *Death Delights*, and in 2003 she was a joint winner of the crime fiction Davitt Award for *Baby Did a Bad Bad Thing*. The publication of her first novels in the 1980s parallels both the recognition and emergence of Australian women writers, and the revival of Australian crime fiction. Many women turned to this kind of literature and subverted the traditional misogyny of the genre (Webby, 2000: 204). Despite her great popularity in Australia, her work has attracted little academical attention. As Peter Pierce asserts in an article that constitutes one of the very few studies of Lord's fiction: "[she] is one of our most accomplished, and still too scantily recognised authors of what the trade calls popular fiction" (1999: 195). My analysis of *Tooth and Claw* should thus contribute to filling the gap in Lord's criticism.

Lord was born in Sydney and attended Armidale University. Afterwards, she had a wide range of jobs. She worked as a saleswoman, a teacher, a fruitpicker and packer, a brick-cleaner and an officer for

the Commonwealth Employment Service. Although she had done some writing as a child, she really started her first novel when she was thirty. She says that she decided to start at that age after reading Gertrude Stein's words: "I decided when I was 30 I'd write", and that is what she did.¹ According to her, some of her literary influences are Charles Dickens, Graham Greene, George Orwell, Coleridge and Francis Derbridge, a former BBC-TV serial writer.² Paradoxically, in another interview she also asserts that her own life experience has been her primary influence: "My own feeling is that writers are not influenced by other writers, but by their own deep conscious and —more importantly— unconscious forces. We are compelled to tell our story, but we do it in a way that is less destructive than, say, a serial killer might" (in Pierce, 1999b: 202). Her first novel, *Fortress*, was published in 1980 and her success allowed her to become a full-time writer.³

The bulk of her fiction revolves around crime. According to her: "All the great stories are crime stories" (in Evans, 2010: n.p.). Her stories are also imbued with the gothic. In fact, crime fiction was born in Victorian times out of the gothic mode, more exactly "from the knot of Gothic and sensation fiction" (Warwick, 2009: 34). Despite the fact that crime or detective fiction emphasises rationality instead of gothic irrationality, "its narrative efficacy and its fascination for the late Victorians lie in the same place —the rendering of urban modernity as Gothic" (2009: 34).

¹ "Interview with Gabrielle Lord": n.p.

² "Gabrielle Lord": n.p.

³ "Gabrielle Lord. Her Story": n.p.

Lord's style can be described as lively, simple and undemonstratively clear (Pierce, 1999: 195). Peter Pierce argues that her novels are not formulaic, that they "all seem like new departures". However, he recognises that "a strong, insistent patterning" can be discerned (1999: 194). To begin with, the protagonist is almost always a woman (1999: 194). A common character in Lord's fiction is that of the dangerous man who intrudes violently in the lives of others (1999: 187), acting as the villain of the story. Lord is very concerned about what moves people to do evil:

not so much the reasons for, or problems of evil, but the want of sufficient cause for the harms that men especially do to children, and to women. It is a motiveless, or inadequately motivated malignity that those of her characters who are victims often and terribly confront. Typically they have not been chosen at random. Rather they are unwitting objects of revenge out of all proportion to their presumed offence. (1999: 186)

Lord is above all interested in the family and personal relationships because they are "the original crime scene" (in Evans, 2010: n.p.). A recurrent theme in her literature is the bullying and abuse of the weak. During her childhood, she lived a traumatic experience that marked her forever. When she was eight, she was sent to a Dominican boarding school in Strathfield. There, she and the other children suffered severe physical and psychological punishments. This experience has slipped into some of her writing, where abuse and cruelty on children — including paedophilia— are described, such as in *Whipping Boy* (1992), or more subtly in *Shattered* (2007) and *Lethal Factor* (2003) (Koval, 2008: n.p.; Lord, 2008: 267-269). Her school years gave Lord a clear insight into the psychology of hatred and its consequences:

this kind of brutality that I was exposed to [...has] given me such a valuable insight into what it creates in later life and to a child who has

nothing but brutality, and we read horror stories of the way children are treated in different parts of the world, in different parts in Australia. And if there's no let-up, this child will be a brutalised monster like Satan, seeking whom he may devour because the desire for vengeance is very strong. (Gabrielle Lord in Koval, 2008: n.p.)

Fortunately, she had a loving family and other good things happened to her, “so I had something to compare it with. I knew that life wasn’t necessarily like that and that there were kind people” (in Koval, 2008: n.p.). The topic of abandonment and isolation, which usually comes up in her fiction, can also be tracked down to this awful experience. Concomitant with her criticism on child abuse is her passion for animal welfare. She finds animal abuse as bad as that inflicted on children: “It’s the taking of vengeance on the defenceless. It’s taking out your suffering on something that is small and defenceless. That’s basically the same pattern” (in Koval, 2008: n.p.).

The themes Lord chooses and how they are dealt with demonstrate the social and moral commitment of her writing: “Her readers are likely to find psychologically engrossing, morally engaged novels” (Pierce, 1999: 195). In this sense, Peter Pierce regards her novels as Dickensian: “in the ways in which anatomy of her society turns with controlled outrage into an indictment” (1999: 192). Regarding the comparison with Dickens, Lord declares that these “resonances” might come “from his own great understanding of adult cruelty towards children which certainly informed his writing spirit as it does mine” (in Pierce, 1999b: 201). Lord is also interested in the element of retribution. There is a reversal of roles, where the “intended prey turn on their tormentors” (1999: 188).

There seems to be a change in her fiction from the 1980s to the 1990s as regards the complexity of the plot and the intensity of her research (Pierce, 1999b: 196; 1999: 193). Research is fundamental for Lord. She first did research for her novel *Jumbo* (1986). As she explains: “I’d come to the end of the lode I could mine with just my own info” (in Pierce, 1999b: 197). She often consults experts in crime, psychology, medicine and forensics:

I have no hesitation in picking up the phone and asking for help —taking experts out to lunch, asking questions, making notes... I’ve learned how to grow (BA) Anthrax, but fortunately not how to weaponise it... I’ve done work experience in a small, busy security business, I’ve handled a .38 and a Smith & Wesson —I’ve spent time with the police dogs [...] spent time at the morgue, hours in lectures on Anatomy and Forensic Science, etc— I take research very very seriously. (Lord: n.p.)

Thanks to that, she is able to provide detailed descriptions of horrible events in her stories. She admits that this technical and forensic interest might stem from her father, a doctor (in Koval, 2008: n.p.). Action is also very important in her work. She asserts that drama consists of action and compares it to life itself: “A lot of writing is beautiful and literary and it flows, but it’s not actually dramatic. It doesn’t keep people engaged. Drama is action, it’s emotional with its sudden shocks and surprises. It’s like life, really” (in Evans, 2010: n.p.). That is why her stories are full of suspense, shock and surprise, that is, all the necessary techniques to keep her readers on the edge of their seats.

II.2. RED IN TOOTH AND CLAW

Tooth and Claw (1983) tells the story of Beth, a young woman who lives alone in the Australian bush near Sydney and her brave fight against an evil man who stalks her and will stop at nothing to get what he wants. Simultaneously, there is Elvira's account. She is a fake witch who tells us about her life and views through her diary. Beth works as a secretary for Roland, Stephen and Declan, three friends who deal in antiquities. She starts a relationship with Declan, but he breaks up with her and later quits his job. Stephen does not agree with Roland about some aspects of the business. After an argument, he asks Beth to move to the bush together, where he has bought a house. Beth does not know what the argument was about, but she decides to join Stephen.

In the forest, away from civilisation, their lives turn primitive. They are self-sufficient and live with few facilities and little technology. There are some hives which provide honey. Beth's grandmother passed on to her the love of bees, and though hers are rather aggressive, she carefully gets familiar with them. One day Stephen goes to Sydney to see Roland because Beth has given away their whereabouts in a conversation on the phone. Stephen promises to tell her everything when he comes back, but he never does. His corpse is found some days later. Now Beth lives alone with her big dog —Sam— and her bees. She is sad and often wonders about Stephen's mysterious death. She notices that she is being watched. At the same time, crows appear flying over a specific point in the mountain behind her farm. One night

somebody breaks into her house. The footprints she finds the next morning prove that she is not imagining things. Soon after this intrusion, she finds her chickens hanged on a wattle tree. She thinks that somebody is trying to scare her out of the place. Since her dog turns out to be an ineffective guardian, she decides to stay at her hippie neighbours' for a while.

Her neighbours live in a place called Willowglen. The house belongs to Robin. He lives with two friends, Garth and Astrid. Robin used to have a relationship with Elvira. They broke up and he moved to the bush. He sometimes writes to Elvira. She notices in his letters that he likes her neighbour Beth. Although she is not really sure about her feelings for Robin, her jealousy makes her pack up and she unexpectedly arrives at his place. Once there, she gets interested in Garth and flirts with him. This brings about Astrid's hostility towards Elvira and, consequently, there is a tense atmosphere among all of them. When Beth arrives, she has to deal with Elvira's jealousy and her contradictory behaviour towards her. That is why she sometimes suspects that she is behind the hanging and the watching. In general, Beth finds the crosscurrents of that house difficult to understand: Astrid and Garth's relationship, and Elvira's attempts to seduce Garth without letting Robin go.

One night Beth decides to go back to her farm. She discovers somebody sleeping inside. She returns to Willowglen in search of help, but she finds none. She gets her gun and plans to uncover the mysterious watcher. That night she finds the macabre thing that is

attracting the crows' attention: a grotesque kind of scarecrow made of dead animal parts. When she returns to her house, she finds Roland there. He kidnaps her and threatens to kill her dog if she escapes. He is looking for something Stephen hid nearby. Declan arrives later. He is Roland's accomplice and does whatever he commands. Beth poisons them, and unwillingly, herself, with some magic mushrooms. In spite of her difficulties to distinguish between reality and hallucination, she manages to run away. Roland chases her. She leads him to her hives and the bees, enraged by the stranger's disturbance, sting him to death.

The main characters have chosen to leave their comfortable lives in the city in favour of a more austere lifestyle, closer to nature. I will start focusing on the description of their natural surroundings. Gothic imagery is used to display the dark side of the forest and the mysteries it hides. It is rife with terrible and horrible things, produced either by nature itself or human interference. Some of the characters also deserve close attention since they comply, to some extent, with traditional gothic characterisation. The portrayal of Beth and her stalker follows the pattern of the gothic heroine and villain. Therefore, I will examine how they both conform to and deviate from these gothic stereotypes. I will also stress the necessity of the villain's appearance, as he paradoxically turns crucial for the restoration of the heroine's self-confidence.

In keeping with early gothic, *Tooth and Claw* is highly formulaic in form and plot, which makes it quite predictable. As explained before, the novel follows Lord's typical pattern. It is simple, direct and full of

action. Suspense is used to engage the reader's attention and focalisation is fundamental to this aim. This is clearly seen in the first chapter, where the focaliser manages to attract our interest. An external narrator describes a character on a hill and the view he gets from there. Focalisation is basically internal. The little information offered about the character pictures him as an enigma. The only clue to his being a man is the use of the pronoun. The chapter is meaningfully very short — scarcely half a page. The shorter it is, the less information we get, and thus the more intriguing it turns. His thoughts reveal that he is watching a woman:

A pail coil of smoke was rising from one of her chimneys [...]. He sighed, relieved and tired. So far, so good. He was safe. No one would find him here. He'd put his plan into operation, get what he'd come for, tidy up a few loose ends and be out of the country again in a matter of days. [...] he squatted, smoking, watching [...], thinking how his own plans now were finally coming to an end. He sat quite still [...] watching the roof of the woman's house down in the gully. (5)

The imagination is given free rein. We wonder about his plans, why he is watching the woman and whether his intentions are good or bad. By the end of the paragraph, we are informed that a few crows are flying over that spot, "coming to rest in a tall ghost gum" (5). The presence of crows and their spooky resting place tell us that the man is surely up to no good.

As we turn the page, we learn that the person under surveillance is Beth, the protagonist. The identity of the watcher is unveiled much later. The mention of watching in the very first sentence of the second chapter — "Lately, she'd had the feeling that someone was watching her" (6)— emphasises how disquieting the situation is for Beth. Further uncertainty is added when Beth is not sure whether the feeling of being

watched is real or imagined: “Perhaps she had been too long alone and had started to imagine things, she thought” (6); “Perhaps she was imagining the watcher now because she was lonely” (11). Moreover, the novel constantly reminds us that there is someone watching, either the mysterious watcher or any other person, producing a claustrophobic atmosphere: “that evening, the feeling of the watcher had been strong again” (14); “[Beth] looked up the mountain to where someone might have been watching, she wasn’t unaware of what an odd spectacle she’d make” (60); “[Beth] walked quickly without looking back but was sure she could feel his eyes [the sheriff’s] on her as she moved on up the dirt road” (67). Once the first chapter ends, the male focaliser vanishes and focalisation is assumed by two women —Beth and Elvira.

The novel consists of twenty-three chapters, most of them dealing with Beth. They are narrated by an external voice and usually focalised by her. In this way, her thoughts, memories and dreams give a more vivid portrayal of her feelings and a better understanding of her reactions, although information is carefully leaked to arouse curiosity. The access to Beth’s mind invites readers to share her fear and puzzlement. Her questions echo those of readers: “Her poor fowls. What sick person had done that? And why? ‘Oh, Sam, what’s going on? What’s happening here?’” (70); “*Who is doing this to me? [...] Why are they doing this to me? [...] What was she going to do?*” (83. Original emphasis). Some other chapters are narrated and focalised by Elvira. She is a secondary character who keeps a diary. Her first person account has the same weight as the third person and complements it.

Diaries are typically gothic, a genre in which “the system of narration is frequently first-person and sometimes also epistolary” (MacAndrew, 1979: 111). Following the gothic pattern of embedded tales, Elvira’s diary is a way of inserting another story within the main one. The relevance of her diary lies in the alternative perspective of Beth it offers. However, at the end of the novel, it is only through Elvira’s narration that readers get to know what happens after Roland’s death. The external narrator disappears once Beth gets rid of Roland and the final chapter is an entry to Elvira’s diary, where she describes a visit to Beth, together with her impressions on the positive changes in her life.

The carefully patterned structure of *Tooth and Claw* shows features that place the novel in the female gothic tradition. The protagonist is a lonely young woman persecuted by a dangerous, but sometimes deceptively attractive man. Bringing to mind the trend started by Ann Radcliffe, explained in the introduction to this thesis, Beth refuses to remain passive, beats the villain, and is rewarded with a profitable farm and the man she desires. Her final victory and the position of power she holds over him evokes the ending of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), one of the best examples of female gothic. My analysis will reveal that *Jane Eyre* is a clear intertext in *Tooth and Claw*, exploring the coincidences and differences between the two novels. Lord’s text sticks to the formulaic plot of the female gothic tradition which *Jane Eyre* exemplifies perfectly. As is explained in more detail in the introduction, the plot basically features a young female character pursued by a man, a haunted house, a series of mysterious events which turn out to be

caused by a human being, and the heroine's happy ending next to the man she loves (Williams, 1995: 101; Punter and Byron, 2004: 279). The application of this formula makes the ending predictable, as readers familiar with the tradition know that the story will end well. Before studying Lord's text as female gothic, I will focus on the natural landscape —since it adds to Beth's fear and sense of helplessness in the middle of the bush— and I will also tackle the stereotypically gothic presentation of the main characters.

II.2.1. The Forest Is Alive

In *Tooth and Claw* the landscape is described using typical gothic imagery. The action takes place in the forest, presented as mysterious and shadowy. Darkness plays a central role. It is a permanent presence, whether at night or by day. It can be said that there are as many night as day descriptions, but in both cases the forest remains dark and enigmatic. At night, it is dark and cold. The moon, a frequent element in gothic descriptions, "intended to awaken a nocturnal atmosphere fraught with mystery and tinged with fantasy, fear and sadness" (Varma, 1987: 59), features prominently. This is when Beth and Stephen arrive at the forest for the first time:

They were following a winding road and a new moon was pale in the sky. [...Beth] turned her face away to look at the worn hills that massed like low cloud along the horizon. There was a flat, black river to cross, snaked by wavering moon and starlight. The car-ferry's port and starboard lights coloured the water as they stepped out of their vehicle to enjoy the cool river crossing. [...] they watched the black night and blacker water. [...] The night was thick but as her eyes adjusted, she could see the white ghost of the river's sand beyond, and soon the pale curve of the moonlit river itself. (46-47)

By day, it can get extremely —and dangerously— hot in summer. This type of suffocating heat, which even wild creatures fear, turns the peak of the day hostile:

The river [...] was deserted under the bright midday sun. The creatures who used it were lying low, waiting till dusk to creep out from under ledge and rock, crawl out of lair and burrow. In the evening, she'd seen crowds of fishing birds and thin white cranes mirrored in the fading light. Once even a black wallaby, but now there was nothing moving. (50)

Daylight does not manage to blow away darkness. Even on the brightest day, there are shadows, dark spaces and creatures are probably hidden in them: “[Beth stood] looking out at the mountains that were lower and closer here. The shadows were darkening as the girl returned” (72); “[Beth] She’d watched the cold, clear moon rise over the black hills while Sam would seek creatures in the shadows” (14). The darkness in light brings to mind the ambiguity that lies at the core of light. It can be positive, as Elvira believes one morning: “I walked in [my flat] and it was flooded by early-morning sunshine, that light that makes things look so sort of optimistic, and even my mess of packing seemed to be crisped up and tidied by its light” (21). Or it can be negative, as Beth experiences it here: “She lay back on the bank, her arms under her head, looking up at the swinging sky. It was immensely blue and it seared her eyes with its brilliance” (51). Sometimes darkness can be psychological, depending on someone’s mood. As happens to Beth in this scene:

Her mood lifted and the fear dissipated in the brave morning light. Perhaps the animal that had disturbed her sleep the night before was up there now, innocently curled up snout to tail under a rock. She was standing there, enjoying the mid-morning display of the sky and mountain, when something caught her eye. [...] the imprint of heavy rubber soles was quite plain to see in the dusty bald patch beneath the doorstep. The fear that had melted in the sun returned in full so that for her the bright morning was darkened. (17)

What light discovers for Beth, though illuminating the real nature of the intruder, paradoxically works to darken her mood.

The movement of the sun is closely followed. It is useful to set the time of the day in a world with no clocks: “The sun stood on the ridge behind the house throwing the overhanging cliffs into green darkness” (61); “The sun had left the room, sliding off the walls where the bunches of dried herbs withered in the darkening corners” (85). Depending on its position in the sky, it casts shifting shadows. In this way, the constant changes of light and shadow in different areas contribute to turning the forest into a kind of living entity: “She looked out at the dark shapes of the looming mountains opposite. They seemed very close, as if they’d moved in the dark while no one was watching” (123). This effect is further emphasised by the characters when they attribute personal characteristics to the forest: willows can look like “bending heads of sad, long-haired women in the gloom” (25), and the mountain sighs and acquires movement with the wind —“as she [Beth] watched, the mountain sighed. The storm wind started to move along the river, whipping the willows on the far bank, spreading over the valley, moving up the mountain like a wave until it broke over where Sam and she sat” (102).

The landscape usually matches the events of the plot or the characters’ feelings, a common technique of the gothic. This is most noticeable in the scene when Beth finds the watcher, one of the most striking scenes of the novel. She decides to leave Robin’s house, where she has been living temporarily after the killing of her chickens, and

camp out near her house to discover who is stalking her. Here darkness shows its positive side as she uses it to her advantage: “Piccaninny dawn was streaking the eastern sky and she’d need to move now if she wanted her movements to be covered by darkness. Nor did she want to be caught by the searing heat of the late season day” (99). The day is heavily oppressive and a storm is brewing up (100), which mirrors the tension of the moment. The weather conditions contribute to making the scenario look terrible and premonitory. This is the increasingly terrifying landscape Beth witnesses as she is climbing the mountain:

A couple of apple gums had grown up in the crevices, forcing some of the blocks to shatter off and fall, to lie lower on the mountain. It almost looked as if someone, the child of a giant, had started to build a castle, beginning without skill and improving as he went, so that out of a rubble of broken slabs, a formal array of angular blocks had arisen. [...] the river [...] mirrored the glaring cumulonimbus. The clouds had become a menacing gun-metal colour where they towered over the mountains like monstrous cauliflower curds. [...] an uneasy light filtered through, making the mountainside around her look artificial and two-dimensional. She might have been the only person in the world, and the world itself might have been a huge stage-set, designed by the giant’s child as a back-drop to his castle. [...] The sky was darkening and the wind had dropped. The trees were utterly still. The world was waiting for the storm to fall and it was holding its breath. [...] thunder, sounding deep and oddly subterranean. Nothing stirred, neither leaf nor beast. [...] The mountain was darkening as she watched, as if a darker filter had been drawn across the sky. Sam whimpered and circled her [...] then running past her into the now shadowy corridors and rooms of stone. (101-102)

The mountain is compared to an unfinished castle first —or a castle in ruins—, and then it acquires more gothic architectural attributes —“shadowy corridors and rooms of stone”—, including proper gothic surroundings —a world darkened by a storm. Therefore, it can be argued that the mountain functions as a gothic castle hiding something evil, which the heroine of the tale —or play, since Beth thinks about the landscape as a stage— is determined to find out. All this serves to make the mountain look more frightening and dangerous. Storms pose a real

threat in the country, especially in high places. It is important to highlight Beth's perception of the situation and the mountain itself as a stage where a giant child is playing with its toys. This points to the sublime feelings that nature can arouse. Here the image of the child works as a metaphor for nature. Humans are small vulnerable toys at the mercy of nature's will, a huge powerful child.

This mountain, which lies behind Beth's house, is a relevant natural element in *Tooth and Claw*. For this reason, its presentation deserves close attention. On the one hand, the mountain is depicted as imposing, dark, marked by the passing of time, oppressive, and dangerous because stones often fall off it:

Behind her [house], in the east, rose the mountain that formed the backdrop to her house, a place for wild fallen rocks, ferns and slim straight trees [...]. Midday in summer the mountain hung shimmering above her, and she would sit staring at it, her mood oppressed and heavy, matching its weight and silence. There was always something to watch up there. Perhaps the wind had risen and bent the clumps of gum-tips on the ridge so that they showed their under-colours against the overwhelming blue of the sky. Or a piece of rock, eroded by wind and water, would finally fall, crashing and bouncing its way through the silence [...]. Sometimes there was nothing to watch but the mountain itself, its shadows and patterns of shifting light, its tangle of trees and fallen timber, fire-blackened, lying aslant. (6)

On the other hand, the mountain is protective because it keeps Beth's farm "cosy and protected" (70). The location of the house at the foot of the mountain gives Beth a magnificent view of the valley —"she could see in a world-curving sweep for miles round" (6)—, and at a certain time of the day, the mountain can keep the house hidden from unwelcomed eyes: "the dark background of the unlit mountain. Once the sun reached there, they could no longer be seen" (6). This protective function stresses its role as a castle or fortress, but it fails Beth because

an intruder has penetrated it and is using the vantage point of this fortress to watch her secretly. In this way, the mountain follows Lord's typical presentation of failing refuges or fortresses, which are usually "so easily assailed and penetrated" (Pierce, 1999: 191). The relevance of the mountain is emphasised several times in the text from the very first page, where we see that an unknown man has decided to camp there. He is the evil presence that hides in the castle.

As the storm develops, Beth starts losing her initial confidence. The landscape has turned into an adversary: "She should seek shelter, but looking around amongst all those dark recesses, she could not find a place that tempted her inside" (103). As if it were a child, nature is playing with Beth, as it usually does with human beings when it shows its power in opposition to their fragility: "The air had that strange quality sometimes encountered when nature plays, covering the morning sun with a dark storm or the bright midday light with the brown shadows of eclipse" (103). The fact that raindrops are "running down the back of her neck and her face like tears" echoes the despair Beth is feeling at that moment: fighting against a terrible storm as well as dealing with the expectations of what she might discover. Approaching the top of the mountain, a nasty smell gives away that something big must be dead. It seems that the storm has been beneficial after all because, otherwise, the place would be full of flies and the stink would be unbearable. Beth cannot see in the dark, but a bolt of lightning makes her freeze, "illuminating the thing that barred

her way with harsh, brilliant light [...]. She had found the watcher” (104). What light illuminates horrifies her:

She looked at the stake that supported it, gave it the semblance of life; looked well at the shrivelled eyes, half-eaten by ants, that were turned in the direction of her place. She saw where composite bits and pieces of different dead things had been nailed together to form a grotesque figure: a caricature of the human body; the head of a cat with the rope that had strangled it still tightly embedded in its matted fur; the body of some larger animal comprising its trunk; and then, in final outrage, the tiny hand-like paws of a possum nailed or wired to the larger limbs. (118)

Tooth and Claw is not only about terror, but also about horror.

While the former is aroused in part by almighty nature, the latter stems from abjection. A vast amount of abject images related to bodily decay and putrefaction appear over and over throughout the story. They are usually very detailed, thus increasing their already revulsive quality. There are injuries and infections —“She stood up [...] giving herself an ugly scratch. She hopped on the injured ankle [...] making it bleed, cursing as she did so” (51); “Every couple of months, a little blister would appear on my gum, build up, fade away [...] and then my tongue would once more find the beginning of the new little swelling” (22)—, along with revulsive smells and fluids —“Her nostrils were filled with the filthy smell” (104); “John the Baptist did the most foul-smelling shit in the wash basket [...] one of those runny ones that cats only seem to do inside houses on pale green carpets or new bedspreads” (25); “Beth’s stomach harden against itself, where the wine and yesterday’s mead mixed with the acids of her own making until she had to walk outside, thinking she’d vomit” (75); “she vomited [...]. The retching racked her, and she heaved painfully. Blowflies were immediately attracted and [...] covered the mess” (144). Flies are commonplace in any Australian

landscape. Here they are a continuous annoying presence, related in part to the most strikingly abject images: corpses and their disintegration. There are animal corpses, such as Beth's poultry —“her poor chickens, each one hanging by its narrow neck” (61-62)— and a mattress made of animal skins at Robin's house —“the mattress was an ugly rug, comprised of many different animals' skins pieced together in an amateurish fashion so that it looked as if the dead animals involved had been hurled together in some frightful collision and joined where they had fallen” (71). The disturbing composition of the rug anticipates the most horrible element in the story: the grotesque human body Roland builds out of animal parts (118). As for human corpses, there is Stephen's (88), Roland's (150) and the sheriff tells Beth about the recent desecration of a grave (66).

The great number of abject images showing death and the imminent decay of any living creature reminds us, firstly, that our bodies are not whole but disintegrating —“She [Beth] was tormented by the rotting of her grandmother, imagining her falling into frightful decay, so that the frail delicate body she had loved became a thing of horror to her” (41)—, and secondly and more positively, that death goes hand in hand with life. Everything living dies, but death paradoxically helps to create life as part of a natural regenerative cycle. This is most clearly appreciated in nature. In the novel, crows feed on carrion, flies feed on corpses and Beth considers using her dead chickens to start a compost heap (83). Moreover, Beth disposes of a fox she kills in a compost heap (15) and later Roland's body meets the same fate: “Early

blowflies were already clustering at his puffy lips and swollen eyelids. She put out a hand to touch him and jerked it back with sick loathing. [...] Remember, she whispered to herself [...] how you dragged the dead fox down to the compost heap. There's no difference" (150). Either human, animal or plant, the same end awaits us all. This idea also agrees with the Dickensian side that Peter Pierce discerns in Lord's fiction: "the notion that —for good and ill— all our fates are linked" (1999: 192). The idea of animals devouring other animals is implied in the title of the novel. As the online dictionary *The Phrase Finder* explains, the English phrase "red in tooth and claw" derives from Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem *In Memoriam A.H.H.* (1850) and refers to "the sometimes violent natural world, in which predatory animals unsentimentally cover their teeth and claws with the blood of their prey as they kill and devour them". *Tooth and Claw* fits in the category of female gothic. However, as has been shown, there is also a huge amount of abjection, a basic characteristic of male gothic. This shows that the distinction between female and male gothic must not be taken as absolute because boundaries are often ignored.

Nature is contradictory, as the mountain and the storm have proved. It can be both good and evil. It gives and protects life as well as it takes it away. The crows illustrate this double quality of mother nature. On the one hand, they are pitiless scavengers, feeding on the dead or nearly dead. In Western civilisation, crows are traditionally regarded as mysterious harbingers of death, disease or war, especially due to their behaviour, black colour, crowing and fondness for carrion

(Sax, 2003: 10, 27-29; Oesterreicher-Mollwo, 1992: 85). On the other hand, crows are beautiful creatures. Beth is able to see this double side:

high above [...] the crows still wheeled and called. There were not so many today. [...] they peck at the eyes of sickly lambs, blinding them, bringing them down in a stumbling pile. Then they feed well. Nor do they pity the exhausted ewe, stained and torn by lambing. They will eat, tearing their tiny strips of living flesh. But a crow is a beautiful bird, sleek, black, darkly handsome. (50)

Besides, those gathering in the mountain point to the atrocity perpetrated by Roland and act as a warning sign. Another vivid example of beautiful but cruel nature is given by the Wandering Monarch—a type of butterfly—and its battle for survival against magpies:

in spring the Monarchs would swoop and dip around, providing the magpies with easy food. Sometimes she'd seen the chase. The Monarch would take defensive action, folding and unfolding its wings with quick, scissor-like movements, veering left and right, up and down so that the snapping beak of the magpie as he missed his prey each time could clearly be heard in the still air. (12-13)

The forest is imbued with the aura of the past, as if it were stuck in time. It is full of human remains from the past and the natural landscape shows signs of antiquity, such as erosion. For instance, the valley is enclosed by round, worn mountains or hills (6, 47). This is how Elvira depicts it:

an old river valley, where the river [...] waters the remnants of dairy cattle that leave tracks in its white sands. Although it's very close to Sydney, there is a nineteenth-century feel about it. One old fellow not far from Robin still uses his Clydesdales⁴ and boasts of not having left the valley in eighty years. It's a slow place with something of the pace of the distant western plains about it. (18)

Although Australia is the oldest continent (Vaisutis et al., 2008: 59-60), in the collective imaginary it lacks the antiquity of other lands because white occupation started rather late. For this reason, human ruins in the forest are not as antique as ancient Western monuments. The novel

⁴ A Clydesdale is a breed of horse, originally from the Scottish region of that name.

hints at this when it evokes the image of monuments erected by an ancient civilisation, such as Stonehenge in England: “Soon the sun would stand on top of the mountain, the first of its rays brimming over the ridge like a photographic image from Stonehenge” (125). In this way, the text highlights the relative modernity of architectural human traces in Australia. Most of these traces are even unworthy of praise. For instance, there is a strand of barbed wire running

ankle level like a trip wire along the top of the bank. It must have been the top strand of a sunken, forgotten fence that years of flood-shifted soil had covered. There could very well be two or three such fences, all on top of each other, like the ancient cities the archaeologists find, piled one above the other, with centuries of time and earth between them. (51)

These remains display attempts to civilise the forest, fences having actually become a common presence in the Australian landscape. However, if people do not continuously draw the limits —either because they become careless or because they abandon the place—, nature quickly recolonises its stolen property and leaves it in ruins. This can be connected with the sublime, as the Romantics did. According to them, ruins are “an expression of Nature’s power over the creations of man” (Varma, 1987: 20).

There seems to be an ongoing battle between nature and human beings. The latter colonise, but once they turn their backs, nature strikes back: “[Beth’s] first of her Monday jobs [...] was to clean out the fowls’ water containers, ridding them of the build-up of rotting twigs, leaves, waste material and the green algae that started to develop every week” (61). Also notice the recolonised ruins of the old gothic church in the forest:

The church lacked harmony; its gothic windows were too large for it; as if the builders had run out of stone and had had to make the whole structure smaller than the architect had planned. Like a ruin from a European painting, the chapel rose out of the bony southern soil. Beth walked inside, instinctively treading softly on the bark-littered floor. It was a curious sensation to let her eyes move over and up the sandstone walls, past the empty arches of windows and up to the ceiling of clear blue sky and clouds. Oddly disturbing to see treetops nodding in clumps where the vaulted roof should have been. (67)

The lack of harmony of the church may derive either from its European style that marks it out as not originally Australian, or from the disturbance it causes to the natural landscape. What seems clear is the fact that nature has won the day. Nature and civilisation do not blend together, as can be glimpsed in some scenes set in the city, where nature has been domesticated with an uncertain degree of success — “[At the zoo, Beth and Stephen] strolled around the pleasant walks, admiring or sympathetic to the different enclosed beasts” (44)— or where nature has learnt to make the most of its shared space with humankind, such as the seagulls Elvira sees feeding on human food: “Seagulls shrieked over bits of yesterday’s pie-crusts. Such lovely birds. Such awful manners” (20-21).

In this battle for power, the effects of humans on nature are much more devastating. People are, more often than not, destructive. Their passing through the forest leaves signs hard to remove: the pollution caused by vehicles —“‘Honey, I can smell the honey.’ The air was thick with it, but as soon as she [Beth] caught it, it vanished and was replaced with the vinyl odours of car and petrol” (47); the motorcyclists that often ride through the bush polluting and disturbing its tranquillity —“she could hear the ugly diminuendo and crescendo of his to-ing and fro-ing in the afternoon. He sounded like a giant blowfly knocking

against the walls of the world, now far, now near” (51); or the old and useless fences that populate the landscape —“the fence [...] still kept wandering cattle from her [Beth’s] garden” (8); “beyond a failing fence, the open paddock gave on to the treelined creek. [...Beth] waited [...] as they climbed over the useless fence” (76-77).

The spirit of the past can mainly be found in the characters’ houses. Beth’s has no electricity, so she has to use candles. Her house is old, scarcely decorated and ramshackle, meaningfully compared to Stonehenge due to its unknown origins and antiquity. There is also a mysterious carving:

The house she lived in was very old and also needed a deal of work done on it. There were two rooms of stone which she imagined were the original farmhouse. In one of them, the one she used as a living-room, was an immense fireplace, made of three huge blocks, like the dolmens of Stonehenge. And in the centre of the mantelpiece block was a crude carving. She’d never been able to work out just what it was. Sometimes it looked like a conventional floral or acorn motif; at other times, she thought she could see a grotesque face that moved in the flickering firelight, wrinkling its stony features and sneering with carved lips. (13)

Two newer rooms adjoin the stone rooms, but they also contain old elements. One room is a kitchen with an old neglected range (13-14). The other room is a bathroom, which has been partly invaded by the bush. It has “an ancient tub with ball and claw legs” which has

a rubber hose inserted through a crude hole in the fibro from where it snaked up outside into the tank whenever a bath was needed. Beside this tank was another very old one, holed and useless and covered in a tangle of grape and passion-fruit vines. Crickets sang from inside it on summer evenings. (14)

As her neighbour Robin puts it, in her house: “there’s nothing [...] that’s not functional” (19). It seems that, to some extent, Beth’s house simply fits in the surrounding wilderness, almost as if it were part of the mountain that protects it. The inhabitants of Robin’s house seem to

have tried a little harder to turn their old house more homely with “posters and the like” in the bedrooms, or a “nice arrangement of dried grasses and leaves” and an abstract painting in the living room (27). Nonetheless, it basically remains an old and dilapidated space. Elvira comments on her arrival: “It is like living a hundred years ago” (25). The house has no electricity. There are

some ancient cretonne curtains at the windows, all faded [...]. The floor coverings are old and worn [...]. There’s a bathroom in the cream and green of the Fifties with a cold water tap over the sink and the bath. Of course, there’s no toilet inside, but a pit down the back garden [...]. The original back verandah has been closed in with louvres and lino and it is here, on peeling veneer cupboards, that the collection of kerosene lamps sits. (27-28)

The boundaries between the inside and the outside are often blurred: nature makes forays into civilisation and viceversa. The rundown condition of the houses prevents their inside from being a comforting refuge against any external threat. The building of fences and locking of doors and windows seem ineffective. The first time Beth’s property is trespassed, doors and windows prove useless. She is woken up by her dog, which points to the kitchen door: “an old wooden one through which moonlight streamed like water; fine cracks had weathered down its length” (16). And this is the state of the windows: “She set the candle on the wooden windowsill [...] where it was dimly reflected in the sheet of faded iron that closed up the window. She felt very glad of that piece of iron, but couldn’t avoid looking up uneasily to the small opening at the top” (17). Not only can plants and animals trespass these limits, but also people. This is the case with Beth’s farm, which has been broken into by a mysterious person: “I think there’s someone asleep at my place” (99). She wonders who would invade her

house if she left, whoever is watching her, or nature: “Would they run in giggling as soon as she turned the corner in the dusty road? Or would the house stay eerily empty with the sun and the moon in turn staring into the neglected rooms and the little foxes and feral cats soiling the unswept stone floor?” (69-70). In this way, the lack of safety associated with inner spaces contributes to stressing the vulnerability of humankind when left alone in the wild with little or rudimentary technology. People do not only become weaker and easy prey for nature, but for other people too.

The novel also brings to the fore the clash between the city and the country. The characters are urban dwellers who voluntarily draw themselves to a primitive lifestyle in the bush. They leave Sydney behind along with the facilities civilisation provides, rejecting materialistic values and the culture of capitalism. Stephen shows this philosophy of life when he proposes Beth to move. He tells her about

his growing disenchantment with the business, the venality of the people they had to deal with, their greed, their possession, not by demons, but by bits and pieces of furniture and things. One night he'd given her an antique ring of amethyst and gold. 'But no [...]. You love that one. You can't give it to me.' 'It's been said that you only really own something when you give it away. [...] I'm just consolidating my ownership of it.' (44)

In the bush, they are self-sufficient. They barter or sell what they produce to get money or whatever they need: “Beth had bought Sam from a girl who was leaving the valley to live in Sydney, paying for him with honey and vegetables” (48); “She made a half-hearted list of the groceries she'd need to buy soon [...]. She checked through her money; the amount was dwindling. Soon she'd have to get the honey and perhaps try and sell a few eggs” (52). The characters follow the lifestyle

promoted in the 1960s by hippies and other groups of people who moved to the country to live according to a different set of values from those imposed by “the rat-race of city life”. The communes of Nimbin in northern New South Wales continue to be well-known alternative communities whose population has also absorbed surfers and musicians, “establishing Byron Bay as *the* alternative country/coastal destination” in Australia (Elder, 2007: 313. Original emphasis). It is significant that the forest in *Tooth and Claw* is situated in Arcadia. Although there is a real Arcadia some miles northwest of Sydney, the mythological connotations of the name are most revealing. According to Greek mythology, Arcadia of Peloponnesus is an idyllic land. It is “the domain of Pan, the virgin wilderness home of the god of the forest and his court of dryads, nymphs and other spirits of nature”. This myth inspired Roman writer Virgil to create his *Eclogues*, a series of poems set in Arcadia. Due to Virgil’s influence on medieval European literature, Arcadia became an emblem of pastoral simplicity: “It became to be seen as the symbol of [the] spontaneous result of life lived naturally, uncorrupted by civilization” (Karadas, 2008: 81), a meaning which prevails to the present.

When Beth and Stephen move to the forest, the crossing of boundaries to this new wild world is symbolised by the image of Caronte and the dog Cerberus. As they are on a ferry, crossing a “flat, black river”, “snaked by wavering moon and starlight”, Stephen comments: “Did you see the ferryman? [...]. He’s got a dog with three heads” (47). In Greek mythology, the Underworld is ruled by Hades. His ferryman is

Caronte. He ferries the dead across a boundary-river into the Underworld (Hard, 2004: 113). Cerberus, Hades' hound, is on the other side. His task is to prevent the dead from leaving the Underworld. He is typically depicted as monstrous. He has three heads, a snake for a tail and serpents coming out from other parts of his body (2004: 62). As Hesiod writes:

A fearsome dog keeps pitiless guard in front, and has a nasty trick: he fawns on all who enter with wagging tail and both ears down, but he will not allow them to go out again, no, he keeps a careful guard and devours anyone whom he catches trying to go out through the gates of mighty Hades and dread Persephone. (In Hard: 2004: 112)

In *Tooth and Claw*, Stephen's association of their crossing with the crossing into the Underworld can be read as their metaphorical death to the world they had been living in so far and their fresh start in the forest. Besides, in mythology those mortals who cross the river while they are still alive can calm Cerberus down by giving him a honey cake (Hard, 2004: 114). There are hives in Beth and Stephen's new house, and the air meaningfully smells of honey (47). Hence, they possess an important weapon if they know how to use it properly. They both will in their own way, as will be seen.

II.2.2. A Wicked Man this Way Comes

As the boundaries between inside/outside and civilisation/wilderness are so weak, intruders are a constant threat in *Tooth and Claw*: Beth and Stephen, as well as their hippie neighbours at Willowglen, intrude into the forest while the forest also intrudes into their properties; Elvira leaves Sydney to intrude into Robin's life again; tourists go through the

forest (10) and motorcyclists are continuously invading on their noisy vehicles: "A long way off [...] she could hear the motorbike" (88); "The buzz of the bikes started up and, within minutes, the valley was silent again, the sound of the fading engines dominated by the nearby flies" (145). But the main and most dangerous intruder is Roland, the mysterious watcher who tries to frighten Beth out of her farm so that he can search for the drug Stephen hid somewhere behind the house. His identity remains a mystery until the middle of the book, when Beth discovers that he is the intruder who killed her chickens. However, he is presented as a bad and unreliable person from the very beginning.

Roland is the gothic villain of the novel. Devendra Varma states that the mission of villains is: "to frighten the heroines, to pursue them through the vaults and labyrinths of the castle, to harass them at every turn" (1987: 19). This is what Roland does in the forest. He harasses Beth. He belongs to the category of the pre-Romantic or pre-Byronic villain⁵ in that he does not have any kind of moral conflict. He lacks psychological depth and philosophical complexity. He does evil because he is evil, so readers cannot sympathise with him at all: "[He] acknowledges the moral codes of society and his own wickedness in violating those codes" (Thorslev, 1965: 53). Peter L. Thorslev draws a parallel between this gothic villain and Satan before being romanticised:

He has attractive characteristics [...], his air of the fallen angel, and his romantic mystery, but he is not yet a Romantic rebel. To become a

⁵ The Gothic villain of the first novels suffered an evolution and "was transformed into the stalwart Romantic figure who finally became 'the Byronic hero', an evolving, changing concept, although individual and distinctive in each of his manifestations. Byron's narrative heroes are cast in the true Gothic mould, verging on the metaphysical superman, victims of Destiny, fired by vengeance and suffering from remorse" (Varma, 1987: 191).

Romantic hero he must take on some of the characteristics of the Hero of Sensibility, and he must be able to enlist at least a portion of our sympathies in his rebellion against society. (1965: 57)

Despite the multiple versions of this type of villain, on the whole, his physical appearance is “striking, and frequently handsome. Of about middle age or somewhat younger, he has a tall, manly, stalwart physique, with dark hair and brows frequently set off by a pale and ascetic complexion. Aside from this, the most noticeable of his physical characteristics are his eyes” (1965: 53). His personality is enigmatic, and so are his acts. He is strong-willed, forceful, engaged in evil deeds to the very end and has an ingenious mind which helps him to “device endless machinations of evil” (1965: 54).⁶

Roland’s portrayal fits in this model of gothic villain. Physically, he is “tall, dark and, Beth thought wryly, almost handsome had it not been for the strange modelling of his nose and brow and the lines of strain on his forehead, deeply etched into the young skin” (41). The physical peculiarity that Beth notices may be a sign of his unreliability. It is also significant that Roland is dark-haired as well as Declan, his accomplice. By contrast, Stephen is fair-haired. He is “the thoughtful one, quieter than the others” (41), the one who decides to quit drug dealing. He spoils Roland’s plans by stealing and hiding the drug. As Beth recalls: “[He was] not often involved in the noisy horseplay that sometimes filled the showroom and office. Roland wearing a grotesque Melanesian mask, chasing Declan out into the street and bumping blindly into a shocked

⁶ Critics have classified gothic villains into different categories according to their attributes. However, they sometimes differ at the time of inserting a particular villain into one category or another. See, for instance, Peter L. Thorslev (1965), Elizabeth MacAndrew (1979: 81-82) and Devendra Varma (1987: 215-216).

passer-by” (41-42). As this scene shows, Roland likes scaring people. Beth gets a real insight on him after he plays a prank on her. One morning, Roland puts a stuffed snake on Beth’s chair to frighten her. He almost scares her to literal death as she suffers a severe asthma attack and has to go to hospital. Roland apologises and does not play any other joke on her. However, Beth realises that he is a man capable of evil, somebody who enjoys the suffering of others. She cannot forgive him:

she’d realised that it hadn’t only been the sudden terror of the seeming snake that had induced the attack. What had really deeply horrified and frightened her to the point where the air was blocked from her lungs had been the realisation that Roland, for his pleasure and amusement, had done that to her. He had subjected her to a mental form of assault and battery no less dreadful because it had been a joke. She had treated him warily from then on. He’d never tricked her again; indeed, he’d gone out of his way to be considerate and kindly towards her. But she’d sometimes look at his odd, good-looking face and his mirrored eyes and wonder what sort of person it is that derives pleasure from the pain and fear of another. (43)

Apart from a sadist, Roland is powerful and manages to subject everybody to his will. He used to be the leader of the business. He obtains his power by bullying, such as when he forces Beth to eat the mushrooms she has cooked (136), or by exploiting the weaknesses of others. As Declan says: “Roland always gets at one’s weak spot, Beth. He has a genius for it” (131). He uses Sam to make Beth co-operate (132-133) and masters Declan by using his addiction to drugs: “He’s my creature”, he proudly confesses to Beth (141). He is basically moved by greed: “I have to get what I came for and get out. I’ve got to wait for someone. He’s late already and I’ve got a small plane to catch the day after tomorrow. Then I’ll be free. Safe and free. And rich” (122). It seems that nothing can deter him from obtaining what he wants.

Roland is the reason why Stephen decides to quit his job and escape from Sydney:

‘I’ve got some money. I want to get out of the city —away from Roland. He’s doing something I can’t [...] Will you come with me? I’ve found a place I want to buy.’ His voice was tense. [...] ‘Stephen! [...] You’re frightened of something.’ [...] ‘Not frightened. Fed up’ ‘But why? What’s Roland doing?’ ‘I don’t like some of his imports.’ (45)

Beth ignores why Stephen and Roland have quarrelled. She once rings the shop to talk to Declan, but Roland answers the phone. To her regret, she gives away the name of their whereabouts. Consequently, Stephen decides to face Roland. As he puts it: to “point a few things out to him. I can make sure he doesn’t bother us” (49). Stephen promises to tell Beth what is happening when he returns, but he never does. Some days later, he is found hanged in the shop. The circumstances of his death are not clear: “The Coroner had found an open verdict: Stephen’s toes were just touching the floor. [...] For many months after, she [Beth] had found the three possibilities equally impossible. Not suicide, not murder, nor an accident” (88). The fact that Beth wonders how Stephen can get so much money, and so quickly, to buy the farm (9) makes us link the money to his death and those “dark imports” mentioned above. At that moment, Beth and readers do not know those imports are drugs, so the following questions arise: Was he doing anything illegal with Roland and Declan? Does it have anything to do with the antiques they trade in? Might the whole business be a cover-up? When we read about the discovery of Stephen’s corpse, there are enough clues to conclude that his death is not accidental, and that Roland is involved. The little but selective information about this villainous character is

essential to portray him as unreliable. As the story develops, our suspicions about him gain strength and are finally confirmed.

After his identity has been uncovered, his wickedness becomes more noticeable: “He shot her a look of contempt and laughed, short and sharp as a needle” (130); “[Referring to Declan’s singing] ‘Shut that bloody noise off! Now!’ The rage in his voice made Beth tighten up” (140); “Roland exhaled such a sigh of hatred that she nearly dropped the weapon (141). His pleasure in submitting others is witnessed by Beth again when he forces her to eat the mushrooms: “as she raised her eyes to his, she saw something curious. He didn’t really suspect, she was sure, that she’d poisoned the food. Roland was enjoying this. It was the same sort of mindless bullying that she’d seen adults subject children to” (136). Although Beth had already glimpsed the real Roland some time ago, she still cannot believe it. As a stereotypical gothic villain, his appearance and manners can be deceptive: “She looked around the dark kitchen, the silent man now seated again and looking no more dangerous or mad than anyone does who sits at a kitchen table, fiddling with a salt cellar” (122); “last night’s terrifying encounter with Roland [...] seemed no longer to be possible, particularly now as the man wiped his lips and folded his knife and fork like a well-mannered schoolboy. He seemed reasonable and peaceful enough now. But he had struck Sam and he’d frightened her badly” (126). Beth does not let herself be fooled: “I don’t know what would become of us if I let you go. You don’t know Roland”, Declan tells her. “I know enough to be very frightened of him. I’ve seen that side of him”, answers Beth (131).

There is a crucial detail that contributes to portraying Roland as a villain. He is often associated with snakes.⁷ Beth's asthma attack, brought on by Roland's fake snake, is similar to being choked to death by a real snake:

The snake was stuffed. She struck at it and it fell stiffly to the ground, its glass eye winking as it rocked and finally lay still. Beth's hands gripped the back of the chair. She was choking. She couldn't breathe. The relief that had flooded through her had turned into something rigid that stopped her throat. A menacing itch under her chin seemed to indicate where the knot was being drawn. Tighter and tighter it drew. (42)

Notice that the eyes of the snake are made of glass, connecting it with Roland when Beth refers to his "mirrored eyes" (43). These are other instances when Roland is related to snakes: when Beth phones him, "the hiss of his voice" shocks her (49); when Beth meets Roland on her farm, "his arm lashed out like a snake and grabbed her wrist, cruelly crushing it until her muscles recoiled in agony and the gun slipped from her fingers" (119), and then it is as if he tried to hypnotise her, as some snakes do to their victims —"His eyes were dilated, his voice had a soothing, professional quality to it, as if he were a social worker, or a nurse. His dark eyes shone blankly, like mirrors" (120)—; while he is chasing Beth with a rope to strangle her, the rope is "flapping horribly like a furious snake" (146). In addition, Beth's bouts of asthma are somehow linked to Roland. Her first attack is provoked by the snake joke mentioned before (42). Then, her asthma returns when Roland appears in the forest. It strikes again as she is going to confront him, invoking the image of the snake again. On her way back to her farm:

⁷ In Christianity, the snake is the source of evil. In the Bible, the Tree of Life is encircled by a snake, representing the close relationship between life and perversion (Cirlot, 1978: 409).

“the old enemy. The old constriction, the tightening of the windpipe as her body turned on itself, stiffening into rigidity like the shellacked coils of Roland’s cobra. [...] her hands rubbed to scratch it away, tear it away before it choked her” (94). In the chasing scene with the rope, she suffers another attack. In her imagination, this last bout is perceived as if Roland had caught up with her and were strangling her:

She imagined the feel of the rope as he pulled it tighter and tighter around her neck [...]. It would be something like the pain she was feeling now, but more constricted, choking, she’d be unable to breathe at all, not even in these tearing heavens. [...] Then, with desperate horror, she felt the phantom itch encircle her neck. The itch he’d started years ago with his cobra was around her neck again, tightening, choking, doing his murderous work for him. (147)

It must be noted that Roland often kills as snakes do, by suffocation. He strangles or hangs his victims: he hangs Stephen (88) and Beth’s fowls (61-62), he threatens to break Sam’s neck (127) and he tries to strangle Beth with Sam’s rope (145). This is the villain Beth has to confront. She will do it all by herself, presenting an unrelenting attitude worthy of a heroine.

II.2.3. Beth: A Heroine in Distress

The figure of the heroine has changed throughout history. It has evolved from heroines in whose “apparently passive attitudes of waiting and homesickness lie the seeds of independence and even resistance” —like those of Antiquity described by Hesiod and Homer, who are limited to being “accessories” to the men, such as heroes’ or gods’ mothers, daughters, wives and mistresses—, to heroines who, in contrast, “do not

wait around for the absent hero but become travellers like him”.⁸

Female gothic literature has enormously contributed to this change.

Ann Radcliffe was the first to present an active gothic heroine, a model taken and developed by later writers:

[She] undermines the hierarchy of “home” and “world” by allowing her heroines as well as her heroes both unassailable virtue and space to move beyond the restrictions of “the proprieties” set by critics and others interested in the reformation of morals. Too much innocence is hazardous, Radcliffe concludes, to a heroine’s health. She needs knowledge, not protection from the truth. (Ellis, 1989: xiii)

Critic Ellen Moers reads the heroine of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* as capable and points to the misconception about the typical gothic heroine as an essentially passive victim, a role promoted by some male authors. She remarks that the capable gothic heroine

sounds like a travesty of the familiar Gothic heroine, that is because of what was done with the figure by the male writers who followed Mrs. Radcliffe. For most of them—an interesting exception is the American novelist Charles Brockden Brown—the Gothic heroine was quintessentially a defenceless victim, a weakling, a whimpering, trembling, cowering little piece of propriety whose sufferings are the source of her erotic fascination. (1985: 137)

In her own particular way, Beth follows the pattern initiated by Ann Radcliffe, which culminated in Charlotte Brontë’s heroines. Beth is strong, independent and resourceful. She can perfectly live on her own, far away from civilisation and other people, a condition she becomes completely harmonious with at the end of the story. She describes herself as “a sort of unwalled anchorite” and is not “too sure she could be bothered with having someone else around, particularly a man” (11). She does not worry about her physical appearance any more, whether she looks attractive or not. She declares that thanks to her loneliness: “she didn’t have to worry about how she behaved or how she looked [...]”

⁸ “Heroines”, 2011: n.p.

All her clothing was now the same colour; a faded grey that had resulted from washing them together too often in water that had the earth in it" (11). Her chosen solitude and lifestyle are regarded as strange by other people. Robin writes to Elvira that Beth is living "like a Carmelite" (19). She thinks that her neighbours probably consider her "some kind of savage [...] unused to social dialogue" (84).

As she lives alone in the forest, close to a river, in a house situated in a place where she can almost see the whole valley, she compares herself to the Lady of Shalott of the Arthurian legend: "There she would sit like the Lady of Shalott, looking past her tapestry, out over the sheltered valley and up to the far mountains" (14). In the nineteenth century, Alfred Tennyson contributed to the Arthurian myth with his poem "The Lady of Shalott" (1842). It tells the tragic story of this lady who lives on the island of Shalott. The world she can see from her abode is the highway to Camelot. She cannot see it directly, but through a mirror, because a mysterious curse will fall on her if she looks down at Camelot. She spends her time weaving the mirror's sights. One day, Lancelot passes near Shalott and she leaves the web to look down at Camelot. The mirror breaks and the curse unravels. She takes a boat and dies on her way to Camelot (Tennyson, 2011: n.p.). Beth is similarly seen as a tragic lady by other people. Robin describes her as "an odd, lonely soul with a tight set face. There's even something tragic about her" (18). So does Elvira. Before going to the forest, she conceives of Beth as a "mysterious, far-away lady" (19), "the tragic lady" (20). However, an important difference with the Lady of Shalott is that Beth's

ending is not tragic at all. The Lady is punished with death for defying her cruel destiny. Beth, by contrast, is given the chance to manage her life as she wishes, as will be seen.

Beth does not live completely alone. She has a dog, Sam, who becomes her “true friend and companion” (76). Sam is a fierce huge dog with black fur and honey-coloured eyes. He sometimes brings mythical Cerberus to mind. He only obeys Beth and acts as her guardian:

Whenever someone started the walk up to the farmhouse, Sam would already have announced their presence, minutes before she'd have been able to see them. Firstly, he stopped whatever he was doing. Then he stood alert, ears erect. The hair of his back would stiffen and stand upright as he made a sound [...] like a coarse purr. Then [...] he would move to stand in front of her. Not at all in the way a cowardly dog might run to the safety of his master's legs, but a deliberate moving of himself between her and the intruder [...], shuddering with aggression. [...] It wasn't until she relaxed, moved forward and then greeted whoever it was, that Sam would unbend and trot beside her, wagging his tail like a good host. She had never tested his utmost reaction. (10)

Robin is afraid of Sam and regards him as a monster: “She has this monstrous dog and every day I have to wait until she sees me and greets me. I don't like to think what would happen if I tried to ignore the bloody dog” (18). In spite of this show of aggressiveness to strangers, Sam is also depicted as a friendly dog, sometimes behaving like a puppy. Of course, this is mainly perceived by Beth: he has “benign eyes” for her (9), he usually likes “rolling or snapping at flies” (14) and he makes good friends with Elvira's horse (90). Paradoxically, his invincible appearance is sometimes undermined by his cowardly behaviour: he is unable to stop trespassers —“Someone had come in the night and done this [...] and he had let them. ‘Oh, go away,’ she said bitterly as he knocked against her [...] He walked sadly away to flop gracelessly under the table, lowing his head on to his paws, looking up at her from under

gabled brows” (69)— and he panics upon meeting the horrible figure in the mountain (118). In fact, he sometimes looks more like a victim. Elvira dares to approach him and carelessly ties him to a tree because he is chasing her cat. This action infuriates Beth who has to go to his rescue. Due to the last events —her chickens having been hanged—, she panics upon hearing his whining call: “they’ve got Sam, she thought. They’re hanging him. [...] she saw Sam dancing like a bear on the end of his rope. She ran to him and knelt beside him while he licked and whimpered, the rope cutting cruelly into his neck as he strained against it” (76). The next morning: “[Sam] was sulking, [...] and barely lifted his tail at her greeting” (81).

Roland also ties Sam and uses him to control Beth. But it is thanks to Sam that Beth can escape. He attacks Roland and gets badly shot. He survives, but the wounds deform him drastically and he turns more aggressive to strangers. Elvira is unable to recognise him at first when she visits Beth some months later. He is tied to blind Declan’s wrist:⁹

The beast looked terrible. Its lower lips hung down from the jaw, showing the row of savage teeth. It was snarling softly, but its eyes, like the man’s, didn’t seem to be able to focus properly on me. It walked with a deliberate step, but it was pulling to one side like a car with sticking brakes. I started to feel scared [...] Then I saw with a shock that it was Sam [...] ‘Sam! Sam! It’s me. Elvira. You remember me.’ But it kept snarling and tacking at me like something from a horror film. [...] ‘Do something! Control it! It’s gone mad or something [...], make it stop!’ (152)

Declan answers laughing: “What makes you think I can do anything? What makes you think I’m controlling it?” (152). There is still only one person who can control it: Beth. As she tells Elvira:

⁹ As Beth tells Elvira, Declan has gone blind after drinking wood alcohol (154).

I'm just so pleased he's alive. I nearly lost him. I suppose he might be dangerous. He takes orders still from me. Perhaps one day he won't. Then I'll have to make a very difficult decision.' 'Is he getting worse then?' She shrugged. 'He's never gone for me.' 'What about anyone else?' She didn't answer this. (156)

Beth's silence to Elvira's question enhances the dangerous nature of the dog. The total dominion of Beth over her dog is significant because as a huge male dog, he comes to stand for the masculine. Despite Sam's size and belligerence, he is dominated by a woman and wholly dependent on her, a woman who has the power to kill him if one day he dares to disobey her orders.

Beth is used to solitude, "living simply and quietly" (40). Her parents died when she was a small child, so she was brought up by her grandmother. She has pleasant memories of those days with her. Unfortunately, her grandmother died when she was sixteen, leaving her "abandoned and quite alone" (41). She managed to survive, and one year later, she found a job as a secretary for Roland, Declan and Stephen. Alone in the bush now, and affected by Stephen's death, she does not always regard her loneliness as positive. She thinks that she has become a barbarian who lives "like a beast. What would Stephen think if he could see her? Spiritless, beaten down by useless drudgery" (46). She wonders: "Who would wish to live as she did? What rare person with another source of income would want to spend hours a week working when others were relaxing, and all for a nice plate of spuds and an egg or two?" (11). When she moves momentarily to Willowglen, she is glad because she is, "at least, no longer alone" (75). However, she feels different, excluded and an intruder, even lonelier

than when she was really alone: “she was feeling, in the comparatively crowded house, the heaviest sense of loneliness she’d experienced for years” (80). She confesses to Elvira that she is not used to company: “I’ve gone feral. Wild, I think. I wouldn’t be able to stay here for very long” (89). Robin likes her and tells her so, but she does not want to have any kind of relationship with any man at that moment, though she feels “grateful for Robin’s small attention” (80). She is aware that her neighbours might consider her weird, an opinion they actually hold throughout the story. As Elvira reflects before visiting Beth at the end: “She is a bit odd, I think. Too much living alone isn’t good for you” (151).

Perhaps in part on account of her loneliness, Beth is the character who is the closest to nature. Her concern for animals and plants stands out in comparison with the other characters. Just notice that upon arriving at Willowglen, the first thing she does is to water some pot plants and the next day she starts looking after her neighbours’ neglected garden to bring it back to life (82). Although her behaviour shows that she can fit well in the forest, she suffers a gradual adaptation: from self-abandonment, sadness and fear to self-satisfaction and happiness. Reflecting on her decision to leave her life in Sydney, she has crossed feelings: “I’ve really gone and done it now [...]. Left my job without notice, ruined my employment history. But I’ve always been sensible and reliable. Perhaps, just once, you’re allowed some irresponsibility. She was feeling a little frightened but also elated”

(46). She prefers her current lonely life in the forest, though she feels dispirited. She thinks that she is not succeeding:

Sometimes she thought she must sell up, take the money and buy a little place in town, look for a job. But that seemed even more undesirable to her than the odd, driven life she was leading now. Also, she doubted her ability—which had never been good—to move in the ordinary world again, especially after such a long time. Yet nor could she live this way successfully either, it seemed. (8)

This ambiguous attitude prevails until the end, when she adopts a much more positive view of her current lifestyle, as will be seen.

Beth is sometimes afraid of living in the bush. She does not feel safe because anyone can turn up unexpectedly. That is why the creaking verandah is so reassuring: “you’d always know if someone was here” (48). Cutting wood is essential in her new life, but she is haunted by the fear of chopping off a foot with the axe. She imagines that in that event she would sit “in shock, staring at the spouting stump” (57). She also fears to get stung by a bee, become allergic and be unable to get proper help in such a remote area: “Allergies can happen any time and she’d had waking nightmares about struggling to get down the drive as her face and windpipe and eyes blew up, until she could neither see nor breathe, and collapsed in a bloated heap in a ditch by the side of the road” (57). On the other hand, she recognises that humans can be more frightening. If the watcher were an animal, she “would not be alarmed by that; only her own kind could arouse that feeling” (7). Beth’s ability to read nature helps her to gather confidence in an uncivilised environment. Her understanding of the forest saves her life. In order to escape Roland, she hides in the wild. She knows her surroundings well, which gives her more power and a chance to defeat her persecutor: “She

raced on, confident in the way her feet knew the lie of the land” (146). And it is nature in the form of bees that finally saves her.

Bees play an important role in *Tooth and Claw*. Beth often observes them or thinks about them: “She had slept late, for it was already covered with sunlight and she could no longer see the bees on their early flight” (17); “Outside the bees sang in the heat of the day and she thought how by now their honeycombs would be adhering again to the ceilings of the hives” (140). Their constant presence is part of the landscape: “She [...] turned around. Nothing. Just the early morning stillness and the bees flying in their hundreds against the dark background of the unlit mountain” (6). Their image comes to mind also through indirect references to honey, mead or wax: “She made a cup of tea and stirred it with honey” (50); “After the washing was out, she would sit in the garden under the pepper tree in an old cane chair reading and sipping [mead] as the bees hummed and the locusts sang” (60); “she set the candle on the wooden windowsill in a drop of its hardening wax” (17). Bees are invested with a positive meaning in the novel.¹⁰ However, as part of nature, they can be contradictory. They provide honey and wax, but their stings hurt and can even kill. Their suicidal behaviour protecting their hive may seem irrational, but these insects are quite intelligent. As Beth reflects: “They must have a sinister

¹⁰ Bees and honey are pervasive in many myths and imbued with positive connotations. The skill of bees at producing honey and wax has captivated humans from ancient times. Those goddesses represented by the symbol of the bee were related to abundance as food and light —honey and wax— providers. Among other many positive views of bees, they have symbolised Mother Earth, the soul and rebirth, wisdom, speech and eloquence, and their hard work and organisation ruled by a queen have made them emblems of industrious and prosperous societies, royalty and empires (Easton, 2008: 76-77; “Mythology of Bees Honey”: n.p.).

understanding of the weaknesses of humans [...]. What knowledge made them drive blindly and suicidally into the face? [...] But that was their way. They were knowing creatures. Often she'd watched the bee dance, only recently deciphered" (56).

Beth is thrilled upon discovering the hives on the farm. Her love of these insects was transmitted by her grandmother, who had some hives in her garden. She was a sort of bee enchantress:

Beth had liked to watch her handling the bees, talking to them, letting them walk all over her hands in shimmering clusters. Grandmother was rarely stung; she scorned to wear protective clothing, just her veil. 'Little brownies,' she'd said to them, using their old name. [...] Like many beekeepers, she believed that the bees must be told all the household news or they'd leave in disgust. [...] Sometimes she'd hear them quieten at the sound of her grandmother's voice, to become noisier after she'd spoken, almost as if they were excitedly talking all at once, gossiping about the news. (54)

Beth's bees are a dangerous kind. They have gone feral because the original queens have been replaced

by a wild aggressive strain, not native of course —native bees don't sting—but wild from generations of undomesticated living. They were feral bees that had taken their courtly life out of white-walled palaces and learned to live in hollow trunks and ditches, banks and caves, gaining strength and viciousness with each new generation, until they were a mad, sullen breed that lived by the code of *kamikaze*. (53. Original emphasis)

Beth tries to follow her grandmother's teaching as she deals with her bees to take their honey. Nevertheless, she has to use a veil and smoke to calm them down, which oddly seems to anger them even more. She connects this behaviour with their collective memory of old practices to obtain honey: "Perhaps they had race memories of fire raging and incinerating their homes. In the old days, the woven hives were burnt each year for the honey and the generous workers perished in the fires" (53). She is also critical about new barbaric practices in agriculture. Pesticides kill birds and bees, and leave unfertilised blossoms to wither.

Orchard growers buy bees to get their trees fertilised. After the bees have done their duty, they are poisoned or burnt: “No one can be bothered, no one has the time, to harvest their store, set them up for winter, care for them till next spring” (54). Through Beth’s description of the ill-treatment of bees by humans, the novel conveys an environmental message. It denounces both the abuse inflicted on these insects and the future implications of these barbaric actions led by human greed —“business is business” (54). The fate of bees does not only affect bees, but all living beings too. As is well-known, bees play a fundamental role in pollination, and thus in the perpetuation of life.

The bees in *Tooth and Claw* can also be read from an Australian socio-historical perspective. The only literal mention of the Indigenous population in the novel is when Beth sees the tarot card of the hangman. It reminds her of the position in which some Aborigines stand: “[The card] was of a young man all in green, standing on one leg, the other bent in to rest on his knee, in the stance favoured by some Aborigines” (85). In a more subtle way, the Aboriginal appears in the shape of bees, as a metaphor for Australian colonisation and traumatic racial memories. Beth comments that her bees might have race memories of fire, of how their hives were burnt to get honey. Accordingly, the bees can be construed as the Indigenous population, and the burning of their hives as the appropriation and destruction of their home —the Australian land— by the colonisers —the heartless farmers. The fact that honey is compared to gold (56, 58) makes this parallelism between the hives and the land even stronger, Australia

being especially exploited during the nineteenth-century Gold Rush. This race memory of slaughter and home destruction is what makes Beth's bees dangerous. They are angry and unwilling to be controlled by the colonisers' threatening smoke, so they revolt in their own name and in the name of their ancestors, maybe in search of retribution. From a different perspective, the bees can allude to the failure of the colonising project if the fact that Beth's bees are not native is taken into account. They belong to the European honey bee species, a yellow-brown bee introduced by settlers around 1822 to produce honey. This so-called "commercial bee" is used for honey and crop pollination in Australia, but feral nests can be found everywhere.¹¹ In this light, the threat of an attack by Beth's feral bees, which now form part of the Australian fauna, does not only evince the unsuccessful domestication of Australian wilderness, but also the process of undomestication suffered in that wild landscape by those civilised. In other words, the bees stand for the reversal of colonisation. In a way, it is what has happened to Beth: she has gone wild like her brownies. Another possible reading of the bees is in terms of immigration. The text states that these bees are not native because "native bees don't sting" (53).¹² Therefore, the bees can be equated to unwanted migrants, dangerous people who can "sting" Australians.¹³ The fact that Beth's grandmother passed on to her

¹¹ "Fifteen Common Questions about Australian Native Bees": n.p.

¹² It is true that some species of Australian native bees are stingless, but very few, only ten species out of the approximately 1,500 endemic species ("Fifteen Common Questions about Australian Native Bees": n.p.).

¹³ As will be seen, apart from making a point on the environment, Winton's *In the Winter Dark* invites a similar reading of cats as metaphors for colonisation, decolonisation, the Indigenous population and immigration.

the love of bees seems to give a hopeful and optimistic message for each of the previous interpretations as well as an exemplary model to follow. However, although Beth loves her bees, and tries to understand and be friends with them, she is still in a position of control as an Anglo-Celtic descendant.

Beth has to be very careful when dealing with her bees, but she is not afraid of them. Actually, she is quite “fond of her cranky bees” (54). Like her grandmother, Beth talks to them. She informs them about the mysterious watcher: “Someone is watching us. Someone is up to no good. I’m telling you this, brownies” (56). The bees turn out to be her real guardians. Despite their small size, they prove to be stronger and more effective than Sam, who is terrified of them because he was badly stung once (100). The bees help Beth whenever she needs money. She collects their honey which is easily sold or can be bartered for other goods. She compares honey to gold because it turns out to be as negotiable as the latter (56). Most important, she owes the bees her life. Thanks to her long experience with them and her willingness to understand their ways, she can use them against Roland. Knowing their violent behaviour if disturbed, she trusts them to get rid of her pursuer. They do not let her down:

She was nearly at the hives [...]; every one was home and humming. [...] She heard him curse behind her as the first bee struck. And the second and the third. She dimly heard through the ringing and roaring in her ears the thumps and whacks that would only serve to enrage them further. She kept puffing up the hill [...]. By now he was screaming, and shrieking words that had no meaning in a high, thin song of terror and pain. Beth [...] couldn’t see him, but he was making a dreadful sound. [...] She fell into a crouch and toppled forward [...]. Below her, the screams were fading and then, quite suddenly, as if the bees had filled his mouth, the sounds were choked off and all was still and quiet. (147-148)

Roland's fatal encounter with the bees is foreshadowed earlier in the story by both the annoying blowflies at which he uselessly "lashes" swearing (125) and Beth telling her brownies to save their "lives for something really bad" (57-58). It is now when readers can feel that his fate was already written. Ironically, she leads Roland where Stephen had hidden the drug. Like Beth, he had resorted to the bees when in need: "she trod on [...] a smallish, white plastic packet like a bag of salt [...] 'You found what you came for, Roland,' she said to the corpse. '[...] Stephen didn't mislead you. A hive behind the house. That's what he said and here it is.'" (149). Stephen had played with the words "hide" and "hive" when he had confessed the hidden place: "he said something about it being in a hide behind the house" (132). This scene illustrates her success as a bee enchantress encouraged by her grandmother a long time ago. It also marks the beginning of her new life.

Beth plays the typical gothic role of the persecuted maiden. Nevertheless, she is not a passive victim. She is a strong and capable heroine. As she angrily tells Declan: "'Give up? Would you? Listen to me. That bastard's going to get rid of me and you're mildly irritated because I'm objecting. Should I sit all ladylike while he murders me? You bloody tell me!' She was shaking with rage and conviction" (134). Though frightened, Beth is brave and takes action to find out who is stalking her and then to defeat the villain. Her courage is mainly displayed in the way she handles her fear. When people are frightened, they can have two opposite reactions. They can adopt a defensive attitude in an attempt to destroy the threatening object, or they can run

away, which is the option most people choose whenever possible (Mannoni, 1984: 15-16). Beth experiences these two different reactions. After the killing of her fowls, the refusal of the sheriff to take her seriously and Sam's ineffective protection, she packs some of her belongings and goes to live with her neighbours for a while: "Time to get out" (69). However, Beth cannot hide forever. She decides to find out what is happening. She is determined to unveil the mysterious watcher: "something like a plan of action was forming in her mind. Two could play at watching, she thought. If she could get back to her place, and have a bit of a look around, she might even be able to find out [...] who was responsible for the happenings of the past few days" (94). Upon her arrival at her farm, she notices that somebody is sleeping inside. She returns to her neighbours to get her gun and wake them up so that they can confront the intruder together. But she does not find any help. When she tells Garth, he pulls "his shawl more closely around himself" and cowardly replies: "Probably just a friend who's dropped in.' He laughed nervously. 'Better wait till morning, just in case, though'" (99). Beth does not give up and decides to continue with her plan: "camp out and see what's going on. The plan I had before I thought I could rely on anyone else" (99). The most illustrative sign of Beth's courage occurs when she discovers the grotesque figure in the mountain. Despite her urge to run away from that horrible sight, she approaches it. She faces her source of fear consciously and deliberately in order to overcome and reduce her dread:

For a few seconds Beth stood unmoving, unable to take her eyes away from the obscenity that stood just a little way from her in the gloom. She

spun about, snatched the gun and started to slip and slide down the rocks, wanting to get away from that smell; that dreadful figure. Sam bolted with her [...] fearful that the thing might rouse itself from its rotting and attempt to slither after them. She stopped, fearing the same, but knowing that she must go back and confront it; must remember every detail so that it could not haunt her. [...] She went right up to the loathsome thing and, standing very near, took in every detail. (118)

As Pierre Mannoni has argued in his study on fear, this course of action probably allows people to obtain “the most complete and noble mastery of fear” (1984: 154. My translation).¹⁴

When Beth is trapped with Roland, she wishes to escape, but she decides not to get away from her problems and to solve them instead: “Powerfully, she felt an overwhelming urge to run. To go, even if it meant leaving Sam. Her stomach turned over and urged her to vanish into the night. Reason prevailed. She would have to handle whatever came up” (123). Anger often replaces her fear, which leads her to act dangerously bold: “And here she was, sitting on the floor with an unconscious dog, a killer standing at her table and she was insulting him. She moved closer to Sam and decided to be very calm and rational” (121). She changes her anger into reason. She is tireless in her attempt to find a way of beating Roland: she studies her possibilities of taking hold of the gun —“She thought of the gun and was just about to turn to it when his eyes flew open and he stood up, entirely awake” (124)—, or she considers hitting him with a tin —“he was very much taller. She’d have to strike up, she reasoned, instead of down, and there’d be very little force in her blow. No, she thought, it would only enrage him” (134-135). She finally poisons her captors with magic

¹⁴ “el más completo y noble dominio del miedo” (Original quotation).

mushrooms and escapes. She has no other option if she wants to save her life.

Rage is a stronger feeling now, especially because she thinks that Sam has died helping her, but she is able to control herself: “She boiled with rage [...]. She had to suppress a violent urge to get up and scream at them, let them know her loathing and contempt” (145). Roland finds her drinking in the river. She runs away, but with a plan forming in her mind: “She must be fleet, must put enough distance between her and him. She’d [...] run into the house, pick up the gun from where it had fallen, load it on the run” (145). And so the chase begins. Suffering an asthma attack, Beth knows that she will not have enough time to get the gun, so she leads her persecutor to the hives where the bees, feeling threatened, kill him (147). Afterwards, she swallows her feelings of disgust at Roland’s corpse and gets rid of it: “Come on. Grab him by his boots. You don’t even have to touch him. She steeled herself, turned herself away from him, kicked his legs apart, stood between them and grasping one ankle in each hand, started dragging Roland unwillingly down the driveway” (150). Like his death, Roland’s burial is also foretold when Garth comments about Beth’s work in the garden —“You’ve done a good job down there.’ Garth nodded at the newly turned earth. ‘You could bury someone there’” (84). The image of the gun is significant. Beth has a gun —a masculine symbol par excellence—, but she never has the chance to use it. She is unable to shoot Roland and he takes it away from her hands (141). Most important, when he is after her, she does not manage to get to the house and the gun inside (145). That is

why she has to use her own unique weapon: the bees. In other words, she symbolically displays her own power instead of appropriating patriarchal sources of power.

Beth's feelings, actions and reactions show that she is a dauntless heroine who does not allow herself to be paralysed by fear. She is capable of dominating her instincts to escape and she fights "tooth and claw" against Roland. Her heroic behaviour is finally rewarded by her triumph over the villain and her dreams coming true.¹⁵ At the end of the story, we can witness, along with Elvira, the boons of Beth's victory. After confronting Roland, her fears vanish and she is able to live in peace. The experience has made her stronger and wiser. Her sadness wears off. The confrontation seems to have been necessary to empower her. She is able to get over her depression and grow in confidence, proving that, similarly to psychotherapy, dark situations may lead us to light. Her abandoned farm undergoes a radical change that mirrors her restored and more confident self. Now the farm is productive and in full bloom, which is also reflected in her body: "She was looking better than I'd ever seen her [...] She was looking like her farm, blossoming and growing" (153), observes Elvira. She even seems to have "lost her feral quality" as she is more sociable and "a good hostess" (155). Now Beth has all that she wants, so she does not feel miserable any more: she has a farm, her loyal friend Sam and a labourer to help her with the hard

¹⁵ Peter Pierce regards *Tooth and Claw* as a "double revenge story" (1999: 188). This critic argues that "Beth is able to exact revenge on [both] her captors" (1999: 189), not only Roland, but Declan as well, suggesting that Beth is involved in the poisoning with wood alcohol that turns Declan blind. Actually, Beth's involvement is not explicit in the novel, so this detail is open to the reader's speculation.

work —Declan, the lover who left her and the object of her fantasies: “She would imagine them working together at the vegetables, or a scene wherein she gave Declan half the farm and, together, they made it modestly productive” (43). It is important to point out that she is in a position of power over them. As usual, she is the only one who can control Sam, and Declan is blind and working for her. As she tells Elvira: “I’ve discovered that you always get what you want in this world. [...] The only surprise is in the way you get it. It’s never quite the way you think it’s going to be” (157). The happy ending and the way Beth finally gets what she longs for bring to mind the ending of *Jane Eyre*, an intertext that haunts the novel and deserves further examination.

II.2.4. “My tale draws to its close”: *Jane Eyre* Revisited

Despite being published in 1847, Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* continues to arouse a great deal of interest among the reading audience and critics worldwide. The novel is considered a classic of English literature and has invited a wide variety of interpretations regarding different topics that intermingle in the text, above all gender, race, class, slavery and colonialism. *Jane Eyre* has exercised a remarkable influence until the present. It has even jumped out of the literary world as it has often been adapted for the cinema, television and the theatre. The reason may be that the protagonist’s desires and struggles as a woman seem timeless in spite of the novel’s Victorian setting. Jane has been seen as a paragon of female struggle for individualism and recognition in the face of patriarchal restrictions. The relevance of *Jane*

Eyre is particularly noticed in the female gothic tradition, where it has been imitated in many different ways, such as in Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938) and Victoria Holt's *Mistress of Mellyn* (1960), among many others.

Jane Eyre is an important intertext in *Tooth and Claw*. The novel was published precisely at a time when Australian women writers were beginning to be recognised, that is, at a time of female struggle (Bird, 2000: 196). Lord mostly writes crime fiction, and together with other women writers, she took part in the revival of this genre in Australia, undermining its sexist conventions by presenting, for example, powerful female protagonists (Webby, 2000: 204). Therefore, though these two novels are apparently different, and the settings and times do not coincide, it is possible to discern and understand the connection with Brontë's classic.

The elements where the influence of *Jane Eyre* on *Tooth and Claw* is most clearly perceived are: the portrayal of a strong heroine, the haunted house and the ending. *Jane Eyre* marks an important shift in the representation of the heroine, since Jane has been seen as "a necessary link in the development of the woman as hero" (Mink, 1987: 9). So far, the gothic heroine was "the idealised image of beauty" and "sublimated sexual fantasy", and thus she was admired by almost every male she met (Howells, 1995: 11). Charlotte Brontë was sure that her challenge of conventions would also result in an interesting heroine:

She once told her sisters that they were wrong—even morally wrong—in making their heroines beautiful, as a matter of course. They replied that it was impossible to make a heroine interesting on other terms. Her answer was, 'I will show you a heroine as small and as plain as myself who will be

as interesting as any of yours'. (Harriet Martineau in Howells, 1995: 176-177)

Jane Eyre narrates in first person the protagonist's rebellion against her unfair treatment as an orphan and family outcast, her constant search for affection and fight to keep her independence, and her marriage to Rochester —the man she loves— in equal terms after having overcome numerous obstacles. It is "an autobiography, a study in the growth of awareness of Jane herself as a credible individual" (Howells, 1995: 161). Jane is a strong independent woman who revolts against the Victorian "Angel in the House" ideal (Becker, 1999: 36) as she refuses to be defined by the patriarchal standards of her time. She "experiences and fights the spatial and ideological containment of the female body" (1999: 60). Brontë's work reflects Victorian reality, presenting the gothic that surrounds everyday life: "the escape into the haunted house of the gothic text, which repeats but exceeds such daily structures" (1999: 35). It is in the fusion of gothic fantasy and social realism that the novel seems to delineate the shift from old to new gothic (1999: 34). Jane is also one of the first literary women to achieve her goals (Mink, 1987: 9). She is honest, self-knowing and more sexually aware than her predecessors (Howells, 1995: 177). She is full of "hunger, rebellion and rage" (Ostrov Weissner: 2007: 76). She is not an innocent sweet lady. She is not a fairytale heroine. Her triumph is that of "a plain, middle-class woman over the obstacles of wealth and class and beauty, as well as over the antithetical demons of aggressive male sexuality (Rochester) and inhuman religious fervor (St John Rivers)" (Denni Porter in Mink, 1987: 9). In spite of her smallness and plainness,

her desire and imagination are so strong that they save her from becoming insignificant: “There is so much to her than meets the eye, in terms of her imaginative and emotional capacities” (Ostrov Weisser, 2007: 79).

Like Jane, Beth is an orphan who has lost a maternal figure. At Lowood, Miss Temple and Helen are mother figures who nurture, advise and love Jane (Gilbert and Gubar, 1984: 346). However, Helen dies and Miss Temple leaves the school. Beth is raised by her grandmother, but she dies when she is sixteen. Neither Jane nor Beth complies with the lady stereotype. Jane is presented as plain and small (Brontë, 1994: 100), while Beth sees herself as not especially beautiful or interesting (6). Besides, they refuse to be passive. As Jane states in her often-quoted condemnation of passivity:

It is in vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquility: they must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it. Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine, and millions are in silent revolt against their lot. Nobody knows how many rebellions besides political rebellions ferment in the masses of life which people earth. Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer [...]. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex. (Brontë, 1994: 111)

Jane and Beth do not “sit all ladylike” (Lord, 1983: 134), but they react and fight back whenever they are threatened. They respond with admirable courage and perseverance, sometimes with anger: “Anger made her [Beth] bold. She straightened up and [...] spoke to the man” (124). The two women are determined to survive, as Jane shows in this passage when she is wandering on the moors after leaving Thornfield:

Hopeless of the future, I wished but this — that my Maker had that night thought good to require my soul of me while I slept [...]. Life, however, was

yet in my possession; with all its requirements, and pains, and responsibilities. The burden must be carried; the want provided for; the suffering endured; the responsibility fulfilled. (Brontë, 1994: 321)

No matter how tempting the option of disappearing may be, Beth, as well as Jane, stands her ground and faces the situation: “[Beth] was suddenly afraid, horribly afraid. She wanted to run back to the safety of the firelit kitchen [...]. But if there was someone up there, she’d have to know. What sort of a night would she spend otherwise?” (103).

Jane and Beth conclude that reason is more effective than fear and anger. They do not let themselves be carried away by their emotions and turn rational to defeat fear. In a similar way as I have shown Beth confronting her fears with cold pragmatism —such as when she looks closely at the scarecrow instead of diverting her eyes and running away (118)—, Jane is able to put aside her fears and respond properly to the “practical demands” of a frightening situation (Howells, 1995: 171). For example, when Bertha attacks Mr Mason —her brother— and Jane is left alone, she is terribly frightened, but she remains next to the injured man and attends him properly:

Here, then, was I in the third story, fastened into one of its mystic cells; night around me; a pale and bloody spectacle under my eyes and hands; a murderess hardly separated from me by a single door: yes — that was appalling [...]. I must keep to my post, however. I must watch this ghastly countenance [...]. I must dip my hand again and again in the basin of blood and water, and wipe away the trickling gore. (Brontë, 1994: 209)

Jane’s anger changes after her stay at Lowood. It loses its wildness and outward violence. As Michelle Massé asserts, this has led some critics to question Jane’s rebelliousness as “a capitulation to Victorian mores and gender conventions” (1992: 205). However, anger has not vanished, as her passionate defence of female action, freedom and equality quoted

above shows. It has been rechannelled. Jane simply rejects being either oppressed or oppressor: “That shift is not a surrender or an identification with [...] meekness but rather a gradual maturation that assures Jane will define herself outside the beater-beaten dyad, that object relations and abusive power will not be synonymous for her” (Massé, 1992: 205). It is a step necessary to assure her survival (1992: 208). Beth also tries to control her anger and be rational instead, which seems more practical if she wants to survive. That is why she tries to be more “calm and rational”, stop insulting Roland (121) and come up with a good plan to escape.

Solitude seems the first condition to be a heroine.¹⁶ Beth and Jane are lonely women. They are outcasts in search of a place where they can fit. Susan Ostrov Weisser defines Charlotte’s heroines —and this includes Jane— as “literal Lodgers” because they do not feel at home “either in homes [...], in boarding schools or in foreign lands”. They cannot find “a meaningful place in the social community” (2007: 76). Jane is often described as an interloper and a misfit —“an uncongenial alien permanently intruded” anywhere (Brontë, 1994: 18)—, and so is Beth. For instance, she is not “comfortable” at Willowglen —“She couldn’t go out to the kitchen to make tea without feeling that she was intruding” (81)— and at the sheriff’s place, she feels “very small and intrusive in the intimacy of the house” (63). Nevertheless, there is a shift from their positions from outsiders into insiders. As Donna Heiland explains about Jane: “she is an unwanted but nonetheless

¹⁶ “Heroines”, 2011: n.p.

acknowledged member of the family at Gatehead, an initially tortured and eventually treasured resident at Lowood, a servant who becomes central to life at Thornfield, and a refugee who ends up providing for the cousins she discovers at Moor House” (2004: 121-122). As for Beth, she moves from feeling frightened and out of place on the farm in the bush to feeling satisfied and at home after transforming the dilapidated farm. Jane’s development as a person is what makes Gilbert and Gubar qualify *Jane Eyre* as a female Bildungsroman, since Jane moves from the “imprisonment of her childhood to the almost unthinkable goal of mature freedom” (1984: 339). Similarly, Beth’s happiness is the result of a personal journey whose experience has helped her to get a stronger self-confidence and a life she is comfortable with.

The haunted house is another common element in *Jane Eyre* and *Tooth and Claw*. Both houses are typically gothic according to their specific setting. In *Jane Eyre*, Thornfield is a dark old high-ceilinged mansion, standing solitary in the middle of the English countryside (Brontë, 1994: 106-107). Though it is easier to identify Thornfield as a gothic abode—it is even compared to Bluebeard’s castle (1994: 108)—, it must be remembered that in Australia the scenarios of the “old continent” were adapted to the particular circumstances of the new environment, while keeping their inner qualities. In Lord’s work, the role of the gothic house is taken on by an old neglected farm and the surrounding bush contributes to its gothic quality (13-14). Beth once qualifies it as “the demon-haunted house” (97) and the mountain just behind it is compared to a mysterious castle (101). In their respective

houses, Jane and Beth are haunted. Thornfield is haunted by Bertha — Rochester's mad wife confined in the attic. The mysterious events of the house —such as the strange noises (Brontë, 1994: 108, 148-149) or the spectral woman Jane sees (1994: 280-282)— lose their otherworldly nature for Jane when she discovers the existence of Bertha. Therefore, the supernatural element at Thornfield is explained away as the action of a flesh and blood woman, not a ghost.¹⁷ Similarly, the supernatural does not exist in *Tooth and Claw*, since the killing of Beth's chickens, the horrible scarecrow and the watching are all the actions of a human being. Significantly enough, both novels make clear that there are no ghosts. Mrs Fairfax assures Jane that Thornfield does not have a ghost (Brontë, 1994: 107) and Beth thinks that there are no ghosts where she lives (14-15).

In each house, a villain haunts Jane and Beth, though unlike in nature. Jane is haunted by Rochester, as he threatens to steal her independence and honour by turning her into her mistress or illegitimate wife. In a more physical way, Beth's life is threatened by Roland, who tries to kill her because she is an impediment to his plans. The important difference between these two villains is that Rochester belongs to the Byronic kind (Howells, 1995: 13), showing a good and an evil side. He is transformed by Jane and thus able to become her

¹⁷ It is necessary to point out that there are actually some unexplained phenomena, such as when Jane, being miles away, hears Rochester telepathic call for help (Brontë, 1994: 414-415). They are left unexplained because they blend with the spiritual, as Howells asserts. They serve to suggest that humans are linked to natural forces by presentiments, telepathies and signs, which is "indicative of the author's attitude as well as of Jane's that human beings occupy a central place in [...a] web of connections" in the universe (1995: 167).

husband. In contrast, Roland is pure evil, unable and unwilling to change. He only stops harassing the heroine when he dies. Besides, the object of Beth's fantasies is not him, but his accomplice Declan.

The ending is the most evident likeness between *Jane Eyre* and *Tooth and Claw*. Both heroines survive and succeed in their particular enterprises, though it must be said that the ending is more ambiguous in Brontë's novel. Jane's happy ending is fundamentally based on a firm belief in gender equality. As Susanne Becker states, it "requires the destruction of Thornfield, Rochester's dependency and Jane's emotional and social empowerment" (1999: 38). Jane demands spiritual equality and will not marry him as long as he treats her as an inferior:

Do you think I can stay to become nothing to you? Do you think I am an automaton? — a machine without feelings? And can bear to have my morsel of bread snatched from my lips, and my drop of living water dashed from my cup? Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong! — I have as much soul as you — and full as much heart! [...] I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh: it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet, equal — as we are! (Brontë, 1994: 251)

Rochester's disempowerment enables Jane to marry the man she loves on her own terms, that is, as an equal. She marries him after he has gone blind and lost one hand, a condition that allows her to gain power over him. Jane admits that Rochester's dependence on her is what has drawn them so close:

Mr Rochester continued blind the first two years of our union: perhaps it was that circumstance that drew us so very near — that knit us so very close: for I was then his vision, as I am still his right hand. Literally, I was (what he often called me) the apple of his eye. He saw nature — he saw books through me; and never did I weary of gazing for his behalf, and of puttings [sic] into words, the effect of field, tree, town, river, cloud, sunbeam — of the landscape before us; of the weather round us — and impressing by sound on his ear what light could no longer stamp on his eye. (Brontë, 1994: 446)

Apart from getting moral equality, she manages to be Rochester's economic equal because she inherits her uncle's fortune: "She cannot cross [...the threshold of marriage] until she can meet her 'master' as his partner and equal, his equal by virtue of her inheritance and family solidarity, his partner by virtue of their interdependence" (Adams, 1977: 152). Accordingly, Jane's acquirement of moral and economic power to the detriment of Rochester's symbolises in part her success over the patriarchal values he embodies as a man.

The burning of Thornfield is used as a metaphor for "the humbling" of Rochester as its owner (Snodgrass, 2005: 337). As a gothic house, Thornfield is the "site for the reproduction of the patriarchal family" (Paula E. Geyh in Davison, 2003: 138). Significantly, Bertha, a woman who has gone mad and is locked inside, destroys the mansion and its owner is maimed in the fire. She is an essential figure in Jane's empowerment as she is the one who definitely disempowers Rochester and the social system he embodies. Given that Rochester is blind, their new house —Ferndean— is ruled by Jane. This means that, at least symbolically, the house along with everything it represents, has passed from male to female hands.

Jane Eyre is a novel full of contradictions, which has created controversy over its qualification as an emblem of female empowerment. The final marriage has caused many critics to brand the novel as conservative.¹⁸ They contend that Jane ends up caught in the constrictive system she has been trying to escape from, presenting

¹⁸ See, for instance, Jina Politi (1982), Mary Poovey (1988) or Bette London (1991).

marriage as the “quintessential female wish fulfillment” (Dixon, 1994: 271). There are two other events that make Jane’s victory uncertain and temporary. Some years after their marriage, Rochester starts recovering his sight, which may lead to some autonomy. Jane also has a son, which means that the patriarchal line will continue and the symbolical “mastery” Jane has gained is bound to disappear. On the other hand, there are critics who acclaim *Jane Eyre* as “rebellious feminism” (Gilbert and Gubar, 1984: 338) and celebrate the heroine’s triumph. Mink argues that today’s readers need to take into account the notion of heroism in Brontë’s times in order to apprehend properly the kind of heroism shown by Jane. She adds that “heroism is not limited simply to specific acts but defined in terms of capacity or attributes as well. Within the constraints of her environment, Jane Eyre exhibits the capacity for heroism, and up until the end of the novel, generally fulfills that capacity” (1987: 11). Despite the ambivalence of the story, Kate Washington highlights its feminist relevance:

[The novel holds] a progressive stance toward sexual economics, given the context in which it was written. Because it is so explicitly concerned with the problem of women’s financial dependency and ends by proposing a solution through love-based marriage and female independence, *Jane Eyre* marks an important moment in the development of Victorian ideologies of marriage and the economic position of women. (1997-98: n.p.)

Tooth and Claw lacks the ambiguity of Brontë’s work. Beth succeeds personally and economically. The death of the villain leads to the positive transformation of the farm. Renewed and profitable, it loses its haunting aura—as Elvira reports in her diary (153)—and becomes a nice place to live in. It reflects Beth’s renewed and powerful self. Beth is responsible for the change on the farm and finally acts as its real

owner. The property belonged to Stephen, but as he dies, she inherits it. In other words, it is taken on by a woman from the hands of a man. Unlike Jane, Beth owns and really rules the house because, as a single woman living in twentieth-century Australia, no Victorian law restricts her from having property, even if she married. Beth ends up living with Declan, the man she fantasised with. Like Rochester, Declan is blind at the end of the story, but he does not recover his sight. What is more, he works for Beth and is tied to Sam, her obedient and faithful guardian: "Sam watched over him while he was recovering. Sam watches him still" (154). He is his guiding dog, but Declan has no control over him at all. The animal only obeys Beth, which emphasises even more the submission of these two male figures and the heroine's empowerment. As she confesses to Elvira (157), in an unexpected way, she has got all she wanted in the world.

II.2.5. Conclusion

Tooth and Claw can be inserted in the female gothic tradition as it follows almost to the letter its formulaic structure. There is a haunted place —the farm in the bush— where the young female protagonist —Beth— is harassed by a dangerous and sometimes suspiciously attractive man —Roland. She takes action and defeats the villain. There are no supernatural forces as all the mysteries have a human source. The ending is closed and happy. The successful heroine becomes more powerful and ends up living besides the man she loves —Declan.

The gothic house is a rundown farm in the mysterious Australian bush. At the beginning, Beth feels unsettled, uneasy living alone away from civilisation. The novel displays the continuous battle between the forest and humans for hegemony, along with their vulnerability in the wilderness as they are deprived of modern facilities and technology. The forest is charged with a gothic atmosphere. It is an ambiguous space where the civilised and the wild clash. It is beautiful, full of wonders and life, but it is also frightening and dangerous because it can easily take one's life in the blink of an eye. It is a strange place overflowing with secrets humans fail to understand. Given the popular notion of Australian landscapes as extremely hostile, human struggle in the bush acquires a further dramatic quality, as can be observed in Beth's lifestyle. Some of the characters are contemporary hippies looking for an alternative and more truthful approach to life. However, Beth is the only one who seems to fit. Little by little, she gets familiar with her surroundings and the different rules that apply in that world, as her growing understanding of her bees shows. This knowledge saves her life when she has to face her stalker and contributes to her successful renovation of the farm.

The bees are crucial in Beth's survival and triumph. Their pervasive image is quite relevant and invites various interpretations. As the embodiment of nature, they convey a message against the destruction of the environment. From a socio-historical perspective, we can conceive of them in three different ways. To begin with, the racial image invoked in the narration of the mistreatment of bees by abusive

farmers calls to mind the brutal colonisation suffered by Aborigines. In this light, the bees can function as a metaphor for the unrecognised presence of the Indigenous people. Secondly, the fact that the bees, which were imported from Europe, have gone feral points to the failure of colonisation in Australia and the fear of becoming uncivilised. And thirdly, the fact that the text equals non-native bees with stinging bees makes it possible to read these insects as a metaphor for unwanted immigration.

The characters in *Tooth and Claw* have been designed according to gothic stereotypes. Roland is the typical pre-Romantic villain, physically and spiritually. He pursues the female protagonist, does evil for evil's sake and nothing seems to stop him. Greed is his only motivation and never shows any sign of regret. Beth is the gothic heroine, the persecuted maiden. But whenever she is threatened, she does not flinch, run away or wait to be rescued. She is brave and displays admirable courage as she confronts the villain and her fears. She is the kind of active and independent heroine that Ann Radcliffe promoted in gothic fiction. This model of heroism, copied and developed by subsequent women writers, was perfected by Charlotte Brontë, whose novel *Jane Eyre* is a visible intertext in *Tooth and Claw*.

The happy ending and Beth's empowerment clearly bring to mind the ending of *Jane Eyre*. This English classic is a brilliant example of female gothic, whose protagonist has been celebrated as an emblem of female independence and struggle. It has exercised an important influence since the day of its publication, proving that the gothic is able

to adjust to any circumstances. *Tooth and Claw* is haunted by *Jane Eyre*, although Lord's work does not so obviously intend to convey a feminist message. My analysis discloses that the influence is especially noticed in the presentation of Beth as a powerful heroine, the haunted house that is finally ruled by the heroine and the ending, in which she has achieved all her goals.

III. *THE WELL*

III.1. NOTES ON ELIZABETH JOLLEY

Elizabeth Jolley —born Monica Elizabeth Knight— is one of Australia's most acclaimed writers. She published fifteen novels, some collections of short stories, non-fictional books, and wrote many essays and plays. Her works have been broadcast on the radio and adapted for the cinema, theatre and television. Her writing won her nominations and several awards, including Australia's prestigious Miles Franklin Award in 1986 for *The Well*. Jolley started writing when she was very young, but she did not get public attention until much later in life. She was an unusual writer, and so was her life, which inevitably slipped into her works. Reviewer Geordie Williamson has commented that:

Those who have read Jolley's darkling narratives of murder, rape, incest, madness and adultery, peopled by deviants, grotesques and melancholic solitaires will understandably bridle at the suggestion that the writer's experience could encompass such bizarre material. But [...] in terms of pure weirdness, Jolley's life often exceeded her art. (In Koval, 2008b: n.p.)

Jolley admitted in an interview to often distorting the real experiences that inform her fiction:

as a writer I do use the moment of truth but very quickly I distort it with imaginative writing. I can't write the real thing. [...If I] write factual things or real things I become very wooden with the writing. I can only write when I'm under the pressure of the imagination, in a sense, so that I just need a little bit of truth to start with and then I will step off that into my own imaginative picture. So I don't really use a real incident to the full. The autobiographical part of the writing is just a moment of awareness or observation, just some tiny thing and then the rest will be all made up. (In Koval, 2007: n.p.)

She was born in Birmingham, England, in 1923. Her father was British and her mother was Austrian. She learnt the German language when she was a child and was a fluent speaker. Both her parents had enjoyed a good education. She and her sister were educated at home by

their mother, but when Elizabeth was eleven, they were sent to a Quaker boarding school. The peculiar relationship between her parents affected her deeply. Her parents' marriage was not a happy one. Her mother had a lover, Mr Berrington, who became a close friend of the family's (Dibble, 2008: 1-2; Koval, 2008b: n.p.). His presence was disturbing for Elizabeth and set her against her mother (Dibble, 2008: 22-23). Her boarding at Sibford School was a welcoming escape from family tensions. Actually, the school came partly to replace her family (2008: 40). Older women also fulfilled this function for her. These women were "there in place perhaps of the mother whom she was always trying to demonise and always at the same time, in a different sense, always ultimately trying to idealise. And so there were [...] older women who figured importantly in her life and in her literature" (Brian Dibble in Koval, 2008b: n.p.).

Elizabeth's parents, as well as Mr Berrington, were pacifists. Her father had been imprisoned during the First World War as a conscientious objector (Dibble, 2008: 4). At a time of crisis and war in Britain, the family sheltered European refugees, kept away from patriotism and maintained their independent way of thinking. After school, Elizabeth trained as a nurse. She first met her future husband—Leonard—when he was in hospital. He was "a chronically ill pacifist who liked to flirt with the nurses and listen to classical music" (Lever, 2009: 1). Leonard married his fiancée. Afterwards, Elizabeth met Leonard and his wife in Birmingham, and the three of them became good friends (Dibble, 2008: 85-86). She reproduced her parents' triangle

as she became Leonard's lover. She got pregnant at almost the same time as Leonard's wife. It is not clear whether his wife knew about Elizabeth's pregnancy. Both had their babies, but Elizabeth left with hers and got a string of jobs to earn a living, some of them at boarding schools. Her experience at schools and hospitals manifests itself in her literature, where such institutions are prominent. Dibble states that:

she was effectively homeless from the mid 30s to the beginning of the 50s. She would not go home, or at least not frequently because of the difficulties there, and so she lived in schools, hospitals, and a place like this, as well as the homes of people when she was a live-in domestic. So that was her natural home. (In Koval, 2008b: n.p.)

Finally, Leonard told his wife that he was in love with another woman — without naming Elizabeth— and left. They got married after Leonard's divorce. When in 1959 he was given a post as the foundation librarian of the University of Western Australia, they moved to Perth.

Throughout her life, Elizabeth showed a strong determination to get her works published. In the end, though rather late, she succeeded. Meanwhile, she worked as a nurse, cleaning lady and door-to-door saleswoman. She had many stories broadcast on the radio, and in the late seventies —when she was already in her fifties— her first book was published. It was a collection of short stories called *Five Acre Virgin* (1976) (Gelder and Salzman, 1989: 66). In 1978 she was hired to teach a creative writing course —the first one in Australia— at the Western Australian Institute of Technology, later Curtin University, in Perth (Brian Dibble in Koval, 2008b: n.p.). Tim Winton was one of her students. It was not until 1980 that her first novel —*Palomino*— was published. Being a woman writer in Western Australia was not an easy

task and progress was further hampered by her own peculiar brand of writing (Dibble, 2001: 216). The literary atmosphere of the years when Jolley finally managed to have her first books published cannot be overlooked. Australian fiction was male territory. Women writers —past and present— were practically ignored, and so were the social debates generated by feminist movements denouncing Australia's repressive gender discourses. As author Thea Astley once commented, she felt “spiritually neutered by [her sexist] society” (in Bird, 2000: 196). Women's recognition and intervention in Australian literature was gradually possible thanks to the feminist consciousness that arose in the late 1970s. Consequently, in the early 1980s, “the critical ignorance of the ways gender functions in writing, publishing and reading” suffered a radical revision. Nowadays, women writers have a stronger presence in Australia. Jolley's first publications are surely a result of female revolution in the country's literature (Bird, 2000: 196), and at the same time, they were a valuable contribution to the change.

Her postmodern style hampered her early career as a writer. According to Delys Bird, it blocked her success because it was before its time. Jolley's fiction referred to “a European tradition not accessible to a wide Australian readership in the 1960s and 1970s. What are now admired as the postmodern features of her work —motifs repeated within and between novels and short stories, self-reflexivity and open-endedness— were not acceptable then” (2000: 195). Her literature is not easy to describe because it mixes comedy, irony and lyricism. She resorted to the genres of gothic and romance with a view to exploring

women's lives (Kelder and Salzman, 1989: 66). Her literary experimentation leads Kelder and Salzman to call her the "adulte terrible" of Australian women's writing:

In her avoidance of any easy dichotomy between the realist tradition and narrative experiment, she points forward to the fiction of a large number of younger women writers who have produced a notable body of work in recent years. It could be argued that this fiction is the cutting edge of contemporary Australian literature. (1989: 72)

Her former student Winton, a Western Australian, shares her interest in blending genres as well as her world view.

Jolley's themes were controversial and sometimes regarded as taboo. The author herself recognised that she was well-known for her "indecent writing" and that there was "an indecent amount of it" (in Sheridan, 2009: n.p.). Her usual topics were women, desire and the creative process—not only in an artistic sense, but also as the creation of the personal self (Kelder and Salzman, 1989: 67). Her work is imbued with "the feminine". She departs from the traditional novel with a marriage plot and turns it into a new way of expressing femininity. Her women usually look for other women's love. According to Bronwen Levy, this longing for love is vital to her description of female protagonists and the feminine condition. Besides, her writing method problematises this desire, making it complex and ambiguous: "Whether they long for other women as lovers or as friends (and the texts are not usually clear about the distinction), and whether their longing is realised or unrequited, the characters' emotions are complicated by circumstances which in turn complicate relations between the women characters" (2009: 112).

Motherhood and lesbianism are two major topics in her female world. They are tackled separately or together, “as polarities or in uneasy combination”, since they cannot be easily blended (Maureen Bettle in Levy, 2009: 111). Critics such as Browen Levy (2009: 113) and Dean Kiley (1998: 4) have found that the deferral of lesbianism and homosexuality is common in Australian literature and criticism, Jolley being an illustrative example. Criticising this deferral, Kiley asserts that Jolley constructs the figure of the lesbian in a way that “‘naturally’ authorises a critical disengagement with the full problematic of same-sex desire or lesbian love, let alone queerness, itself” (1998: 4). In other words, Jolley’s lesbians are always figures or metaphors for something else. The feeling one gets is that lesbians appear in the text, but simultaneously there are no lesbians. However, as Levy points out using Aneeta Rajendran’s words, despite the unclear definition of the lesbian in Jolley’s fiction, her “writing does make ‘border crossings between the homosocial, the homosexual and the homoerotic’ in its depictions of women characters” (2009: 114).

Her characters are mothers, lesbians, single women and spinsters. In truth, her spinsters are celebrated for their strength, autonomy, pride, capability and sexuality. They are “visionary spinsters attempting to effect innovative life-styles outside the dominant gender system” (Kirkby, 1991: 236). As Joan Kirkby and Browen Levy assert, all these women’s lives, professional occupations and preferences also mirror many mid-twentieth-century Western women who stepped out of their

marginal positions thanks to their independence and determination.

Jolley's women are active in their own marginalised world:

They work; they play, or try to; they travel. They engage in incredible power struggles, they make love (in ones, twos, and threes), they clean floors, and empty bedpans. They garden, have fights with their mothers, misunderstand each other, they drive cars. They play music and listen to it, they dance. They cook, eat, and drink. They become jealous, feel left out, surprise each other, worry and are relieved, feel overwhelmed with helplessness. They decide they want to have children or, having given birth, are entranced by the child. Their lives are characterised by amazing longing, by erotic and sensual curiosity, by intelligence, by subtle thoughts and observations, by emotions and actions, whether achieved or contemplated. (Levy, 2009: 111-112)

Therefore, she highlights thought, movement and activity instead of identity and self-definition, that is to say, "what the characters do, think, or feel" instead of "how they may explain themselves or others" (2009: 112).

Jolley's female protagonists seem to be doomed by the symbolic order in which they are inscribed. Despite their strength, resourcefulness and creativity, they cannot escape it, and suffer from sexual repression. They exclude the maternal and usually identify themselves with a father figure. Joan Kirkby summarises the pattern of this characterisation:

1. Jolley's women are motherless, the mother having died at an early age.
2. They are father identified.
3. In their father identification and rejection of the maternal they have in different ways repressed their access to the feminine, to their own sexuality [...].
4. Their rejection of the maternal impels them at times to a violent rejection of other women, the murder or sacrifice of another who is in reality the self.
5. However, the denial of the maternal leads to a violent return of the repressed. There is a vengeance of the denied element. (1988: 46-47)

Moreover, these women normally come across a representative of the archetypal woman, either "a voluptuous mother woman" and/or "an ageing, ailing post-menopausal woman". Both figures stand for "the maternal blackness", that is, "the spectral presence of a dead-undead

mother, archaic, and all-encompassing, a ghost signifying the problematics of femininity which the heroine must confront” (Kirkby, 1988: 47). Sexual difference becomes important when the subject enters the symbolic order. At that moment, the daughter can choose mother identification, emphasising her “feminine” side and placing herself in a marginal position within the symbolic order, or father identification, rejecting the maternal and deriving her identity from the same symbolic order (1988: 47). Since Jolley’s women reject the maternal, when the ghost of the repressed mother appears —“the call of the mother”, as Kristeva labels it in *About Chinese Women* (1977: 39)—, it can be fatal, resulting in hallucinations and madness (Kirkby, 1988: 56).

Jolley employs deflection and evasion in order to achieve her depiction of women’s love of other women. The observing narrators of her stories are simultaneously outcast characters, which brings about a double distancing of narrative perspective. This double distance also produces the typical ambivalence of her fiction. Furthermore, the gaze is directed to what is lively, out of the ordinary or painful, thus inviting the reader to look. Readers enter her fictional world captivated by what they see, but how far they are able to be part of it is left open or suspended. That depends on how much the narrator-observer offers them: “From a deflected angle Jolley achieves a clear view, but readers are always implicated in the observer’s gaze” (Levy, 2009: 114-115). Observation is crucial in Jolley’s literature, in particular women observing other women. This female voyeurism, often represented as women dancing and other women watching them, is attained in a subtle

way. The fact that her “observer narrators are themselves awkward or unconventionally feminine, and are attracted to the feminine, is not directly stated, but is suggestive of motives for looking, and longing, among Jolley’s desiring women”. The power of the gaze is both artistic and erotic. Besides, it is connected with the outsider, “for the outsider—an artist or observer—has to make sense of what she sees and decide how she wishes to engage with, or in, it” (2009: 117). Jolley’s observing women transgress literary conventions, where men are normally the lookers that desire female objects. In her fiction, it is the female voice and desire that are expressed, something that traditional literature, following patriarchal tenets, has usually neglected. This is also related to Jolley’s concern about storytelling and the creative process. In this way, she joins feminist discourses, in which women’s access to speech, narration and textual production are prominent themes. Her typical ambiguity in topic and style is another characteristic of feminist writing (2009: 114).

The mastery over speech and storytelling is linked to the constant control that Jolley’s characters try to get. They are possessive not only with people, but also as regards money, land and other kinds of property. Susan Lever highlights the subject of domination in her novels: “Her novels so often create characters who passively fall in with the wishes of more dominant people, or who practise cruelty within a limited domestic or institutional sphere. But she is also alert to the shifts in power within relationships and the desire for control that often accompanies love” (2009: 2). This domination is practised by men over

women, or by women over other women. The tension created around power relationships is successfully depicted by her use of the gothic, inscribing her fiction into the female gothic tradition. Within this tradition, the female world she portrays is: “enclosed, interior, even claustrophobic; the women long to escape those confines, and the fiction reveals the fantasies to which that desire has been transferred. [...] The woman, confined or enclosed (often within the domesticated house), desires to move outside of that enclosure” (Gelder and Salzman: 1989: 128). As far as human relationships are concerned, Jolley’s fiction deals with relationships within unorthodox families, focusing above all on generation gaps and misunderstandings (Paul Salzman in Koval, 2007: n.p.). She demonstrates the lack of conventionality of most apparently normal marriages, and how loneliness and sexual desire can make people get involved in “a maze of wayward relationships” (Lever, 2009: 2).

Jolley produces a special imaginary world in her novels. An important feature of this fictional world is its unity. It is an ever-evolving entity where characters reappear in different situations (Kelder and Salzman, 1989: 66). Jolley sets her novels in contemporary times, but it is possible to grasp the flavour of an earlier period —the 1940s. The main reason is that she wrote most of her stories many years before they were published. Her common settings are institutions —normally a school, hospital or nursing home— and the country (1989: 66). With regard to institutions, she used these locations to bring to light what is hidden behind their official doors, in the same way as patriarchy

shadows the feminine world and heterosexuality shadows homosexuality. As Bronwen Levy asserts:

In Jolley's own life, as a young woman in female or female-dominated institutions such as schools and hospitals, 'women of a certain kind' were able to make of the institution a cover, and lead encoded lives beyond the official view. The young Jolley observed and, to an extent, it seems, participated in these lives, with all their physical and emotional energies. Jolley's lived and fictional worlds of women's longing therefore precede Women's and Gay Liberation, perhaps bearing out [...] 'something irredeemably between-wars' about some of Jolley's characters. (2009: 115)

As for the country setting, the characters usually show the urge to possess land, which can often be read as "a commentary on the narrow existence they must break out of" (Kelder and Salzman, 1989: 66). Jolley's landscape is varied, but her favourite country location seems to be the small landholdings around Wooroloo —situated at about fifty kilometres east of Perth (1989: 98).

Landscape played an important role for Jolley. Nature is restorative, instructive, but also mesmerising and secretive, unwilling to disclose its mysteries: "nature offers the possibility of unspoken knowledge to those who can read it. It is the soil that gives people a sense of belonging; it is a well-proportioned landscape that brings a balanced view of life; and it is nature which, through its silent indifference towards human life, brings freedom" (Lindsay, 2000: 167). Jolley rejected the biblical view that humans were created in the image of God and given the free dominion of the earth. Rather, she called for a coexistence in harmony (2000: 169). Nature and life-force were intrinsically bound together for her (2000: 162). That is why lack of respect towards nature will have evil consequences for all (2000: 167). Jolley's interest in literary creation seems to be related to natural

creation. Sue Gillett links artistic and biological creativity in Jolley's fiction, contending that the writer's intention was to demythologise creativity and place it closer to humankind. Her inclination to describe the female body serves to highlight the reality of birth:

In making the woman's body the site of conception, in conceiving of birth as a biological passage from the womb to the world outside, Jolley replaces the notion of creation as a magical granting of life by a master with a powerful wand with that of a laborious transformation of one material into two. Pregnancy, which features so often in Jolley's work, symbolises the paradoxical nature of the relationship between mother and child, writer and text, whilst also demythologising creativity and centring that activity in the human physical world. (1991: 112-113)

Thus, Jolley emphasises women's gift of creation: they are able to produce both art and life. Gilbert and Gubar's "anxiety of authorship" does not seem to work for her.

Jolley's spiritual approach to nature is noteworthy. It runs parallel to the Aboriginal understanding of land, and it is similar to Tim Winton's. This approach places her close to the mystics, who perceive "a divine force that cannot be named" (Lindsay, 2000: 200) —what Winton would call "the numinous". The fact that she lived in Western Australia cannot be underestimated. The Western Australian landscape can be found in her novels, and not just as a mere background, but also impinging on her characters' lives. Isolation, entrapment, marginalisation and the possession of land are prominent topics in her fiction. These themes are also connected with Jolley's feeling of exile. It is important to bear in mind that she was a European immigrant. Delys Bird points to the role that exile played in Jolley: "[She] perceived herself as an exile in her own life, 'on the edge' as she put it, always out of step with the ordinary and the conventional, and her writing is

marked by the experience of exile” (2009: 127). Her condition of exile places her in a middle position between Australia and Europe: “her fiction refers to her European literary and intellectual background but is also inscribed with her Australian experience” (Bird, 2000: 185). Although Jolley said that she considered herself a West Australian writer —“if my writing has some regional flavour, then that is what it is” (in Lindsay, 2000: 145)—, her European experience is also visible in her works, but not at odds with their West Australianness. This in-between status turned her into a more difficult author for her contemporary Australian readership. But once restrictive literary barriers were overthrown, this special characteristic contributed to making her a much more interesting writer worldwide, as the ongoing popularity of her novels demonstrates.

III.2. THE WELL: A TALE OF HIDDEN DEPTHS

The Well (1986)¹ tells the story of two women who live isolated on a farm in the wheatbelt area of Western Australia, and how their friendship begins to fade when a mysterious man tragically intrudes. Hester Harper is an old crippled woman who has lived on the farm for most of her life. As a child, she lived with her father and grandmother. She fondly remembers her childhood with Hilde Herzfeld, a German governess who, apart from educating her, became the mother she never had. Unfortunately, Hilde was forced to abandon after her pregnancy — the result of an affair with Mr Harper— was discovered. Hilde's dismissal and the unveiling of her sexual relationship with Mr Harper leave an indelible mark on Hester, which will affect her future behaviour. Hester was sent to a boarding school, but when her grandmother died, she had to return to look after her father. She helps him to run the estate, and after his death, she inherits it all and takes charge of the business. Hester has never married and is not interested in looking for a husband to create a family.

Hester meets Katherine in the town. She is a sixteen-year-old orphan who is going to be sent back to the orphanage because her foster family is leaving the country. Hester decides to adopt her. Katherine is a lively girl, fond of movies —always impersonating some actor or film character—, and in contrast with Hester, she dreams of her wedding day and future life with an ideal husband and family.

¹ The book was adapted for the cinema in 1997, directed by Samantha Lang.

Katherine adapts to the lonely farm life very well, obediently doing everything Hester commands. Hester loses all her interest in her property and gradually focuses more on her relationship with the young girl. She is trying to reenact her past relationship with Hilde. The neglect of her business pushes her to sell the estate to the Bordens, a neighbouring family, and they move to a small old cottage on the edge of her former land. There, the two women are able to go on living in a peaceful and wonderful world of their own.

Nevertheless, their happiness has its days counted. One night, they are driving back home. Katherine is at the wheel and she runs over something on the dark road. It seems that she has hit a man and the dead body is stuck on the front rack. Hester does not let her see the body, and following her instructions, the girl drives to the well that is next to the cottage, where Hester manages to drop the corpse. Later, they realise the money the old woman kept hidden in the cottage has been stolen. They assume that the dead man is the thief. Hester tells Katherine to go down and recover the money that the man must still carry on him, but the girl refuses. The next day, Katherine claims that the man is alive and demands to be helped out. Suddenly, the girl's good nature and disposition change. Hester panics as she witnesses how her almost perfect recreated world threatens to vanish. Uncertainty arises and the women's friendship and honesty are put to the test. Besides, Hester's repressed memories find a way out at the same time as she loses Katherine's control. Hester's solution is to have the well sealed off and put an end to the intruder's evil influence.

The well is the most potent symbol of the story, as its title gives away. It is contradictory and multifarious. Apart from being a universal symbol of the feminine and Mother Earth, in the story the well functions as a source of anxiety and the repository of desires, repressed fears and memories. It is also a multidiscourse space where meanings collapse, and a metaphor for both female oppression and liberation. Hester is a very complex character with outstanding gothic qualities. In a sense, she chooses marginalisation and isolation. At the beginning, she is rich and powerful, feared and respected. Her alienation is exacerbated by her defiance of gender stereotypes as a spinster and female landowner. I intend to analyse her as both conforming to and subverting the deep-rooted tradition that reads deviant females as monsters. Hester's ongoing transgression of gender boundaries gives her the chance to integrate in herself those qualities and activities that have traditionally been gender-divided. Possession, manipulation, the exertion of power and how it can easily shift hands, are central motifs in *The Well*. I will study how the characters participate in this battle for power and the strategies they employ to obtain it—which sometimes leads them to imitate the same social pattern that suffocates them, as is portrayed in Hester and Katherine's unequal relationship. This battle for control also extends to words, so I will end my analysis by exploring how storytelling provides women like Hester with the possibility of challenging the hegemonic masculine discourse.

III.2.1. Monstruous Hester

Hester is a magnificent piece of characterisation, whose complexity lends itself to multiple and sometimes contradictory readings. “*I challenge thee to mortal combat!*” (190. Original emphasis), she used to say to everyone when she was a child, waving her umbrella and thrusting it into the sofa cushions. Although she is not precisely a feminist advocate because her actions are basically selfish, the way she behaves often departs from established rules. The way she lives and the way she acts place her in the so-called “masculine” sphere. To begin with, she is a businesswoman. Her father owns a huge agricultural estate in the wheatbelt area of Western Australia. She lives with him in the big house of the property and helps him to run the business. Since Mr Harper has no sons, she becomes her father’s “son”. As she recalls: “She had not come home, at sixteen, from boarding school, in the middle of a term, to keep house for her father, her grandmother having died suddenly, and not learned how to speak to the men” (205). When Mr Harper dies, she inherits everything as her only descendant: “In spite of a lame leg which caused her to walk awkwardly leaning on a stick, and in spite of her own advancing years, she decided that she would continue to run the property. Following her father’s ways and wearing all the keys on a gold chain round her neck she concentrated on wheat and sheep” (9). Hester is strong and independent. She is not passive and is able to take action under any circumstances. For instance, when the accident happens, it is her who takes total control of the situation. She tells Katherine, who is crying and in shock, what she

must do: “Stop crying! Stop making that noise. I want you to listen carefully and do everything I tell you. We’ve no choice. We’ve not got much time” (7-8). In addition, Hester is a childless spinster. She is not a wife and a mother, traditional female roles which acquire higher relevance in a conservative farmer community in Western Australia.

For centuries people have been taught that women can only be satisfied at home within a traditional family. From a patriarchal perspective, the dream of every woman should be marriage. Having children, a fate written by her biology, is a must. Namely, a woman “does not fulfil herself if she is not a mother. A single woman is inevitably unhappy and does not perform her social mission” (Alborch, 2004: 103. My translation).² Single women defy and disturb the universal dynamic man-woman as well as the essential function of marriage. The single woman is the antithesis of the ideal woman, a deviation from the ideal feminine which has been established by a phallogocentric culture. For this reason, the figure of the single woman has been imbued with all kinds of negative connotations, which are still alive, though in different forms. Society continues to feel sorry for single women or blames them for not conforming to gender roles. It is interesting that, in contrast, celibacy in men is regarded as positive. Since men belong to the public sphere, their choice is understood as their “noble sacrifice” for their “creative vocation” (Alborch, 2004: 107. My translation).

² Una mujer “no se realiza si no es madre. Una mujer sin pareja es irremediabilmente infeliz y socialmente no cumple con su misión” (Original quotation).

The term “spinster” evokes ideas such as unfulfilled promises, repression, sublimity, self-deception, frustration, subjection to a father figure, selfishness and hedonism. In the past, no sensible woman wanted to remain single because a spinster was the target of jokes and sympathy. What is more, spinsters could easily suffer from hysteria,³ “the female disease par excellence” (Alborch, 2004: 32. My translation). Nowadays, fertility, youth and beauty are still bound together. They have different meanings for men and women. As a single woman gets older, her devaluation is greater because she is losing her beauty and her capacity to bear children. By contrast, an old man embodies experience and wisdom, qualities hardly valued in old women (2004: 106-107).

Hester has all the requirements to be despised by her patriarchal community: she is old and unmarried, she has a lame leg that makes her ugly, and she participates in “masculine” activities. The fact that Hester performs tasks attributed to men is symbolised by “her English walking stick”, one of her emblems of power: “It was imported specially having a singular gracefulness of its own, only becoming ugly, she realized, when in partnership with her own deformity. Without a stick, this stick, she was helpless. She never tried to do anything without it” (16). Hester, playing in part the role of his father’s “son”, is as possessive and domineering a character in every sense. This can be

³ As Renes notes, the name “Hester” is etymologically linked to hysteria, “a condition of extreme fear and emotional excess which the ancient Greeks believed to be typically female as they related it to disturbances in the womb, while nineteenth century medical science identified it with sexual dissatisfaction and Freud with unresolved psychological conflict” (2009: 8).

seen in the gold chain with keys she wears around her neck: "She did not wear rings or ornaments of any kind. Only the keys" (9). The key is a traditional symbol of control and authority, as it masters the door (Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1995: 670). As long as she feels the keys, she feels safe because she still holds the power. That is why she continuously checks if she has them on her. Kerry Goddard finds the roots of Hester's possessive behaviour in at least two sources: "it stems from her father-identification but also from the fact that she is a woman and her only access to power is through ownership. Land is power: it has a financial meaning. It has given Hester masculine (phallic) power and has been her only guarantee of respect and safety" (1993: 207).

Hester's status as an independent businesswoman is marked on her body. It deprives her of "femininity", as she symbolically wears the keys on a necklace "nestling between her rather flat breasts" (9). Her crippledom also points to her lack of feminine charm. She needs an orthopedical boot and a stick to walk. However, though limping, she manages to move freely anywhere and do anything: "One night, Hester, hearing a noise, slipped from her little bed in the prettiest bedroom in the house and limped, without her special boot, along the passage, steadying herself along the wall" (161); "She carries a petrol can in one hand. With the other hand she leans heavily on her stick and, in spite of the built-up surgical boot and the iron calliper, she is limping along at quite a good pace" (225). She usually rejects any kind of help, as when Mrs Grossman says that she does not need to come to town to do the shopping:

You have only to send in a note with one of the men and Mr Grossman will be only too pleased to oblige. Mr Grossman will bring you anything you need, just you . . .’ ‘Thank you Mrs Grossman.’ Miss Harper tossed her stick letting it leave her hand as if it were a spear into the long back of her station wagon. She drew on her leather gloves, ‘but I am quite able to come to town as often as I need,’ she said. (12)

Her lame leg makes her ugly in a patriarchal world where female beauty has been standardised and made a must. Hester has been aware of her ugliness since she was a little child: “Hester’s fingers were white at the knuckles as she picked up the leather folder containing her writing things. She did not like her white bones showing through the skin, they were ugly, she would hide them in the pleats of her skirt” (159-160). She has often perceived herself as inferior and pushed aside. On these grounds, she feels so upset when Mr Bird warns her against men who may go after her inherited wealth. She takes it as an insulting hint at her lack of beauty:

It was not so long ago that time could blur entirely a farm-management conversation when Mr Bird had come directly to the point and warned Hester that there was always the possibility that some man, out for land and money, might make up to her with a view to marriage. He had spoken as gently as he could but the very truth that he uttered was one which Hester knew and understood all too well; the awful fact that a man, if one should come, would not want her in her ugliness for herself but want her only as a means to the possession of her land. (69-70)

Thus, *The Well* joins the female gothic tradition in its criticism of the imposition of beauty in women: “The role of beauty is deeply connected with the myth of a ‘natural’ femininity which dominated Victorian thinking especially and today again influences radical feminist groups. This myth is discarded repeatedly throughout feminine gothic texts” (Becker, 1999: 63).

It can be argued that Hester’s social alienation and physical deformity turn her into a monster of sorts. This is hinted at in the

frightening noise she makes when she laughs, which is often compared to a donkey's braying: "Hester, when really roused and excited, was capable of making sounds like a fog-bound ship knowingly approaching a rocky harbourless coast. This night she brayed like an enthusiastic donkey" (48). Hester fulfils the role of the typical gothic outcast, a kind of Frankenstein's monster. In this light, her physical deformity shows her deformed morality from her community's point of view, following the tradition that links ugliness to the morally bad. The figure of the female monster is pervasive in female gothic fiction. But before explaining its use for feminist purposes, it is important to trace the figure of the monster in gothic literature in general.

The word "monster" is employed to define something "horrifically unnatural or excessively large" (Punter and Byron, 2004: 263). According to etymology, the term monster can have two meanings. As it derives from the Latin "monstrare" —to show—, a monster is something to be shown or something that serves to demonstrate. As it also derives from the Latin "monere" —to warn—, a monster is also a warning, a prophecy of catastrophes (Punter and Byron, 2004: 263; Huet, 1993: 6). The interpretation of the monster has repeatedly changed throughout history. From classical times to the Renaissance, monsters were regarded either as "signs of divine anger or as portents of impending disasters". Some were made out of ill-assorted members —like the griffin, a cross between an eagle and a lion—, some were incomplete because they lacked some vital part or their excess made them grotesque as they had more body parts than usual —like the Hydra,

gifted with many heads. By the eighteenth century, the awful body of the monster started to be imbued with a moral function. They were the visible warning of the fatal consequences of vice and foolishness, in an attempt to promote virtuous and proper behaviour (Punter and Byron, 2004: 263).

Monstrosity has played a crucial cultural role. Through difference, both physical and behavioural, monsters contribute to defining what is normal and acceptable in society. They serve to differentiate good from evil, the self from the other: “Located at the margins of culture, they police the boundaries of the human, pointing to those lines that must not be crossed” (Punter and Byron, 2004: 263). Nevertheless, the definition of good depends on evil, in the same way as the definition of the self depends on the other. This leads to the ambivalence that can be appreciated in twentieth-century gothic, an ambivalence mainly seen in the monster’s advertising and defiance of social ideologies:

Monsters, as the displaced embodiment of tendencies that are repressed or [...] ‘abjected’ within a specific culture not only establish the boundaries of the human, but may also challenge them. Hybrid forms that exceed and disrupt those systems of classification through which cultures organize experience, monsters problematize binary thinking and demand a rethinking of the boundaries and concepts of normality. Gothic texts repeatedly draw attention to the monster’s constructed nature, to the mechanisms of monster production, and reveal precisely how the other is constructed and positioned as both alien and inferior. In turn, this denaturalizes the human, showing the supposedly superior human to be, like the monster’s otherness, simply the product of an ongoing struggle in the discursive construction and reconstruction of power. (Punter and Byron, 2004: 264)

Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, significantly written by a woman, is probably the first work to invite readers to sympathise with the monster. Unlike other writings of the time, the monster is given a voice so that he can explain the reasons for his wickedness (2004: 265). This

implies a potential subversion in the representation of monstrosity, which so far consisted only in the visual display of moral vices and transgressions: “they were to be seen and not heard”. Therefore, “the visibility of [...Frankenstein’s] monster means nothing and his eloquence means everything for his identity” (Baldick, 1990: 45).

Women have been tied to the figure of the monster from its inception. Back in classical Greece, Aristotle claimed that monsters were false resemblances and linked monstrosity to woman. Monsters and women were both necessary dissimilarities, deviations from the standard which was man. Woman was a sort of deformed male:

Anyone who does not take after his parents is really in a way a monstrosity, since in these cases Nature has in a way strayed from the generic type. The first beginning of this deviation is when a female is formed instead of a male, though this indeed is a necessity required by Nature, since the race of creatures which are separated into male and female has got to be kept in being. (In Huet, 1993: 3)

He goes on to conclude that if woman is herself on the monstrous side, she will bear monsters by nature. Many theories have accounted for the origin of monsters, but until the nineteenth century the most popular one can be traced back to a lost text attributed to Empedocles (Huet, 1993: 4). He ascribed the birth of monsters to the disorder of the mother’s imagination:

Instead of reproducing the father’s image, as nature commands, the monstrous child bore witness to the violent desires that moved the mother at the time of conception or during pregnancy. The resulting offspring carried the marks of her whims and fancy rather than the recognizable features of its legitimate genitor. The monster thus erased paternity and proclaimed the dangerous power of the female imagination. (Huet, 1993: 1)

Hence, monsters were warnings, demonstrations of the mother’s unfulfilled desires and secret passions. The evolution in embryology and genetics undermined the old theories that explained resemblances.

However, the role of the mother in the physical shape of progeny was not completely forgotten. Even nowadays, it is popularly believed that birthmarks are the result of maternal cravings during pregnancy (Huet, 1993: 6).

The image of woman as monster is pervasive in culture. Literature has reflected and contributed to spreading this stereotype. From a social perspective, woman's natural monstrosity is brought to the fore or increased every time she steps out of her imposed social role, that is, every time she is not "feminine". Female gothic has reappropriated the female monster and used it in its exposure and rebellion against the patriarchal system that rules society. The monstrous female is a powerful figure in literary history since she embodies "forces which are among the most challenging to the structure both of the house of fiction and the symbolic order" (Becker, 1999: 57). She is employed to denounce the annihilating effects of opposing the archetypal notion of women to one specific woman, who will normally depart from the archetype. As Toril Moi asserts: "Patriarchal oppression consists of imposing certain standards of feminine on all biological women, in order precisely to make believe that the chosen standards for 'femininity' are *natural*. Thus a woman who refuses to conform can be labelled both *unfeminine* and *unnatural*" (in Becker, 1999: 44. Original emphasis). Female gothic revolves around the implications of the unnatural unfeminine in society.

Monsters and women in phallocentric cultures share some basic characteristics. Ellen Moers defines monsters as "creatures who scare

because they look different, wrong, non-human” (1985: 101). In a universe where everything is defined in opposition to male patterns, women enter the category of monsters. To mention a few similarities, both are the other, alterations of the norm, and thus, they are outcasts who find it really hard to change the position allotted to them in society. As outcasts, they are denied access to certain privileges, such as the knowledge provided by a proper education and a voice of their own. Their technique to fit in society is to copy the dominant party. Frankenstein’s monster serves as an illustrative example of the affinity between monsters and women, as Fredericke van Leeuwen, among other critics, has observed:

Because of his ugliness this male monster is an outsider to society in the same sense in which women, because of their sex, are outsiders to it. Like women, he is not responsible for his situation, yet can in no way alter it. Nothing can make him a human being, just as women can never be men. He tries to find his way into the dominant culture in the same way women try to fight their way into it: by imitation. He is deprived of male privileges, speech and education, in the same way women are deprived of them. (In Becker, 1999: 64)

Van Leeuwen adds that as Mary Shelley considered herself a social outsider, she identified with her “hideous progeny”, as she called it in the preface of her novel (Shelley, 1993: 5).

In *The Well*, Hester acts as a monstrous outcast. Firstly, she is a woman, an other to man, but most important, she does not comply with feminine stereotypes. She trespasses the boundary that separates men and women as she participates in non-domestic activities, invading the masculine sphere. This is in part her way of getting power, identity, status and success in a world controlled by men. In other words, she imitates men. However, her success is flawed because she is not a man.

Regardless of her actions, she will never be treated as such, as an equal. Her usurpation of male privileges is perceived as a serious threat by men because she can destroy the discriminatory gender opposition on which patriarchy is based. Unfortunately, she also represents a threat for those women who have internalised patriarchal values to the point that they agree with men in that the only function of woman is to be the dependent beautiful partner of man and to perpetuate the human species.

Furthermore, she bases her relationship with Katherine on possession, uncannily recreating the oppressive atmosphere of patriarchal families. Hester's appropriation of Katherine is slightly different, though, since she uses her to flee from a world she does not harmonise with. Hester, a "masculine" woman, paradoxically retreats to "feminine" domesticity. But when she retires with Katherine, she does not stop thinking as a businesswoman, and when she runs the farm, she also takes care of the home —and her father until he dies. This ambiguous attitude shows her difficult position between two confronting worlds: the impossibility of participating in both, of choosing one without renouncing the other. Whatever her decision, she will always be a sort of monster for her community, neither feminine nor masculine. On the whole, it can be said that Hester embodies the struggle to integrate human qualities that phallogentrism has split as irreconcilable opposites. Moreover, Hester's relationship with Katherine, independently of the nature of their relation —friendly, motherly-daughterly, erotic, or a combination of all: "[Hester] did not attempt to

give any name to the relationship” (19)— implies a further challenge against the patriarchal system which imposes heterosexuality. This imposition, apart from suppressing homosexuality, hinders female friendship because, in a world where the only chance for female self-fulfilment and security is beside a man, women can regard other women as rivals.

Although Hester can be regarded as a monstrous woman, she invites sympathy. When we pity somebody, “we place that person in a position of inequality, since the person must first be recognised as weak and unfortunate in some way” (Cranston, 1991: 208). Hester is described according to her gender, age, marital status and physical disability, all of which put her in a difficult marginal position in her society. Despite this presentation, the narration shows that she is ambiguous, capable of both good and evil. On the one hand, she is good-hearted: she regularly makes clothes for the children of poor families (15), sends small cheques to organisations that fight against starvation in third world countries (52-53), and adopts orphaned Katherine. Although her reasons to adopt her are basically selfish —she feels lonely—, she is even toying with the idea of leaving her all her money when she dies (16). On the other, she can be remarkably cruel: “She was sympathetic to misfortune and helped a great many people but itinerant workers bowed down with personal tragedy she refused to have on her property, saying quite bluntly that she had to prosper and would only be held back by the down and out and the feckless” (45), she refuses to offer some company to a depressed young wife —“Not

understanding nor caring about the young mother's need, Hester had merely, from her lofty place on the verandah, dismissed the visitor watching with a superior detachment as she made her slow way back to the loneliness of the long day while her husband was somewhere out in the paddocks" (38)—, or when a rooster once disturbs her with its crowing, she does not hesitate to break its neck "with a twist of her strong fingers" (66). Besides, her selective goodness makes us wonder about the truthfulness of her generosity and whether the text is being ironic, such as when her cheques, parcels and other contributions to charities are described as small or meagre: "the selected few charities, [...] fortunately, did not have to survive on her meagre contributions" (61). Also notice that in the following example Katherine behaves as possessively as Hester. Neither of them is able to get rid of most of her clothes:

Katherine would bring several armfuls of clothes [...] and spread them on the sofa and the chairs and then they would go over the clothes trying to decide which things they no longer wanted. This was difficult to do for as soon as Katherine said her pink dress was really out of fashion and too childish now Hester would cry, '[...] Not your little pink! [...] You must keep it always! Forever!' [...] And when Hester, with a flamboyant gesture, gathered into a cardboard box whole heaps of her own garments Katherine wept and said that Miss Harper would surely freeze in the winter, wasn't it all her good woollens she was giving away. [...] in the end, tired but triumphant, they would reach a decision which satisfied them both and a smallish parcel would be made [...] to be sent to [...] the Orphanage. (52)

Hester's cruellest deed is that she rules Katherine's life in the same constrictive way as society rules hers. The lack of real love and affection in her life partly explains her attitude towards the young girl. The fact that the girl seems to be taking advantage of the old woman makes it more difficult to pinpoint where evil really lies: in Hester, in Katherine, in society or in all of them. "By inviting us to share [...Hester's]

sympathetic background [...], Jolley creates a converse situation in which the reader's terror rises up from the inability to locate the source of evil" (Cranston, 1991: 221).⁴

If monstrosity is used to show the morally wrong, it is also necessary to show the morally right in order to define more clearly the limits of both. Although in *The Well* right and wrong are entangled, a contrasting figure is used to expose what Hester, as a woman, reacts against. Hester's counterpart is Mrs Borden, whose name summons the feminine: Rosalie. Her way of obtaining power differs from Hester's as she is willing to comply with social norms. This woman is exemplary according to patriarchal patterns: a good wife to Mr Borden and mother of a large offspring: "She was a vigorous woman and was, as always, pregnant" (38). Her current pregnancy is emphasised every time she appears in the novel: "Mrs Borden said laughing and glancing [...] down her own simple maternity smock" (90); "She keeps her hands lightly on the steering wheel which does seem to be held firmly by her pregnancy" (231). Her respectability and high status is achieved through her husband, and thus she is accepted by her community. However, it must be said that the novel does not present Mrs Borden as an example to follow. Rather, she is as defective as Hester. It is true that she is a lot more "feminine", but she is not much of a likeable character. See, for instance, her portrayal at the party she gives, particularly when she

⁴ This characteristic is similarly found in Frankenstein's creature. His wickedness is shown to be in part the result of the ill-treatment he suffers by society. *Frankenstein* conveys the message that if you treat people monstrously, they can turn into monsters, bringing up questions such as: "What is the origin of monstrous behaviour?", "Where does evil come from?" (John Mepham in Shelley, 1993: x-xi).

interrupts Hester's conversation with some men: "she was hissing and rearing, clutching at Hester's arm. [...] 'Mr Borden is just addressing his guests. Keep your voice down. Do! If you can!'" (100). Hester thinks that "women caught" in marriage and childbirth, like Mrs Borden, try "to ensure that others [...] similarly trapped" (145). In her opinion, people in general, "especially people like the Borden, [...] have] only one idea in their heads and that [...] is] to make couples of people and to follow this coupling with reproducing" (159), something which she abhors. That is why she is terrified by the future Mrs Borden wants to design for Katherine: marriage or an adequate job for a woman, such as one that implies child raising —"a teacher, primary of course"— or the care of others —a nurse (94). Obviously, Hester will not consent, not so much because she has a conscious feminist interest, but because she does not want to lose her.

III.2.2. Miss Harper's Inheritance

Hester derives her power from her status as landowner. At the beginning of the novel, she lives in a big house in the middle of a vast agricultural estate she will later inherit from her father. There is little around except fields of wheat isolated from civilisation:

the brown paddocks which stretch endlessly on both sides to far-away horizons. A practical consideration which can bring a human being into perspective [...] is the knowledge that a tiny handful of people can produce from this vast landscape enormous quantities of food. The great dome of the familiar sky is above like a never-ending floating roof of light clear air. Once again there are no clouds though [...] a faint blur which could be cloud perhaps even rain-bearing cloud. It is at present far away. It seems to lie, hardly suspended, above the place where the land meets the sky. (225)

This flat landscape, unlike a forest, cannot hide dangers in the shadows of trees. It is well-lit by day, so it is possible to see everything around under the usual cloudless and all-embracing sky. However, that does not make it less mysterious or frightening. Its immensity compared to the size of a human being is scary. It belittles the human figure and paradoxically arouses feelings of enclosure and entrapment, similar to those felt by early explorers in the Australian desert. Its dryness makes it hostile and relates it to death. But appearances can be deceptive.

Water flows underground, and where there is water, there is life:

Hester, looking again at the line of big trees in their groups along the boundary fence, remembered her father explaining to her once that trees growing like that suggested that there was water flowing under the earth, probably over a rock face a long way down. These old trees, he said, more than likely had their feet deep in sweet water. (36)

Nature is not mere decoration in *The Well*. As in Western Australian literature in general, landscape is one of its main ingredients. It is a living entity, part and parcel of the characters' lives as it rules their destinies, both personal and economic. Drought and rain determine the productivity of the soil. Since these people live in the same land they work on, their personal lives are inevitably linked to their natural environment. The power of nature is highlighted through numerous references to lack of water and rain, and the dry parched land, which mirrors the characters' anxieties about their means of survival: "As they crossed the road bridge into the town Hester would always remark on the low level of water in the river" (45); "Prices will drop, like lead they'll drop. Why? Drought" (72); "She tried to be pleased that there were clouds, even if they were thin, they were clouds and

clouds were clouds even without the immediate promise of rain” (128); “The river, far below, was undisturbed. The brown water had no ripples; it was low below the banks and stagnant” (130).

The nature described in the novel calls forth the sublime. It produces both fear and wonder, as the next sentence expresses in just a few words: “The immense landscape dwarfs all human life” (234). Hester also experiences the sublime as she walks along the land, but with a significant difference. She feels free, happy and small in comparison with the vast landscape, but she is not afraid at all. On the contrary, nature is capable of erasing her fears:

As she walks she tells herself that she must enjoy the feeling of her own insignificance which is enhanced by the indifference of the land. This silent indifference towards human life can make her feel small and safe. It is a safety which brings freedom for the time being. It is a freedom from fear. As she is able to sift her thoughts and feelings she knows, as she has always known, if there are several fears then there are really none. One fear on its own, is really fear and it is one fear that she has. Out between the apparently deserted paddocks it seems to be dissipated. (226)

This harmonious relation with nature is based on her understanding of the land, which helped her to be a successful businesswoman when she was in charge of her estate: “She understood the rain clouds, the east wind, the movements of the sun and the varying conditions of the soil. For some years she had been resting on her reputation and her knowledge and she continued without thinking much about it to do so” (39). Hester feels safe in the countryside. In the next example, she imagines going to and from town on foot rather than by car:

Life would be changed completely if a person walked all the way. Sometimes, in the car, she feels tempted to get out and start walking. The road between the endless paddocks of wheat would lie before her quite deserted and she would accept a different view of time and journey. When walking like this, on and on, no one in the whole world could know where she was. The occupation of a small fragment of the earth is known only to the one person who is alone on it. She imagines the feeling of being unseen

and not known about while standing in one isolated place. She would be small and safe walking and pausing to stand still low down under the immense clear blue sky. (2-3)

When Hester rents —and later sells— her estate to the Bordens, she retreats to a former shepherd's cottage in the farthest corner of the land. The cottage is even more isolated than the big house, which contributes to her further marginalisation from society. There Hester plans to indulge in the pleasures of her life with Katherine. However, the depiction of the cottage is typically gothic, preparing the scenario for the uncanny events to come:

It was a shepherd's cottage belonging to the days when men went about their work on foot or on horseback. [...] It must be one of the most isolated places. [...] The only way to approach it, apart from the rough ride over the paddocks, was by a long winding track which curved sharply immediately before coming to the yard of the cottage. The saltbush on both sides of the track [...] had grown over in places but it looked as if it would be possible to drive through. [...] All the windows of the cottage were broken and the verandah was rotten [...]. The landscape was stark, ugly even in its bareness. Near the boundary fence there were, at intervals, groups of trees making thin patches of shade. (34-35)

The description of the environment plays an essential role in any gothic story. In *The Well*, it complements scary situations and adds uneasiness. Two major passages in the book benefit from the gothic atmosphere of their surroundings: when Katherine runs over a stranger, and the stormy night when the well floods and is subsequently closed. The accident is the cornerstone of the novel (7, 105). After a party at the Bordens', Katherine and Hester are driving back home. It is late at night and the road is as deserted as usual. On their way, the moonlit clear night turns dark, as if foreseeing catastrophe:

At first it is a moonlight night, dry and clear. The chill air carries the fragrance of the ploughed earth. Liking this but wishing for the sharp scent of rain on the dusty paddocks Hester thinks to herself, not for the first time, that the nights in the wheat are either moonlit or quite black. As soon as she has this thought the moon seems to slide into a bank of ribbed dark cloud. (2)

Hester, having witnessed the change, comments to Katherine: “How the night can change [...]. The surrounding countryside [...] could seem desolate and frightening for anyone travelling” (4). In addition to the black shadows of the night, they drive through occasional “swirls of white mist”, which causes a contrasting effect against the dark, especially when they come across a dip on the road, because then “they are completely enshrouded as if in a light white endlessly winding garment” (4). Shortly after they have dropped the corpse in the well, it begins to dawn. Since the daylight can give away what they have done, the sunrise is depicted as menacing: “Already long fingers of a pale honey-coloured light were creeping across the place where the endless black paddocks merged with the endless black sky” (108). The night seems the best moment to recover the money from the corpse: “Tonight, when it’s dark we’ll get our money back!” (114).

The night when the well floods is the most thrilling part of the novel. It is when Hester and Katherine’s fears and true feelings come to light. That night they see each other with different eyes. Katherine, who always lets herself be led by Hester, becomes unruly and dangerous. She wants to steal Hester’s keys and rescue the man in the well, who she swears is alive. Despite a splitting headache, Hester is doing her best to stay awake. The girl knows that after a headache Hester usually falls soundly asleep, so she is biding her time to grab the keys. The tension between the two women is reflected in the brewing storm that finally explodes. The clacking of the well lid in the wind ceaselessly

reminds the women of its dark secret (193-194). Rain is always welcomed in that dry territory, particularly after the current severe drought: “the years of drought had now become several years” (59). Nevertheless, the stressful circumstances make the protagonists almost indifferent towards the blessed rain:

The two women, as if unable to leave each other, sat in the kitchen, one each side of the table [...]. Outside it had started to rain. Long overdue the rain was heavy and persistent. They heard it beating on the roof. Water ran in long rivulets down the outside of the uncurtained kitchen window. The fragrance of the rain on the dusty earth which normally pleased them both was not mentioned. It was as if they had not noticed it. (186)

But old habits die hard, and Hester, who has been in charge of the estate for a long time, cannot help worrying about the safety of the cottage (193) and thinking how beneficial that water will be for the soil, though it is no longer hers (191). The rain, however, turns into a potential threat because flood water will cut off all means of communication with the outside world. What is worse, if the water in the well rises too high, it will push the man to the surface, and if he is really alive, they will be trapped with him:

There was water in the well. She could smell it. High water, terrifyingly high considering the depths. She turned the pale beam of her torch on the dark surging movement of the water, hardly able to follow the frail light with her look. She was afraid of the water and what its power might have yielded. She knew how quickly flood water could rise. Bridges and paddocks could become impassable in less than ten minutes. (199)

Rain is full of symbolism in the book, like water in general. It is a positive element that creates life, far more appreciated in such a dry land. Rain water does not only bring joy to the earth, but also to people:

Strange water courses reopening altered the paddocks. The rain altered life too. Everything began to be active with the coming of the rain. People changed too. They rejoiced and they forgave old bitterness. And they did optimistic things like sowing more land and increasing their buying of machinery. Even her [Hester's] grandmother, who did not allow boots indoors, did not seem to mind mud on the kitchen floor when the men came in. (188)

The power of nature to transform is pervasive in Jolley's fiction, "rendering miracles a normal occurrence", as in *The Well*, where rain is able to change both people and landscape (Lindsay, 2000: 198). Hester feels a strong connection with rain. It evokes music for her. She experiences the same freedom as if she were listening to music (187). For this reason, sitting opposite Katherine in the kitchen, she longs for "the free pleasure of the rain" (189), to escape from that awful night. But she knows she cannot. She must confront and solve that situation. Otherwise the coming of a new day, though physically illuminating, will not shoo away the real darkness, that is, rebellious Katherine and the intrusive man in the well: "Everything would look different in the morning but the problem would be unchanged" (189). Darkness can also come from the psyche. Hester has never minded the isolation of the farm. But now, although she still loves it, if Katherine left, "the black moonless nights in the wheat" would be intolerable for her, having to spend "all her days and nights alone" (59).

Throughout the novel, Hester is afraid of interlopers who could endanger her idyllic life with Katherine, such as Joanna —Katherine's friend from the orphanage— and the man in the well. The best way of keeping intruders away is by drawing boundaries, so necessary for humans to define themselves in the world. Boundaries are constantly emphasised in *The Well*. Hester is quite conscious of the limits between her territory —physical and metaphysical— and the external world. She hates intrusions, so she is always alert to fight them: "The dead man,

the intruder, had distorted their relationship. He had brought disaster and a remedy must be found" (180); "As she opened the door she thought that she could smell the intruder. Perhaps every room and corner of the house was tainted" (122); "I don't want people here. I don't want newspaper men and photographers or journalists and sightseers. I don't want other people coming here poking about in our lives" (196); "[Mr Bird] had one leg over the fence. At the sight of the wires being pushed down even more Hester flinched. She was surprised to welcome the feeling of anger over something like a fence. [...] She tried to push Mr Bird back with her abrupt explanations" (119). The fence, so prominent in the Australian landscape, separates the strange and dangerous outside from the familiar and comforting inside.

The limits between the outer and inner world are also symbolised in the clash between the city and the country. The urban invades the rural. People from the city are buying and renting small pieces of land and farms to enjoy a leisured life close to nature. Hester does not like the newcomers and even predicts their imminent failure outside the city (143). The arrival of these people is understood differently by the other inhabitants because it means the arrival of fresh money and business. For instance, the Grossmans' store has more customers, or as Mrs Borden says, they will be able to raise enough money to build a swimming pool for the town. Despite Hester's reluctance about this invasion by the city, she concludes that she must bear the fact that life changes as time progresses, whether she likes it or not: "A town fête [...] can provide money and money can do things to alleviate and ameliorate

as people, doing all the things they do, move through life. Like moving a wood heap, log by log, to alter some detail of living. All the same, her thoughts continue, people have to endure. She also must endure” (232).

Boundaries are personified in the Bordens, Hester’s neighbours, whose name clearly echoes “borders”. It is this neighbouring family who, moving their borders little by little, engulfs Hester’s territory. Losing her land to the Bordens, Hester unwillingly passes her power on to them, which is clearly reflected in Mrs Borden’s authoritative behaviour: Hester, who has always been a privileged customer at the Grossmans’ store, has to wait until Mrs Borden is served (134); Mrs Borden proposes to hire Katherine, and Hester if she wants to, as a babysitter while she is away at a wedding with her husband (135-136); when Hester and a group of men are talking, Mrs Borden tells them to shut up because her husband is about to speak to the guests:

Other people, she noticed, were still talking. She was not the only one, there was considerable noise everywhere except in the bar where the men were now looking on in silence. With a final glare Mrs Borden released Hester’s arm and went back to her husband’s speech forcing a smile which lifted her scarlet lips well off her teeth. Still smiling she took up a possessive position at his side. (100-101)

It is at this party that Hester realises that she is now “fully on the same footing as the common townspeople” (98). Nevertheless, she will continue to draw a line between her and them to protect her own world with Katherine, her only remaining property.

The most important and dramatic scenes of the novel take place in and around the cottage. The dead man is hidden there. In the cottage, Hester starts seeing Katherine in a different light. Her gradual distrust in the girl ends up in their final confrontation for power during the

stormy night mentioned above. Houses in *The Well* function as a gothic castle. Although the flexibility of the gothic genre adapts the physical image of the castle to any time, space and social circumstances, its basic role does not change. These houses are isolated sites, far away from civilisation, usually with some old element, where the characters are consciously or unconsciously confined. Hester's farm is isolated both in space and time, as some remains from the past evince: in the cottage there is "ancient equipment" from the days when the farm was productive (42) and the women cook in a wood stove (51). Hester's behaviour exacerbates the sense of timelessness through the repetition of domestic routines (Nettelbeck, 1999: 92) and her stubborn adherence to old ways. For instance, she keeps her money in a hat, as her father did (61) and she leaves the doors unlocked (80). Mr Bird warns her that times are changing, and so should she (79-80). The "sinister dimension" in this timelessness, as Nettelbeck describes it (1999: 92), is the "unnatural stasis" that Hester introduces into her life with the girl in an attempt to stop her growing up and going away. This is most notably seen in the childish clothes Hester buys for the girl.

The house has a double function in the novel. Hester finds refuge and safety in her cottage. It is also the space where she has total dominion. On these grounds, she is reluctant to visits. Her sanctuary, however, can turn stifling. Once she sells her property and moves to the cottage, her power is limited to her house. This is significant as gothic houses are often representations of female mental and physical imprisonment in patriarchal societies. Institutions such as the family,

the courts, the Church, etc— are often embodied in architecture (Delamotte, 1990: 17). Nevertheless, Kate Ferguson Ellis contends that a “castle turned into a prison and reconverted into a home (or destroyed so that its prisoners can establish a home elsewhere) is the underlying structure of the feminine Gothic” (1989: 45). This is what Hester does with her prison/castle/cottage. She transforms it into her ideal home:

They talked happily imagining how they would make a little garden, a border each with bright flowers and attractive weeds. It would be possible [...] to coax a little lawn and a vegetable plot. They pictured the yard alive with long-legged hens and a particularly heavy type of cat. Hester thought a rooster [...] on the highest point of the well cover and herald the bright mornings with his crowing. (36-37)

But the internal structure of the cottage remains unchanged. It is still a prison. It is noteworthy that in her dominion Hester imposes a domestic happiness based on female stereotypes. They spend part of their time on the practice of the sort of female accomplishments that bring to mind those of ladies centuries ago, and whose aim was not to educate them as individuals or teach them a way of earning a living, but to insert them in constricting social roles and to please men (Mukherjee, 1991: 4). Therefore, the cottage turns even more imprisoning — especially for obedient Katherine—, and Hester’s defiance of conventions is partly maimed, as her body symbolically shows.

There is a meaningful change made by Hester in her castle/cottage. Castles are usually protected from external dangers by a moat or have guardians. Hester’s father had dogs, but she chooses birds as guardians.⁵ Birds are a recurrent image in women’s literature. The life of birds offers the sharp contrast between freedom and

⁵ The function of the moat is taken by the fence.

imprisonment which female writers use to talk about women's conditions under patriarchy: "Of all the creatures, birds alone can fly all the way to heaven —yet they are caged" (Moers, 1985: 250). The action of flying gives an uplifting sensation of freedom. An illustrative example is given by writer and pioneering pilot Anne Morrow Lindbergh. This is how she described what she felt when flying: "[It] is a very tangible freedom [...]. From being earth-bound and provincial, I was given limitless horizons. . . . Like the bird pushed out of the nest, I was astonished that —flapping hard— I could fly. All this was liberating" (in Moers, 1985: 251). In the image of birds and their wide variety, the domestic and the familiar are entangled with the mysterious and the exotic, which calls to mind the archetype of woman as both familiar and the other. Moreover, women's voices are mirrored by the singing of birds. Birds can sing "more beautifully than human voices". However, their voices are ignored or silenced when they become upsetting (Moers, 1985: 250).

There are plenty of birds in Jolley's fiction and *The Well* is no exception. The freedom of birds is envied by Hester when she sees flocks of cockatoos flying the morning after throwing the dead body in the well: "These marauding pirates, on their way to other places, swooped and circled in their noisy ragged flight. They seemed to suggest the encompassing of spaciousness and freedom and an enjoyment of something known only to themselves. They seemed entirely without responsibility" (117). But most important, birds are the guardians of the cottage: "There were geese about the place and Hester knew that an

intruder might well be frightened of the flock. There were four white ganders with strong flexible necks. They were powerful birds and their blue eyes were cold and steady” (47-48). Practical Hester explains that she prefers poultry to dogs because they are more independent and require less attention: “Poultry [...] enjoy your company if you’re prepared to give it, but if you don’t want to bother you can just throw them their food and forget about them” (49). Similarly, the guardian of Hester’s property and wealth is also a bird.

Mr Bird has always been the family’s financial advisor, a loyal man who continues to advise Hester after her father’s death. He also warns her against dangers —such as thieves and swindlers— and points to Katherine’s unreliability. Mr Bird is always there offering Hester comfort, as he does at the Bordens’ party when he speaks to her about money (99) —a topic Hester feels comfortable with—, or when he used to send her birthday cards when she was at boarding school (99). Elizabeth Jolley considers Mr Bird a very important character and she highlights two moments related to him:

The dramatic moment in *The Well* for me is when Hester looks at Mr Bird’s accounts and then is forced to look at herself. And Mr Bird’s advice to Hester, which must be the hardest advice to give a woman: that some man might come and want her, but no really want *her* —want her land. Which is a terribly painful thing, and Mr Bird manages to do that. (In Joussem, 1993: 41. Original emphasis)

When Mr Bird dies, Hester feels unprotected. As she reads his account books, she realises how much Mr Bird cared for her and feels alone:

The little exercise books were a powerful indication of how she had been looked after and she was ashamed because she had never wanted to know and had never given a glance or a smile of gratitude or a word of thanks. She understood too, at once, that she needed to be looked after, cared for, more than ever. She had never felt so afraid and so alone. (223)

Hester recognises that she never thanked him for all he did for her. She took for granted that he would always be there, and she feels the most ungrateful. It is her realisation of Mr Bird's goodness that will trigger off change in her at the end of the novel.

III.2.3. Possessive Hester

Hester does not only possess land and money. She possesses Katherine as well. She "acquires" her one day when she goes to town to do the shopping: "if this Kathy would get her things she would take her home with the shopping" (11). Her status as commodity is made sufficiently clear. The next extract is the novel's epigraph, a dialogue between Hester and her father, which is later retold within its context (12-13). It serves to present the nature of Hester and Katherine's relationship from the outset: "What have you brought me, Hester? What have you brought me from the shop?' 'I've brought Katherine, Father,' Miss Harper said. 'I've brought Katherine, but she's for me.'" Readers' first encounter with Hester is through her appropriation of the girl, introducing one of the major themes of the story: possession.

Hester and Katherine's relationship is based on possession. Hester is aware of her jealousy, but that does not prevent her from keeping a close watch on Katherine: "She realized quite quickly that she was possessive. She knew she was irritable and restless during the evenings if Katherine was writing a letter to one of the girls she had grown up with at the convent. And if a letter came for Katherine she always expected to be shown the contents" (19). The two women belong to a

phallogentric, classist and rural Australian community, where those who possess are more often than not men. Hester's appropriation of Katherine involves an action that defies, and to some extent disturbs, divisory social rules based on gender. As Renes argues, one of the consequences of Hester's new "acquisition" is Mr Harper's marginalisation, who definitely passes his power on to his daughter. In the new "emotional household", he is practically forgotten, and when mentioned, it is "mostly in terms of dementia, illness and feminisation". The purchase of Katherine has a double function in *The Well*. On the one hand, it challenges patriarchy, and on the other, it brings to the fore the difference in power between the two female protagonists (2009: 5). Kerry Goddard claims that Hester uses the economy of the marketplace to establish an emotional connection with the young girl (1993: 202). Accordingly, one acts as the male proprietor —Hester— and the other as the female possessed object —Katherine. The fact that the girl is a poor orphan and Hester is a rich landowner adds to their power inequality. It must be said that Hester's taking over the girl fails to really challenge gender binaries because she is just copying the same abusive patriarchal attitude. As Goddard asserts: "this break can only be partial because Hester and Katherine's desires are coded by the language and institutions of the market" (1993: 201).

With Katherine by her side, Hester retreats into total domesticity. They cook, clean, sew, read, play and listen to music, that is, they construct a world of female accomplishments (30, 43). Nonetheless, "in a patriarchal economy a woman cannot simultaneously love/share and

own/rule” (Renes, 2009: 6). For this reason, Hester has to choose between the success of her business —her “masculine” side— or Katherine’s love —her “feminine” side. Hester prefers the girl to running the farm: “she had, with her usual truthfulness, to acknowledge privately that she was not facing the responsibility most of the time and, though she tried to be as keenly interested as she had been, she knew really that she was having to force herself” (19). Apart from neglecting her business, she becomes spendthrift to please the girl: “after all the years of careful frugal housekeeping, she became extravagant and wasteful. It seemed that whenever she went with Katherine to the city she had to buy everything they saw” (29-30). As a result, she is forced to sacrifice her property for the girl’s affection. She finally has to sell her land and the big house to the Bordens, and they move to a cottage on the border of the estate. Her loss of masculine power is clearly symbolised by the loss of her gun, a masculine symbol par excellence: “She had a gun somewhere. She was not sure now where it was. It was bound to be somewhere; mislaid, she thought, during the move. She meant to find it and put it on top of her wardrobe but in an uncharacteristic way, she let the gun and its much needed meticulous care slip from her mind” (48). Notice that the text emphasises that the gun has been lost in the move to the cottage —that is, when Hester chooses Katherine over her farm business— and that neglect is not typical of Hester.

Mr Borden is a successful farmer. The excellent results of his land management are compared to Hester’s inefficiency, which contributes to

inscribing economic productivity into the male sphere. The fact that he is also the father of a big family makes his success complete. Bearing in mind that the land is traditionally feminised, the description of Hester's land can be read as a description of her body. She is an old woman who does not have, and can no longer have, children. Therefore, from a patriarchal perspective, her body is as unproductive as her land. Mr Bird's comparison between Hester's land and the Bordens' is illustrative of such reading: "Borden's place is doing very well. [...] It's the slope of his place and the movement of moisture [...]. Funny how you can stand on the ridge out there and see a crop to one side of you and —on the other side— there's —well, there's nothing. [...] Your slopes [...] don't seem to conserve moisture as they once did" (71-72). As Hester's insides dry up at menopause, so does her land. Nonetheless, Hester's view of her land is not so catastrophic. As a metaphor for her body, she defiantly refuses to see her soil and herself as useless. While Katherine brushes her hair, she thinks about the state of her land, drawing a parallel between her hair and her paddocks. The presence of the moon highlights the feminine element:

During the night Hester, sitting in the moonlit window while Katherine brushed her hair gently, forgave Mr Bird his insult about her stubble. Never, she thought while the hairbrush steadily pressed the long sweeps of her strong hair downwards, had her paddocks looked so beautiful. From where they sat they looked across fold after fold of silent silvered stubble. In the moonlight the land seemed to be lifted up, raised as if held in offering towards the moon and the stars. Every stalk seemed clear and separate as if made of precious metal. (74)

This view is also influenced by Katherine. Hester has found in the girl love and happiness, which are reflected in her land. Curiously enough, the traditional feminisation of the land is somewhat undone by Hester

when, trying to bring back her German, she is not sure “if the earth [...is] masculine, feminine or something between the two” (14).⁶

Hester has chosen a “masculine” approach to win Katherine’s heart. She has created her identity from the same symbolic order as men, so her power cannot mean triumph over patriarchy. As Hélène Cixous contends: “Under patriarchy, any female victory will amount to a taking of phallic power, a victory which by definition, can never be feminist(ine), but (can) only constitute a masked assertion of essentially masculine power” (in Goddard, 1993: 204). Therefore, in spite of her power, Hester remains trapped in a patriarchal system which does not let her act as herself and design her own instruments for self-assertion and success. Her physical impairment can be understood as a metaphor for this condition. Since she is a woman, her “masculine” behaviour is crippled, a defective imitation of man’s.

In truth, Hester is owned by other men in the novel. In particular by her father, as she has to leave her studies in order to look after him when her grandmother dies. The only reason why she is in charge of the estate and later inherits it is that, much to Mr Harper’s regret, he has no male heir. He longed for a boy, but he has to be satisfied with his imperfect daughter. His hope seems to have been destroyed a second time when Hilde was forced to leave:

The petted, nimble and courageous little crippled girl grew into a tall clumsy adolescent female. The father who had once hoped with what he knew to be his only chance for a son must have hoped again for a son, a healthy capable boy, a partner and a companion [...]. His shame and disappointment must have accompanied him through all the years. (201)

⁶ In German, nouns can be masculine, feminine or neuter. “Earth” translates into German as “Erde” and is feminine.

When Mr Harper gets older, Hester looks for ways of escaping him, such as encouraging Mr Bird's visits in order to avoid granting his cooking whims:

It became his habit to insist that chosen dishes with complicated ingredients should be prepared for him. Sometimes, late at night, he fancied a snack which entailed hours of bending over a sink under a poor light, endless shreadings and whippings and mixings and long slow cooking requiring constant stirring and watchfulness. (18)

Her father's greedy behaviour is also felt by Katherine. On her arrival, she suffers an insulting check-up by both Mr Harper and Mr Bird. They meaningfully check her legs to see if they are as defective as Hester's:

'Let's have a good look at you Kathy, [...] let's see if your legs are good.' He poked his stick under her skirt flipping the material up. 'Give her a pinch,' he said to Mr Bird, 'on the bottom,' he added. Mr Bird, grinning, leaned forward making a pecking movement with his thumb and forefinger but Kathy, who was nimble, jumped aside. (13)

But Mr Harper will not have the girl. She is Hester's. What Hester does through Katherine is to challenge his father for control. Gerry Turcotte recognises Hester's acquisition of Katherine as the cornerstone of *The Well* and qualifies it, together with their unlabelled relationship, as unnatural:

The story builds on this 'unnatural' moment and goes on to tell of Hester's increasing distance from her father and from her responsibilities for their property, due to her consuming interest in Kathy. The relationship is made to seem 'unnatural' in a number of ways. The very isolation of the pair is commented upon by other characters, an aloneness made all the more complete by the father's eventual demise. Hester's possessiveness, suggested in the 'epigraph,' is reinforced by her habit of making clothes for, and her dressing of, Katherine to suit her own designs; her insistence on reading Katherine's correspondence; and her reluctance to have Kathy's friend visit her. (2009: 193)

Katherine is Hester's definite escape from her father: "As time went by, having to nurse her ailing and often demented father, she looked for small compensations. These she found more and more in teaching Katherine and in spending pleasant hours in her company" (19).

Perhaps the progressive abandonment of the farm is her way of detaching herself from Mr Harper. She wants her own life, not her father's. Her unwillingness to keep dogs to protect the property, as her father did, illustrates this point (47). In a broader sense, she is escaping from the worries of a male world that submits her in every possible way, regardless of her womanly or manly attitude: "At the end of his life, even while he was dying, her father worried endlessly about the property. At least, Hester thought, she would not end her days, thank you very much, muttering curses because the rain clouds were thin" (96). She does not realise that, in a community where property and money are synonyms for power, this course of action will mean the decline of her authoritative status: "She had not considered earlier how she would feel when the land spreading out towards the horizon was no longer hers. She had not bargained either with the thought that the wife of the new owner would start at once telling her what she ought to do" (96-97). Being and acting within the system, Hester finds it really difficult to shed conventions. For this reason, she still worries so much about money, her remaining power. As Kerry Goddard explains:

Hester has been alienated from her home and her land by her refusal to continue accepting patriarchy's conditions. The conditions under which she can wield power are derived from traditionally masculine positions of power, such as exist in the squatocracies of rural Australia. [...] Hester's possessive preoccupation with Katherine has led her to neglect her land (responsibilities). Hester's attempts to disengage from society are complicated by her complicity with capitalist and patriarchal systems; her desire for Katherine is already bound by their constraints. As Hester turns from a father-identified position and begins to pay more attention to the personal and sensual, as opposed to the public, her status is diminished. Despite her pleasure in her life with Katherine, Hester finds it difficult, if not impossible to reconcile herself to the diminution of her status and continues to cling to money. Money is of primary importance now that she has lost her land, and the position and authority which ownership construes. Hester is also aware that she requires money to 'hold on' to

Katherine. The need or desire for money reflects the imperatives of a society in which possessions define status and confer power. (1993: 206)

The character of Hester can be regarded as an attempt to integrate both male and female spheres. On these grounds, she is contradictory. On the one hand, she is independent, possessive and a businesswoman. On the other, she seems to enjoy domestic life with Katherine. She tries to escape from social rules resorting to female archetypes such as domesticity and the acquisition of feminine accomplishments. But the only way she is able to express her love for Katherine, and to win it, is by complying with masculine oppressive models. She regards her as an object and tries to keep her beautiful for her own joy. She also loves watching her, especially when she dances, since she herself cannot dance owing to her defective leg: "it gave her infinite secret pleasure to watch Kathy abandon herself to her own energy" (95). The scenes in which Hester watches Katherine dance are heavily voyeuristic, and scopophilia has traditionally been the preserve of men. The little realm the two women have constructed in isolation from the rest of their community is imbued with stereotypes, but they are also often questioned. Their domesticity is quite anarchic. It does not follow outside rules. The next extract exemplifies how the breaking of domestic rules is celebrated as an act of purification from oppressive obligations:

as if to assert some kind of discipline, Hester would embark on a strenuous cleaning plan and would draw up programmes of work to be done by herself and Katherine. Sometimes these programmes would be torn up and burned in the kitchen stove. This burning often took the form of a little ceremony during which libations of milk or wine would be poured into valuable cut glass and afterwards they would wash each other's hair with home-made infusions of rosemary. (18)

But it must be noted that Hester, the patriarch figure of the cottage, is the one who designs the rules and decides whether to follow them or not. Katherine simply obeys, though it is not sure if voluntarily or forced by an underlying motive, as is hinted at in the next extract:

She played the piano [...and] sang some Schubert Lieder in an untrained contralto. She loved these songs [...]. She was pleased to see that Katherine sat as if transfixed by the music. It did not occur to her to question whether the girl really enjoyed the performance or whether she simply pretended to. (14)

The most remarkable rupture of stereotypes occurs the day they make up the story of a troll who lives in the well. He reminds us of Hester because he has “horrible anti-social habits” and has kidnapped a princess (41). Katherine claims that it would be more romantic and exciting if “a prince on a white horse came out from the well” (42). Besides, the prince should be older and taller than her because “the man should always be taller than the woman”. Hester replies: “Oh yes, instead of a princess [...] who would only mess up the bathroom with her endless cosmetics. The prince [...] would be more useful about the place and a horse, especially a thoroughbred, would be lovely!” (42). Finally, Hester concludes that neither a prince —the prototype of a man— nor a princess —the prototype of a woman— would be the best person to come out of the well, but a troll —that is to say, a monster. He would be more practical: “Imagine! [...] how easy he would carry the firewood indoors on his bent back. I don’t suppose your prince, however tall, would want to spoil his white velvets” (43). In this extract, it is possible to discern the clash between imposed archetypes and reality or common sense, which results in the contradictory positions of the two

women. It is worth noting how the text emphasises that the man's goal to find a woman is reproduction in order to deconstruct it later. Katherine's remark that men should be older than women reminds Hester of young roosters which carelessly mate "with their own sisters, mothers and grandmothers" (42). Immediately, she reverses the situation:

She reflected on Naomi asking her daughters-in-law if they wanted to wait until she bore more sons. She, for a moment, tried to consider the stick-like limbs of the newly born boys in their cradles, it would never be possible to offer these to the fecund bodies of the two youthful and possibly buxom widows. (43)

The allusion to Naomi, a biblical character, is not coincidental. Significantly enough, her story is about the trade of women among men for reproduction and property rights, incest, the rejection of old women as useless, and the friendship and loyalty of two women. Naomi appears in *The Book of Ruth*. She is Ruth's mother-in-law. She leaves Judea with her husband and two sons and moves to Moab. Her sons marry two Moabites. When her husband and sons die, she decides to return to her land. She says that she is too old to look for another husband and bear more children to offer as husbands to her widowed daughters-in-law. Therefore, she tells them to go back to their families. But Ruth is determined to stay with Naomi and together they return to Judea. If a widow had no sons, Leviate law obliged her to marry her husband's closest to kin in order to keep the land within the family and carry on the husband's bloodline. Since Naomi is an old woman, Ruth acts as her substitute and marries old Boaz —Naomi's brother-in-law. They have a son who is also considered Naomi's son. Distorting the biblical

version of Naomi, Hester places men as objects used by women to reproduce, and thus seen as useless if they are too young.

III.2.4. What the Well Hides

As the title suggests, the well is a central element in the novel. It is a dark mysterious place. Its bottom cannot be seen, so it is impossible to know exactly what lies inside:

On bright hot days, where they could see a little way into it, the inside of the well seemed cool and dark and tranquil. Mysterious draughts of cold air seemed to come from somewhere deep down in the earth. If they bent their heads close to the unclosed part of the cover they thought that [...] they could hear from its depths the slow drip drop of water. Inside the well going down into the blackness were stout metal rungs. [...] They went only a short way down, not much more than the height of a tall man and then it was a sheer drop. (40-41)

Folklore has invested wells with universal symbolism. They are regarded as sacred places, as sites of healing, magic, wisdom and access to the otherworld. They are archetypal symbols of life, fertility and vitality, so they have been linked to feminine divine power —the same power as Mother Earth. As an archetypal female image, wells are contradictory. On the one hand, they give life, grant wishes, heal, provide knowledge and foretell the future. On the other, they can take life away, apply curses, and lodge lost souls and supernatural mischievous beings (Varner, 2009: 1-2).

From the beginning, the well is presented as a living entity. The wind is its voice —“Some days the wind sang in the empty well shaft and, on other days, their voices seemed to echo and reverberate as they sat together on the generous coping talking to and fro contentedly to one another” (40)—, and though it is dry, there seems to be water

within. Its depths connect to several caverns that constitute a natural water network under the earth. Hester conceives of this network in fairytale terms:

She thought of the well and what it might be like down there on an underground bank of earth and crumbled rock. Dark and damp. Quite unimaginable and yet in her imagination she seemed to see the world of the well quite clearly. In ordinary circumstances there was a fairy-tale enchantment about the idea of secret streams and caves beneath the ordinary world of wheat paddocks, roads and towns. The streams would trickle through crevices in the rocks and flow more swiftly in channels and even through tunnels in some places. [...] If the water flowed down there finding ways through the earth and the rock then naturally there could be no water level in the well. (176-177)

The well keeps the basic source of life. In this light, it is closely connected with nature, both as life giver and as threat. This last quality appears when it threatens to flood with rain water:

The well water gurgled and splashed slapping as it was forced upwards from below. She could imagine the holes in the rocks far down through which the water was making its way, trickling slowly in places and then gushing to fill caverns. As more water flowed underground and the small openings and channels became blocked with earth and stones, more water would be forced upwards in the wide shaft of the well. (202-203)

Hester and Katherine usually sit on its wall on sunny days, where they talk, make up tales and think about their ideal lives. In folklore, wells grant wishes. The two women ask the well to make their dreams come true. This is possibly why they throw things into the well, as if they were coins or offerings for their wishes: "Sometimes they threw small stones. [...] Hester often threw broken or badly burned dishes down [...]. There's a fortune [...] in bits of antique crockery down there" (41). The well is also their way out of trouble after the accident, since its dark belly is employed to get rid of the dead man. From that night on, the well becomes a source of fear and anxiety. What it has been forced

to swallow might return. Its rising water, apart from creating life, can also bring about death.

The well and its content are disturbingly doubled by a previous event in Hester's childhood. She used to play with a wooden pram that she found in Mr Bird's shed. One day she put her doll in the pram and it slipped down into its "deep well" in a "most awkward way". Hester could not rescue her doll:

it was wedged somehow. She poked at the small round head of the doll marking and scratching, without meaning to, the sleek shining paint which the doll had for hair. Not wanting to tell anyone, she had pushed the pram back into the shed upset by the offended and hurt look the doll seemed to have on its red-cheeked face. Neither her father nor Mr Bird noticed the emptiness in Hester's arms when it was time to leave. (218)

This incident does not only advance the action of throwing the man in the well, but also stands for all those things that Hester wishes away and tries to repress. The man is also replicated by the café called El Bandito —the bandit or thief. When Hester enters the empty café she sees a blowfly "trapped in the mesh of the net curtains" (139), which evokes the man's entrapment in the well.

The main mystery that structures the plot is what the well hides. Hester is the only one who has seen the corpse. The mystery of the well is never solved. The interpretations are multiple. It may be the body of a thief. There have been some burglaries in the area and Hester's money has disappeared. Amanda Nettelbeck suggests (1999: 93) that it may also be Joanna's body, whose visit to the cottage is expected in a few days. Perhaps she arrives earlier and is run over by Katherine. Preventing the girl from seeing the body, Hester might have grasped her chance to get rid of Joanna. Everything could also be Hester's own

invention to keep Katherine under control. The novel also invites symbolic readings of the contents. As Nettelbeck asserts:

The deviations from realism that pervade the novel [...] enable a reading of the thing in the well [...] as not real but imagined; in other words, as a manifestation of Hester's fears (of sexual 'corruption'), of Katherine's desires (of life of romance, in which she would be adored and 'saved' by a man), and of the struggle between them to control the other according to each's own wishes. (1999: 94)

Wells are associated with the depths of mystery and the access to hidden sources. Thus, they can represent the unconscious (Oesterreicher-Mollwo, 1992: 255). In the story, the real content of the well is not what matters, but the possibilities that it hides. As Mircea Eliade claims about the significance of wells, they are the “reservoir of all the possibilities of existence” (in Varner, 2009: 12). The indefinable content of the well is what raises the protagonists' anxieties and desires, and destroys the apparently peaceful happiness of their secluded life. What there is in the well is unstable. It depends on each person. To put it differently, it is the projection of the women's minds. Hester and Katherine have populated the well with princes, trolls and all fairytale creatures they have fancied. From the outset, these women have linked it to “pleasures to be had, and fears to forget” (Nettelbeck, 1999: 90). In this light, the dirty or broken dishes Hester throws in the well can be read as a metaphor for repression. She disposes of those “dishes” she does not want to face. She prefers to bury them in the depths of the well —her unconscious— because she finds them too difficult to deal with: “The dinner dishes, cold and greasy, remained on the table and in the kitchen sink till the next morning. Any dish which

proved too disgusting to clean was simply carried outside and pushed through the hole in the rotting corrugated-iron cover of the well” (52).

The well, as a metaphor for Hester’s unconscious and thus the repository of her repressions, is doubled by a cupboard that hides an old photograph of Hester as a child. She unburies this photograph, which she had hidden a long time ago, “without explanation” (59). The “repressed” photograph brings to the surface old memories. Some of them seem to be good —Hester longs “to be cherished again in the way she once had been by her father and her grandmother and, for a few years, by Hilde Herzfeld” (60)—, but others are bad:

The lame leg had not shown on the photograph even though the low-waisted dress was short. The skilful photographer had arranged her to sit in such a way that the little body and limbs looked perfect, the lame foot was tucked in behind the good one. Perhaps that was why, when she became older and painfully aware of the disfigurement, she had removed the photograph from its place and put it away. (61-62)

She regrets unearthing the photograph and wonders if her father ever realised that it was missing. Hester significantly points to the impossibility of covering the gap it left when it was removed: “Nothing could have covered the pale space left on the wall because it had been in the sitting room [...], where it would not have been possible to pin up one of the poultry-feed or farm machinery calendars they received every year” (62). In other words, what is repressed in her unconscious can never be completely removed or replaced by something more pleasant. Its mark remains indelible and it can resurface at any time.

When the corpse is thrown into the depths of the well —something to forget—, each woman constructs a different identity for it, depending on their worries and passions. For Katherine, it is a prince. Katherine’s

foremost desire is to find, or rather be found by, the man of her dreams. The man in the well is her saviour from the cottage, her way to a richer and happier life in a prince's castle, so she has to rescue him. With a view to getting a position in life, this girl resorts to the archetypal model of womanhood —marriage and maternity. This implies her voluntary dependence on and handling by men. Her dream involves her passing from Hester's hands to the man's. But Hester will not allow it. That is why the man symbolises danger for Hester. This man is an intruder. He embodies the return of her traumatic past and everything she has tried to repress in her unconscious. He is a male thief that comes back to steal her precious Katherine, in the same way as another man —her father— stole Hilde from her. The figure of the man also stands for the frightening, corrupting and disgusting connotations that sexuality carries for her. Since early childhood Hester has had quite a romantic concept of love, and thus she has cherished romantic dreams similar to Katherine's, "in which domestic romance [...is] chaste, untouched by the physical dimension of sexuality and childbirth" (Nettelbeck, 1999: 95). The embroidery of household linen and her neck washing, activities taught and encouraged by her governess, are evidence of such dreams.

As Hester remembers:

Laughingly in drawn-thread work and with generous smooth stitching, white upon white, the two of them had initialled sheets, table cloths, table napkins, little linen towels and pillow slips [...]. Miss Herzfeld, making her way into the youthful Hester's heart, taught her to wash her neck every day with cold water so that it would be beautiful to receive, when the time came, the necklaces and pendants and jewels some man would want to cherish her with. (70)

This vision was destroyed when Hester discovered Hilde's affair with Mr Harper. Then she was able to put together certain things about

her father and governess which she had unconsciously been picking up for some time. They are significantly imbued with a gothic aura in her mind, as the following extract illustrates. It is worth noting the subtle reference to Hilde and Mr Harper's sexual relationship as two grotesque shadows becoming one:

All night long, behind the noise of the rain, chairs and tables talked and groaned and the floorboards, creaking, passed the sighs and the whispers from room to room and on up into the timbers of the roof. Sometimes something cried out. There was a pain and she called out. Her father came flickering across the ceiling in the light of the candle he carried on a saucer. [...] Later, during the nightmare, as her father and Fräulein Herzfeld hurried along the passage, the double light from two separately held saucers flooded Hester's ceiling and their two shadows, grotesque and tremulous, moving up and down and across the walls, colliding, became one. Her father, yawning, told her stories in a deep voice about the great red fox and brother wolf. (188-189)

The result of this affair was pregnancy, which Hester perceived as hideous and painful:

she saw Hilde crouched on the floor, her nightdress spread like a tent, red splashed, round about her. Hester had never seen her like this before [...]. Long moans escaped from Hilde and a loud cry seemed to burst from her whole body. [...] She groaned again and seemed to fall forward to her knees under the nightdress. [...] Hilde's pain, it must be pain, her agony made her unable to keep to the perfection she was usually proud of maintaining when speaking English. [...Hester,] staring at the blood-stained woman who was her dearest friend, knowing something of the scene already — never having been banned from the sheds and out-houses— began slowly to understand something dreadful. (162-163)

This scene means for Hester not only pain and revulsion, but also her father's intrusion in her friendship with Hilde and the latter's betrayal. When she had finally found a mother, a friend who she could trust, who she could love, her father had intruded, spoiling their perfect friendship. In Jolley's fiction the figure of the father is normally represented by a fox. Joan Kirkby draws a parallel between *The Well* and D.H. Lawrence's *The Fox* (1923), a novel which depicts a similar relationship between two

women.⁷ It tells the story of March and Banford, who live together on a farm in England during the First World War. In their lives, two intruders appear: a fox which assaults their chicken coop and a soldier who gets March's interest, putting in danger the women's relationship.

Joan Kirkby asserts that:

The fox recurs in Jolley's fiction in *The Well* and in the autobiographical short story 'One Christmas Knitting', in both associated with the sexual energies of the father; much as in Lawrence's *The Fox*, the fox is the male demon that 'knows', 'possesses' and 'masters' the spirit of the spellbound March preparing her for sexual mastery by the man. (1988: 59)

Hester's father is identified with this animal, and in connection with Hilde's pregnancy, Hester meaningfully mingles the images of a fox —Mr Harper— and a midwife (190).

Hester was so furious and disappointed that, disobeying Hilde, she did not go in search of help and left her bleeding in the bathroom: "she limped back to her own room, instead of going to his [Mr Harper's] room or her grandmother's" (163). The notion of sex becomes imbued with all these negative meanings. The fact that she hid in her room instead of getting help is, according to Renes, "a spatial metaphor for repression" (2009: 9). She could not cope with Hilde's sexual relationship with her father and the horrible bloody outcome it led to.⁸ What she had just discovered was "forbidden, disruptive knowledge" (2009: 9), so she thought she could not "reveal to her father what it would seem she knew about him privately" (163). The future consequences for her are a traumatic approach to sex, contempt for men as partners and the loss

⁷ In *The Fox*, there is also an implied lesbian relationship, as will be seen later with respect to Hester and Katherine.

⁸ Hilde might have given birth or suffered an abortion. The book does not point exactly to one option or the other.

of a mother figure. It is meaningful that the next morning Hester suffered the first migraine of what would become a chronic disease (163).

Hester's reaction was to reject sexuality as an evil drive. She repressed it in order to erase the horrible memory. Hilde had lied to her when she had taught her about love. She found the recently discovered truth so disturbing that she chose to turn a blind eye and remain faithful to her romantic ideas, as her behaviour towards Katherine proves. Love should be pure, innocent and beautiful. It should not be polluted by sex, a dirty and beastly act encouraged by men. That is why she tries to keep Katherine pure. Sex is only for animals: "How could she have suggested to Kathy that she make herself pretty and go down for what was cowshed and corner-of-the-paddock business. The mating of cattle for stock was all right for the beasts and for some people but it was not for Kathy. Not for her dainty innocence" (202); "The idea of Kathy bearing a child could not be thought about and the idea of some man, that man, touching or handling her perfectly made and childlike body was repulsive" (204). It is interesting that Hester usually draws close parallels between the images of man and beast, as Nettelbeck contends (1999: 91). This is well-illustrated by what she once sings at Katherine: "For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts [...] even one thing befalleth them; as the one dieth, so dieth the other. [...] Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth . . . Unter die Erde" (14). Although Hester's main reason for keeping Katherine away from men is

jealousy, it can also be read as her rejection of the trading of women for men's purposes, such as reproduction. However, this reading is hindered by the fact that she treats Katherine as an object too.

The well —a space traditionally connected with femininity and motherhood— epitomises Hester's repressed sexuality. It represents the ghostly presence of the absent mother and female sexuality, which, at one point in the novel, threatens to overflow, bringing everything dark back to consciousness, step by step, or rather, rung by rung:

As her torch flashed again to the water making curious rings and rippling patterns of light on the black surface, she was sure she saw a hand grasping the lowest metal rung, the one which was set in the wall of the well at a greater distance below the other rungs. She thought as the water slapped crazily against the stonework that she saw too a man's head which, because of being drenched, was small, sleeked and rounded. It is difficult to see anything which is partly and, at times, wholly submerged. (199)

Hester's fight to keep her repressions down in her unconscious is evoked in her desperate efforts to push the corpse back down:

Trembling and fearful at the thought of what was now so close to the edge of the coping, she raised her stick and tried to lean into the hole. Supporting herself on the wall she tried [...] to poke at whatever it was just below the level of the water. Not able to reach she struck wildly and without effect with the stick. He must go down. 'Down!' she said in a voice which she did not know was her own. 'Go down! Go on! Down! Go back down!' [...] If only she could find the hand and the head and [...] get rid of them for ever. 'Down! Go back down!' (200)

Meaningfully, the sound of the engine of her truck when she attempts to close the well reminds her of the sound of the gravel under her father's car "when Hilde cried" and was taken away (201). Mr Borden, who has come round to see if they need help in the cottage, drags the cover effortlessly and closes it, promising to send someone over to have it properly sealed (206).

Hester regards the flood of the well as catastrophic, a metaphor for her fears. However, according to Nettelbeck (1999: 99), the well can also stand for healing and liberation, as it gives her the chance to come to terms with her past and work through her traumas. This is why critics such as Renes (2009: 13) and Turcotte (2009: 197) interpret Mr Borden's closing off the well as a symbol of patriarchal control. Mr Borden is an emblem of masculine values. As Hester depicts him, his "fleshy shoulders" look similar to those of "the mating bulls", and he gives "the impression of setting about the male task of servicing frequently and thoroughly with a view to enriching his property with a number of sons" (91). Although Hester is glad that Mr Borden is going to seal the well for her, he actually prevents her from confronting her deepest fears.

Hester's suppressed sexuality can be further interpreted in terms of the abject. Female gothic makes use of abjection to destabilise the symbolic order, "exposing the vulnerability of its systems of meaning, underlining the tenuousness of its power-base and questioning the substratum upon which its laws, values and logic are predicated" and giving increasing importance to the outcast female language and desire (Turcotte, 2009: 185). Phallogentric culture rejects female experience and turns woman into a waste or excess. In *The Well*, Jolley's interest in the abject is concomitant with the repressed feminine. The scene where Hester finds out about Hilde's pregnancy is the most abject of the novel and clearly illustrates this point. There intimacy, pregnancy and the female reproductive function are to be kept secret (Turcotte, 2009: 186).

For this reason, Hilde, who succumbed to desire, was ostracised, and denied the satisfaction and open recognition of her sexual needs. Moreover, Hilde's ostracism implied the loss —or abjection— of Hester's mother figure. Separation in female gothic is associated with the protagonist's separation from the mother figure. According to Susanne Becker, it is a punishment usually executed by those in authority in order to show the other's departure from the law, that is, the woman's failure to be a good woman or mother. Her femininity has to be corrected by separation, and more often than not, her escape or return is impossible (1999: 56). This is what happens with Hilde. She was punished for her transgression of proper feminine behaviour and Hester became motherless.

Hester's repressed sexuality also stems from her sexual attraction to Katherine. Though subtly hinted at, the theme of lesbianism is central to the novel. *The Well* brings to mind another novel of similar name, Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), an exploration of frustrated lesbian love known as "the banned lesbian novel" (Kertzer, 1992-93: 127). It tells the story of a lesbian upper-class woman who falls in love with another woman while they are working as ambulance drivers during the First World War. They go to live together, but they find social marginalisation and rejection. Unlike Hall's work, *The Well* refuses to be completely open about Hester's lesbian desire. Adrienne Kertzer explains that avoiding the implications that the word "lesbian" carries, the novel rejects to be fully categorised and thus it reaches a wider readership, homophobic and non-homophobic alike (1992-93:

127). The scenes where Hester's desire is most clearly seen is when she watches Katherine dancing. The action of dancing is a displacement of Hester's sexual desire for Katherine. As she admits, the physical manifestation of love for her is not sex, but dancing:

He remembered Katherine's animated movements and the ripple of the light-yellow dress. She groaned. The dance was for her the only physical manifestation of physical love. Hester did not feel guilty about the feeling. It was private. She pulled off onto the gravel for a few precious minutes alone on the edge of the great emptiness. (129)

Hester's desire is also manifest when she watches Katherine trying on new clothes:

[Katherine] paced forward and, swinging round, she posed. She froze [...] completely still, transparent like long icicles faintly rosy, apricot coloured, as if formed from water dripping slowly over a rusty gutter. Several times she went through this little intimate routine displaying the feathery black fragments of clothing, taking them off and putting them on. (48-49)

Other female relationships where lesbianism is implied are evoked. For instance, Katherine imagines dressing herself up as Rosalind and Joanna as Orlando in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*—a comedy which precisely plays with the confusion of gender boundaries— and getting married (103), and as Hester infers by a letter, it seems that in the convent lesbian relationships were not unusual: "There was the time Kathy and Joanna had fallen over two nuns on a mattress in a storeroom. Perhaps there would be further reference to their actions, their nakedness, a glimpse of their feelings" (23).

Hester is unwilling to label her love for Katherine (19). Hester loves her in many ways: maternally, creatively, sexually, and silently since she refuses to name her desire (Kertzer, 1992-93: 127). By resisting and questioning categories, something intrinsic to gothic literature:

Jolley not only rejects 'the narrative of damnation' that [Catherine R.] Stimpson sees in Hall's novel, she also explores an alternate construction

of motherhood and maternal desire. Freeing the maternal from its reference to birthing labour, Jolley frees it from the antagonism to lesbian desire that defines the maternal in Hall's fiction. (1992-93: 122)

The Well breaks the boundaries between maternal and sexual desire. The notion of maternity is deprived of its exclusively biological quality. Significantly enough, there are no mothers in the story. Hester is motherless and Katherine is an orphan, so the word "mother" seems "to have little meaning for either of them" (61). "To mother" comes to comprise other meanings: "to love, to desire, and, most importantly, to tell stories. In this sense, it is not just women who mother, a concept demonstrated late in the novel when Hester recognizes Mr Bird's mothering of her in the 'words'" (Kertzer, 1992-93: 125). It is this blurring of the maternal and the sexual that makes the topic of lesbianism ambiguous in the novel. The lesbian is there, but at the same time, it is intermingled with the maternal.

As far as the absence of mothers is concerned, Judith Roof connects it in lesbian writing with "the paradox of a desire fulfilled by its unfulfillment" (1991: 169) and regards the absent mother as "the original model for unfulfilled desire" (1991: 171). This has further implications at a narrative level: "whereas the heterosexual accounts privilege the illusion of a desire fulfillable via maternity, lesbian stories situate desire as fulfillable only by desire itself" (1991: 171). Lesbian texts detach themselves from the traditional Oedipal structure, in the same way as *The Well* "is not restricted to a structure of lesbian relationship modelled on traditional gender roles" (Kertzer, 1992-93: 128). Thus, it can be concluded that not only does the character of

Hester break with conventions, but the whole novel as well. This deviation allows the appearance of an alternative that presents the world from a different perspective.

The sexual restrictions imposed by patriarchy are often represented by illness and physical impairment in the female characters. This agrees with Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's assertion that patriarchal constrictions can make women literally ill, both physically and mentally (1984: 53). Hester's migraines are related to Hilde's abjection, so when they happen, they comprise revulsive elements: "Hester's headache was accompanied by that total lack of dignity suffered during bouts of vomiting, not once or twice but several times, first undigested food, of which she was deeply ashamed and then painfully and with difficulty, bile" (62). Apart from migraines, Hester often suffers from a kind of agoraphobia when she leaves her property: "she felt [...] a general uneasiness whenever she had to leave her own landscape" (143). Thus, although she wishes to travel to Europe with Kathy, she feels frightened at the thought:

She was not used to crowds of people. She knew from her childhood experience of travelling with Fräulein Hilde that people would be thronged, crushing against each other, in airports and on railways stations and even on pavements. Unused to traffic she would find crossing streets fearful. She knew she was afraid of being ill and feeling old and unable to manage in a strange hotel room. (82)

Hester's deformed leg can also be interpreted as a symbol of her crippled sexuality. Another example of female crippledom in the context of patriarchy is found in Katherine's story about a one-armed woman who worked in her orphanage, whose boyfriend amputated her other arm. The bloody description of the scene significantly evokes the abject:

this woman had a boyfriend who, one night in a fit of pique, cut off the other arm—it seemed because of her only having one arm—making her less attractive than ever. She bled something awful [...] out by the toilets there she was in a pool of blood. They said he hanged himself after cutting off his own arms. (45)

Also notice the use of food in the novel as a metaphor for repressed desires, a typical device in Jolley's fiction as Ken Gelder and Paul Salzman have pointed out (1989: 69). Hester loves preparing lavish meals with Katherine's help:

they spent hours preparing piquant orange and plum sauces for roast ducklings. Hester, coating the succulent servings with a remarkable glaze, felt that she was doing justice to the creatures she had reared. [...] Their simple little dinners were often a work of art. They developed too the habit of having a glass of champagne each with their sodden cornflakes at breakfast. (51)

And sometimes she greedily devours food, "as if feeding needs she suppresses in other ways" (Rombouts, 1994: 145): "Unable to battle with the pangs she selected a lamington roll from the edge of the counter. Tearing off its clear wrapper she ate the whole cake enjoying every large mouthful and letting the white shreds of coconut litter her black bodice" (209).

The well hides something more than Hester's repressed desires. It is the place she chooses to get rid of the corpse after Katherine's accident. The incident, however, resists erasure. Katherine insists that the man is not dead and that he wants to come out. Hester, who dismisses such a crazy idea, is sometimes convinced by the girl's insistence. As she admits, the man in the well will haunt her forever:

There was [...] the awful truth about a dead body pushed ruthlessly down the well. Something about this might emerge at any time. But even if it never did and she was, for the most part, able to keep it out of her mind, she knew it would return time and again. She would have it on her conscience forever. (158)

The return of the dead man is also disturbing at a further level. Coming back from death, that is, becoming unnaturally animate, the man arouses uncanny feelings. But what the reader finds particularly distressing is the uncertainty surrounding the whole episode, since we cannot be sure whether the man is alive or dead.

The man in the well has also been read from a postcolonial perspective. The postcolonial is alluded to in the novel in subtle ways: the family that adopted Katherine before Hester are called the Whites and they are returning to England (11), Hester has an English walking stick that gives her power (16) and Europe is perceived to be at a great distance (Renes, 2009: 15, 17). Dolores Herrero reads *The Well* as a postcolonial trauma novel from an individual and social perspective. The man in the well does not only represent unresolved conflicts in the protagonists' psyches, but also in the Australian collective psyche. As is the function of gothic literature, *The Well* brings to the surface unconscious desires and repressions in distorted forms. The mysterious man points to the fact that the wounds inflicted by white colonisation are still open. Published in 1986, before the beginning of the Australian Reconciliation process in 1991, Jolley's novel "subtly denounces an unacceptable situation, and paves the way for Australia's [...] Reconciliation, which was to gather strength in the following decades" (2011: 229). Herrero adds that, in this sense, the final closing up of the well turns problematic. It may counteract "the novel's initial subversive potential" of disclosure because it is an attempt to cover up and "return to 'normality'", eliminating the possibility of solving the traumas (2011:

216-217). The ending can be explained if the novel's date of publication is taken into account. Accordingly, its inconclusiveness is the result of trying "to deal with many thorny and traumatic issues at a time of Aboriginal exclusion in Australia" (2011: 229).

Although the Aboriginal element seems to be absent, Renes (2009: 15-18) interprets the man in the well as a metaphor for the Indigenous population. According to him, the road accident is: "a crude metaphor for the violent invasion and colonisation of Australia" (2009: 15). What seems to be a kangaroo —an indigenous Australian species— turns out to be a man. "This is the return of the Aboriginal transcendental sacred of sorts but, uncannily, not recognised as such" (2009: 16), in a text that does not dare to summon the native element. White Australians fear the reversal of roles if the natives claim back the land. Consequently, "both the community's adverse reactions to the intruder and Hester and Kathy's struggle over the male well-dweller may be seen to acquire a racial implication" (Renes, 2009: 17). In addition:

Hester's dispossession and concomitant identity problems uncannily foreshadow the 'white moral panic' that was to come with the legal changes around native title and expressed how white Australians felt increasingly displaced from a land they had long considered their own. If we take Kathy as Hester's uncanny double [...] one may establish a subtle, premonitory connection between Kathy's feelings of guilt towards the well-dweller and Hester's fear of loss of property and money. (2009: 17-18)

Therefore, apart from gender oppression, *The Well* can be regarded as a tale about racial repression. In the process of colonisation, everything that has to be conquered is feminised, including the natives, so the fact that race and gender are bound together and repressed at the bottom of the well does not seem coincidental.

The man in the well shares the name of the biblical Jacob. Renes contends that Jacob's story parallels Indigenous dispossession and reappropriation (2009: 16). After an argument with his brother, Jacob—a metaphorical representation of the Aborigines—has to leave his homeland, but later, God tells him that he is the true heir of Israel and that his descendants will people that land. This revelation takes place in a stairway to heaven, and similarly, the well has rungs forming a kind of stairs to climb up. Nevertheless, Renes's interpretation does not take into account the fact that, like the man in the well, Jacob is in reality a thief. As we are told in *Genesis* 27, 1-45, Jacob robs his elder brother of his birthrights by impersonating him and thus receiving his father's blessing. He has to leave his homeland to avoid punishment in the hands of his brother. The parallelism between Jacob/the man in the well and the Aborigines is therefore rendered problematic since it places the Indigenous people in the position of the thief while they were very clearly the victims of theft.

III.2.5. A Friendship in Danger

Hester's primary purpose with respect to Katherine is to recreate the happy relationship she had with her governess. Her longing for love as a child, and now as an adult, makes her idealise her childhood with Hilde. Her good memories are, however, shadowed by the horrible event that led to Hilde's banishment from her life. Hester does not have a mother, so Hilde, apart from being a teacher and a friend, took over that role. Her ostracism meant the disappearance of a mother figure, which

would have traumatic consequences in her life. This partially explains Hester's future behaviour: "The severing of the sexual-emotional bond with femininity is staged through the immediate disappearance of the mother figure from her life [...]. The resulting psychological trauma informs her later actions with Katherine and is re-enacted in an uncanny doubling of Hester's relationship with Hilde" (Renes, 2009: 9). Hester often tells Katherine about her childhood, "confiding details about Hilde Herzfeld about whom she had never spoken to anyone" (21). She sometimes wonders whether she should reveal "the treasured things about those times in her life" or keep them for herself. However, she realises that Katherine could never replace Hilde:

If she looked back on Hilde as Katherine must see her she noticed again, in her memories, the stains in the armpits of Hilde's dresses, [...] dark moist half-circles, fascinating and repelling, in the too warm stuff of which the dresses were made. Katherine with her elaborate preparations, her jars and bottles and pressure packs, her light pretty washable clothes and her scented youthful body knew nothing of these other scents. Because of things like this perhaps it would be better not to talk, better not to try to recapture something which could not exist side by side with what she had now. (22)

This intimate comparison between Hilde and Katherine reveals how strongly Hester was attached to her governess. Hilde's German surname —Herzfeld— is also symbolic. It translates into English as Heartfield. In other words, Hilde was a field where Hester could harvest love and affection.

The marvellous world she once more tries to reproduce is not free from the constant menace of intruders. Joanna and the man in the well are the most dangerous. Hester even connects the images of these two people, two thieves who want to usurp her place in Katherine's heart:

Hester thought of the new pretty curtains and the bed coverlet prepared for the other unwanted guest. [...] Perhaps the three of them —Joanna and the man and Kathy— would want to live in the house. ‘Miss Harper dear,’ she could hear the purring voice, ‘we have found the darlingest rest-home for yew —in town— yes we’ll be able to visit you, Miss Harper, dear . . .’ (204)

As mentioned before, the man in the well is called Jacob. The biblical Jacob passes himself off as Esau, his elder brother, with the help of his mother in order to cheat his father. Thus, he gets his blessing, stealing his brother’s inheritance as the eldest son. Acknowledging the connection with this story, Kerry Goddard states that: “Hester has played the role of the eldest son for her father and received her reward. [...] The man, it seems, has already stolen some of Hester’s inheritance and now threatens her with the loss of Katherine. Like Esau, [...] Hester unsuccessfully tries to destroy this threat to her rights of ownership” (1993: 209).

Katherine often remembers her friend Joanna, who she met at the orphanage. Hester is jealous and controls any contact the two girls have by reading their mail. She imagines that they together would laugh at her behind her back —“talking in low voices in their room at night — with the door closed so that she would hear their voices, intimate, with little burst of mirth and affection from which she would be excluded” (57)—, or that Katherine secretly writes to Joanna and mocks Hester (24). Hester thinks that Joanna is dangerous, a bad influence on Katherine and a potential menace for their peaceful existence: “Hester was vague in her mind about the life this other girl could have had but it was dirty and infected and should be kept away from the freshness and purity of their own lives” (59). Joanna seems to have been addicted

to drugs and locked in rehabilitation, as Katherine explains: “It was not prison really [...] only a place to get better from ‘what she’d been taking [...], I know you’d love her” (54). But Hester’s view is completely different:

She felt increasingly a mixture of hurt and annoyance as well as fear. This friendship carried a threat; things read about in newspapers. She wished that the girl had tried to escape and been caught and kept in with her sentence doubled. ‘Good Behaviour.’ Joanna had written [...] ‘what a laugh! Here I am out before time, but.’ The writing paper was wickedly innocent. Hester would have liked to screw it up into a tight ball and burn it. Annoyance made her tremble. (56)

Although Joanna represents danger, Katherine, in a very smart way, has persuaded Hester into inviting her to stay with them for a few days. The old woman sees that Katherine is not completely happy, that she longs for company of her own age (55). She understands that the “quite secluded old woman’s life [...] is] not really the desired thing for a young woman like Katherine” (59). Hester feels disappointed because she is offering ungrateful Katherine a good life with her in the cottage. Thus, she becomes suspicious of her affection: “Why [...] was Katherine so ungrateful. She [...] was sure she was doing everything possible to make a happy life for Katherine [...], for them both. [...] She wondered if all the affection had been purely on her side” (56). That same night Hester does not feel well and wonders if she could have suffered a mild stroke (58).

The main intruder in the novel is the man in the well. He is the one who really puts Hester and Katherine’s relationship to the test. He brings to the surface suppressed aspects of their friendship and personalities, especially Katherine’s, since Hester has idealised her. When he turns up, uncertainty arises. Hester starts distrusting Katherine. First of all, she distrusts her mental stability. She thinks

that due to the shock caused by the accident, Katherine has lost track of reality. Nonetheless, she occasionally suspects that Katherine is faking her madness and that she was the one who stole the money. Appearances are unreliable and people may see what they want to see, not what really lies underneath:

She wondered how Kathy could suddenly look dishonest. She had to realize that it was not sudden, that she had always dreaded a revelation of something not quite truthful. She remembered her grandmother thought the tinker looked sly and her father said that was not so, that the way he looked was the way in which he was being regarded. He said that people often judged by what they feared or knew existed in themselves. (154)

This last sentence comprises two vital elements. It sums up the character of Hester, describing how she perceives the world. Her vision is biased by the fears and traumas she tries to repress. The sentence could be rephrased as: “Hester often judges by what she fears or knows exists in herself”. Consequently, this statement may hold an answer to the main riddle of the story: what hides in the well? Nothing but ourselves, our innermost fears and desires.

Hester wishes to discard the idea of Katherine’s implication in the disappearance of the money, but there is evidence that points to her guilt. When Katherine gives Hester a one-hundred-dollar note, which she swears the man in the well has given her for the shopping, Hester sees her suspicions confirmed, though at the beginning she refuses to believe it (175). Afterwards, she remembers Mr Bird’s warnings and convinces herself that Katherine is guilty:

Perhaps he had been right after all. She could have laughed if she was not so bitterly hurt. Katherine must have the money. She had stolen it and now to make her believe that the man was alive had given a note back. Also Katherine liked food and knew that they would need to purchase their stocks of fresh food immediately [...], and so was prepared to give up some of the stolen money. She wondered what was the best way of behaving now. (177)

She discovers that she does not know Katherine so well. She may have planned to rob her from the very beginning and Joanna could be her accomplice. Maybe she has been blind all this time. Wise and faithful Mr Bird warns her about her old and foolish habits, such as keeping a big amount of money hidden in a hat:

‘I do not think it right or wise, Miss Hester that you keep cash the way you do in the house. In your father’s time it was different. You’re asking to be robbed. [...] Times are different [...]. All kinds of people get to all kinds of places now. You could get a visitor, an unwelcome one, not invited, down that track any day.’ (79)

And it is Mr Bird who suspects Katherine’s true intentions: “[Referring to Mr Borden’s offer to buy the land] And if I might advise you to hold your tongue about it before everyone, including little Miss Whatsaname in there” (73); “‘There’s people,’ he said, ‘as sometimes forget who their benefactors are’” (80).

Uncertainty about Katherine’s honesty and uncontested will to submit to Hester’s desires is subtly conveyed throughout the novel. For instance, when she shows off her knowledge about drugs —“Katherine, assuming an air of importance, had said that she knew a lot of people who were stoned wild regularly and not one of them was blind or had anything wrong with them at all” (65); or when she is compared to a criminal (27) and a burglar (102). Katherine is an accurate imitator. She is usually “under the spell of film stars” (1), who she is able to imitate to the letter. She also copies Hester, becoming “an almost too perfect girl, anxious to fit into Hester’s lifestyle to the millimetre” (Renes, 2009: 10). This perfection is uncanny: “It was almost sinister. There was nothing Katherine could not copy or learn. She seemed to have all the makings

of an efficient criminal” (27). Her mimicry makes her suspicious. It is difficult to believe that a young girl, full of expectations for the future, wishes a lonely life with an older woman as her model and only companion, and to be treated as an eternal child, as her way of dressing shows. Mrs Borden tells Hester about this. Hester feels offended, though she admits to herself that she is keeping Katherine too young. Actually, Katherine represents a nicer version of her younger self, through which Hester is trying to reenact the idealised relationship she had with her governess: “With Hilde, Hester felt safe and young and happy. Perhaps now she had been making an extension of this youthful happiness in her attempts to give Kathy a home and to educate her at an age when most people considered themselves, as Kathy and probably Joanna would say, ‘through with school’” (191). Although Katherine usually complies with this, there is a moment when anger makes her shout at Hester that she is not a girl any more (116). In the recreation of Hester and Hilde’s friendship, Hester acts uncannily double, as both Hilde and her past self. As Hilde, she teaches and protects Katherine,⁹ and as her past self, she finds a friend in the girl.

As Katherine’s demands to rescue the man get stronger, she stops being such an angelic girl. She disobeys Hester’s orders and becomes more aggressive, even bossy: “I hate you and I shall always hate you. [...] I hate your music too. More than anything I hate that” (185); “‘Oh rack off!’ Katherine jerked herself away from Hester who was about to caress her shoulder. ‘Piss off!’” (186). The next extract also illustrates

⁹ It is telling that Hester and Hilde’s names and surnames start with the same letter.

Katherine's dark side as she tries to steal Hester's power epitomised by her keys:

'Miss Harper, dear, he wants out,' Katherine's hands smoothed the sheet. 'He must come up, he says he can't stand it another minute. Can I let down the new rope, Miss Harper please? I tried the old rope [...] but it broke [...]. I must have the new rope, you did get one didn't you [...]. I must have it. Can I have the key Miss Harper to get the rope now?' [...] Katherine kneeling by the bed smoothed the pillow. Hester closed her own hand over the little keys [...]. The persistent little voice and the pattering of the hands on the sheet as if they were feeling for something was more than Hester could bear. 'I've looked everywhere for the rope Miss Harper, dear. Did you bring a rope Miss Harper? I must have it!'" (167).

Hester will not submit so easily: "thoughts of possession gave her an upper hand. It was, she thought, the feeling of ownership, even if wrongly achieved. She, Hester, would soon show Katherine that the time of being in possession would be brief" (179-180). That night both women compete for the keys. Hester stays awake all night while the girl waits for her to fall asleep. Hester does not only feel anger at losing authority, but fear as well. In an attempt to get the keys, Katherine has plaited Hester's hair so tight that her head aches. She cannot help falling asleep for a while and has a suffocating dream. Katherine has tied her using her hair:

She felt for her keys. They were still under the buttons of her bodice. She felt numb with cold and she found it hard to move her head. Frightened she put both hands up and felt the smooth ropes of hair to be tight and rigid. She knew at once they were wound, in and out, round the struts of the chair back. Cautiously she felt the chair lower down. Her hair was wound round and through and round and through. She was tied by her hair. Terrified by the knowledge of silent and sinister action she tried to get up from the chair but could not. [...] She woke with a start. With a timid movement she put her hands to her head and to the chair back and knew she was free. (197)

Hester's migraine does not leave her weak enough to lose the battle. The final victory is hers. Katherine goes to sleep until the next morning and the well is closed during her sleep.

The theme of manipulation permeates the whole story. Hester is skilful at turning adversity to her advantage, making the most of her ambiguous position of power as a wealthy single woman in a patriarchal community. As the inheritor of her father's property, she is powerful and respected. Nonetheless, she sometimes looks vulnerable. Firstly, in comparison with men, above all Mr Borden, because she is moving in a territory forbidden to women. And secondly, due to her status as spinster that deprives her of any respectability. But Hester is not a weak character at all. As Amanda Nettelbeck wonders: "Is the vulnerability Hester displays in the 'smallness' of her gestures a sign of her lack of power, or does it rather disguise her power?" (1999: 97). Those small gestures —small smiles or waves— subtly give away Hester's ulterior motives, and evince her shrewness and determination to manipulate any situation to her favour. These are a few examples of her imperceptible strength: when she has to choose which monster will be in the story she is going to tell the Bordens' children, she draws "her lips together in one of her half smiles, the smallest smile a person can give" (233); when she buys a cassette for Katherine with songs titled "I can't let you go", "Never Never Say Goodbye to me" and "Hold me Just a little longer", she smiles "in a twisted way, one of her little smiles" (139-140). When Mr Borden closes the well for her, her fragility is deceptive. This last example illustrates Hester's physical weakness in opposition to Mr Borden's strength and how she manages to take advantage of the latter's, becoming even a little bossy, to achieve her goal:

'Anything there you need help with?' Mr Borden stepped, with powerful thighs, over the wires. Hester noticed with approval that he did not press

them down, his long legs cleared them beautifully. [...] Mr Borden bent down and dragged, it seemed without effort, the well cover into its proper position. [...] 'How about I send someone over,' Mr Borden said breaking off a small piece of rusted iron, 'patch this up in no time.' [...] 'If you can spare a man...' Hester said. 'No worries, [...] I'll send one over later today.' 'I'd like it closed over completely,' Hester said, 'and fixed all the way round.' 'Will do,' [...]. He stepped back over the fence and waved his hand as he climbed back on to the tractor. Hester gave a small wave, the smallest wave one person can give to another. (206)

The smallness of Hester's smiles and waves can also be read as part of her possessiveness, her fake generosity and inability to give free affection.

Hester appears to exert total control over Katherine. On those occasions when the girl becomes difficult to dominate, she does not have qualms to threaten her, as she does when Katherine refuses to go down the well. She offers the girl the alternative of prison or the orphanage:

'Katherine be quiet!' Hester was like a monument in the small kitchen. 'I'll have to remind you [...] who killed him? Eh? Who? Also, I will ask you this. Do you want to go back to the Orphanage? Do you?' [...] 'I'm not a girl any more [...]. You can't send me back there [...]. Hester, keeping her lips together said, 'The orphanage or prison.' (115-116)

Nevertheless, it must be said that Katherine is perfectly capable of manipulating Hester too: she tells Hester about "incidents of unkindness or unfair treatment" that happened in the convent, probably with a view to inspiring pity, because every time she repeats them, she adds new details (20); she talks Hester into buying everything she wants —"Advertisements everywhere [...] told Katherine that, if only she had this or that, perfect happiness would be hers. Hester's common sense deserted her quite often and, without meaning to be, she was taken in" (50)—; or she feigns sadness to persuade Hester into inviting Joanna to the cottage, and immediately after the old woman does, she

stops crying (57). Being an orphan with no one in the world, she sticks to Hester for survival, faithfully obeying and adapting to the latter's conditions. In return, she gets a home and the satisfaction of most of her whims. She may even have planned to rob Hester —perhaps allied with Joanna. Therefore, manipulation is reciprocal. Both obtain something out of the other. Hester gets a friend and Katherine economic security —and maybe also a friend.

III.2.6. The Power of the Storyteller

The Well brings about postmodern questions about whose truth is the real truth. Its publication coincides with a time when, according to Alice Jardine, there is a decline of paternal fiction in favour of an “acutely interior, unabashed incestuous exploration of [...] new female spaces: the perhaps historically unprecedented exploration of the female, differently maternal body” (1985: 33-34). The so far ostracised (m)other becomes a primary theme in order to be rediscovered, “to move beyond the repetitive dilemmas of our Oedipal Western culture” (1985: 116). The transgressions of *The Well*, both in form and content, contribute to the devaluation of the paternal. Susanne Becker contends that what unifies female gothic literature is the belief in the gothic's power to revolt against patriarchy, and this is mostly achieved by means of antirealism (1999: 9). In this novel, circularity, the repetition of the accident and the multiplicity of the author figure, have the purpose of defamiliarising masculine conventions which promote realism through

linear narratives and a finite plot development and conclusion. As Renes argues:

the different versions of the plot, centrally the accident, circulate through each other in uncanny ways and estrange the reader from a single authoritative interpretation. This sensation is heightened by the fact that the novel is open-ended and suspense *and* suspension fold back into its beginning. (2009: 3. Original emphasis)

The structure of *The Well* is circular, without a definite ending. The car accident is told twice using different tenses —the present at the beginning and the past in the middle. In an interview, Jolley talks about how she wrote the story and her intentions behind this repetition:

Q. [...] you start with an account of events to which you return later on, but in the meantime things have changed, and the account changes.
A. I have taken out a chapter in *The Well* and put it at the beginning, and the reader or the writer then works up to that. I didn't have that chapter to start with. I started with the real first chapter. Then in the judging and rewriting, I decided to take that piece out and put it at the beginning in the present tense.
Q. The story is different the next time you come to it.
A. Well, not quite. It's just that you know more by the time you come to the end of the story.
Q. There is less detail in the first one.
A. So as not to give too much away. That was a conscious piece of crafting to do that. [...] you're doing things to try and catch the reader.
(Kavanagh, 1989: 450)

The double narration of the accident has an important effect on readers as it problematises their vision of Hester and Katherine. As Alexandra Rombouts explains: "These versions could be seen to follow the Gothic technique of alternately building suspense and then deliverance. But in this novel, the differences between the two accounts also appear to lie in the way they complicate the reader's impressions of the two women" (1994: 171). In the first account, for instance, when Katherine insists on driving to let Hester rest, she seems to display concern for the old woman and innocent eagerness to be allowed to drive:

When the end finally came Katherine had insisted on driving. 'You sit back Miss Harper, dear, and take a rest.' She had covered Miss Harper's bony

knees with a cheerful tartan rug before taking her place behind the wheel. 'If I'm to get my test next week Miss Harper, dear,' her purring soft voice soothed, 'I'd better get in some practice hadn't I.' With nimble fingers she had quickly taken the ignition key. (1-2)

By contrast, in the second telling our extra knowledge and the slight differences inserted in the text change our perception of the same scene. Katherine does not look so innocent and her action is seen as manipulative and authoritarian. She is even compared to a burglar. It is suggested that she "is 'taking [Hester's] place behind the wheel' in more ways than one" (Rombouts, 1994: 172):

Katherine, elated with the evening, had insisted on driving. 'Yew sit back and take a rest Miss Harper, dear,' she had tucked the small tartan rug over Hester's bony knees. 'If I'm to get my test next week,' her purring voice soothed, 'I'd better get in some practice hadn't I.' As Hester fumbled with the ignition key which she wore on the chain around her neck Katherine's neat quick fingers helped themselves. 'Make a good burglar wouldn't I,' she laughed as she slipped into the driver's seat. (101-102)

The book ends with Hester beginning to narrate the accident in the form of a gothic tale. At this moment, the present tense is used again. The effects are uncanny. The action of the novel is suspended and moved back to the beginning—which actually started in medias res—, ending on an inconclusive note. There is a sense of circularity that contributes to keeping readers trapped in the mysteries of *The Well*. Readers find themselves in the same position as the Bordens' children, who beg Hester to go on telling (Renes, 2009: 2). In this way, the past always remains in the present, pointing to the disturbing fact that it can never be left behind and that it actively intervenes in the shaping of the present. Ashley-Brown asserts that:

By doing this, she [Jolley] gathers up the past events that have shaped the predicaments of the present moment. Also, in keeping with the ongoing past of the Gothic, Jolley signals that the story will be repeated. This happens when [...] Mrs Borden [...] invites Hester to distract her children by telling them a story. (2009: 35-36)

Ashley-Brown also highlights the use of flashbacks to Hester's past in order to keep it alive "and thereby provide an embedded story that accounts for Hester's motivations and her reasons for creating the kind of life she lives with Kathy" (2009: 36). Moreover, the book resists a clear authorial identity, since "the figure of the writer has been uncannily multiplied throughout the text" (Renes, 2009: 2). Who is in control of the narrative: Jolley, the woman writer or Hester? Sue Gillett describes the novel as an atypical detective story because its uncertainty and suspense do not depend on "lack of evidence or conflicting accounts of events given by various characters", but on "notions of artifice and the deliberate confusing of real life and storytelling" (1992: 34). Also reading *The Well* as a detective story, Veronica Brady identifies an important difference in the ending: "Constructed by means of a complex interplay between guilt and innocence, the traditional detective story, however, finally resolves the tension; crime is confronted and punished, and order restored. But here a sense of evil remains" (1991: 57).

The challenge to the values and truths of patriarchy also comes in the form of uncertainty, one of the most powerful sources of fear. The novel's refusal to provide clear answers increases the level of mystery, giving readers free rein to speculate. It is hard to distinguish between reality and imagination, truth and lies. To begin with, it is never known what exactly there is in the well, and if it is a man, whether he is alive or dead. Most of the information about the mysterious inhabitant of the

well comes from Katherine, who also has the gift of the storyteller but is at the same time a very unreliable narrator. There are times when it seems clear that Katherine is hallucinating or making it up, but other times things do not look so obvious. Hester has doubts as she occasionally thinks she can hear him: "She thought she heard a voice somewhere outside. She thought someone was calling and calling. [...] The wind rose raging once more and the voice was lost" (194). Furthermore, if the man is alive, it is uncertain what his intentions are. On the one hand, he seems nice, keeps on telling Katherine that he loves her and promises to marry her. On the other, he sometimes gets angry out of desperation and threatens to kill the women. This is how Katherine describes the man's ambivalent attitude to Hester:

He wants out Miss Harper. I'm scared [...]. He's going to kill us both. If we don't get him out he'll find a way out and then he'll get us both. [...] You'll like him. Honestly! [...] It's only that he gets mad and angry and yells and shouts and uses language. It's then that I get scared, real scared. He's got a terrible shout [...] and he knows some words. Most of the time he's sweet. A sweetie pie. [...] I can't help loving him when he's being sweet. He's been singing for me this afternoon. (169)

This atmosphere of uncertainty adds despair along with a sense of uncontrol and vulnerability to the already uncanny situation.

Uncertainty also stems from mistrust. Katherine is the main source of distrust. She looks honest, but the book sometimes hints at the contrary. Readers, along with Hester, know very little about her past, true nature and intentions, whether her temporary posttraumatic madness is faked and whether she stole the money. It does not seem coincidental that her madness starts when Hester tells her to go down the well and recover the money. It may be a scheme to avoid facing what she has done. Her insistence on the man's rescue may be

explained as a strategy to displace her guilt about the accident, clean her conscience and use it as a weapon against Hester. If the old woman takes out the corpse, she will be able to blame her for not having rescued the man in time. The next extract seems to support this point: “I’ll tell you this, Miss Harper, I didn’t kill him. I did not kill him and it was you that put him down the well. It was your idea and you did it and if you keep him down there he’ll die and you’ll have been the one who killed him” (185). Focalisation creates uncertainty too. Although there is a third-person narrator, Hester is the main focaliser, hampering a broader and more objective perspective. Her particular perception of the world, her self-interested behaviour, as well as her tendency to idealise her past and other events, are sound reasons for doubting the scope of her objectivity.

Uncertainty makes meaning, reality, truth and values unstable, stressing their flexibility. By means of a careful leak of information or lack of it, *The Well* prevents readers from seeing the whole picture. It only shows what the writer chooses. Almost everything can have more than one interpretation, and what is true now may not be some lines later. A good example of how meaning can be manipulated is Hester’s photograph, as Turcotte points out (2009: 195). Her deformity is hidden thanks to the photographer’s skill (61). Maybe that is why she takes it away when she is older. The girl portrayed there is not her, it is a lie constructed by the photographer. Narration and interpretation are essential elements in *The Well*. The novel is a metafiction which exposes the changeable nature of storytelling and meaning. It highlights the

relevance of whom has the power of interpretation and problematises “either the authority of the teller, the ‘facts’ which are offered up to the reader, or the very prescriptions embedded in literary modes as authorized by the ‘rule makers’ in ‘literary circles’” (Turcotte, 1995: 21). These rules have traditionally been set by a masculine voice that obliterates other alternatives.

Language is connected with the body. The male body is the standard, and thus the world is viewed and expressed from that perspective. “Phallogocentrism” is the label used by Jacques Derrida to refer to the inevitable connection between phallus and logos: “Since it is man who constitutes the origin, and since its institution and reproduction can only be achieved through the reduction or effacement of what is different, woman serves as its site of alterity: she is the sacrificial victim of a system within which she exists only as a void” (in Sellers, 2001: 23). The masculine word is constructed as the truth, but as a construction, it is unstable. Hence, everything it silences threatens to destroy it. For Derrida, the logos works in “a destructive dialectic of opposition”, which fails because its demarcation is drawn by the other it constructs and tries to deny. He, among other critics such as Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva, contends that one can revolt against this phallogocentric system of representation through writing. According to him, narratives always slip from their writers, exceeding and disrupting their real intentions when they took the pen:

writing in particular retains the knowledge of its own creation, since the system of differences whereby its meanings are produced allows other possibilities to come to the fore, disrupting every attempt by the writer to control what is said. This ‘supplement’ within writing constitutes its

radical potential, since a text can always be made to reveal its history, including its manipulations and suppressions. [...] this 'feminine' excess entails the possibility of a plurality which deconstructs our conceptual system. [...] In contrast, therefore, to the logocentric text which strives to establish and police its own weave, what might be termed a 'feminine' text is an unguarded network that continually unfolds outwards towards others. (In Sellers, 2001: 25)

Storytelling shapes people, and people use storytelling to shape the world. Tales turn a strange and frightening world into a more palatable place to live in. Stories, being easy to remember, help people to cope with new situations. They also encourage certain desires and provide models for social, moral and personal behaviour. Accordingly, tales can be regarded as "a forum in which we can conduct imaginative experiments, distinguishing as well as providing an outlet for feelings and attributing value for them" (Sellers, 2001: 31). The fairytale is the most popular literary form through which children have been taught proper gender roles. They normally encourage action in boys and passivity in girls: "Heroines wait (Sleeping Beauty), they cannot venture or idle in the forest (Red Riding Hood) or they do not leave the house (Snow White). Meanwhile, male characters leave to conquer other worlds" (Alborch, 2004: 162. My translation).¹⁰

The tales we tell are the product of the language and literature we have received. These tales are not stable at all. It is possible to see that they have changed over centuries of telling. As a result, they offer female writers an instrument to undermine assumed truths and present alternatives to the dominant discourse. As Susan Sellers argues, feminist rewriting can be split in two: "as an act of demolition, exposing

¹⁰ "Las heroínas esperan (la Bella Durmiente), no pueden aventurarse y entretenerse en el bosque (Caperucita) ni salen de casa (Blancanieves). Mientras que los personajes masculinos parten a la conquista de otros mundos" (Original quotation).

and detonating the stories that have hampered women, and as a task of construction —of bringing into being enabling alternatives” (2001: 30). The gothic —the genre of the other— has been used by many women writers to achieve this purpose, that is, to speak the unspeakable: the female body and experience. They use it to criticise the values intrinsic to traditional literary genres and destabilise them with controversial material. It is a type of counterdiscourse that “once spoken, even to be silenced, acquire[s] ‘a phantom but fundamental existence’” (Richard Terdiman in Turcotte, 2009: 183). This is, for example, Angela Carter’s project in *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979), a gothic rewriting of traditional fairy tales against the masculine norm.

The Well puts into question the archetypes and certainties of the fairytale. Throughout the narrative, there are constant allusions to this literary mode, the most prominent of which being the wishing well next to the cottage. Hester’s physical appearance and social situation call to mind the mythical figure of the witch. She is a lonely old spinster with a bony body, who looks weak but is not, uses a walking stick and is considered a “masculine” woman. Parallelisms can also be drawn between Katherine and figures such as Rapunzel and Gretel, young girls kidnapped by the witch in the cottage. It is interesting that the name Hester is similar to the German word “Hexe” which means witch (Cranston, 1991: 216). The image of Rapunzel’s long hair also comes to mind when Hester dreams that her hair is tied to a chair (197). Although Katherine is in her early twenties, Hester refuses to let her grow up, and at a party she makes her wear a childish dress with a

“Peter Pan collar” (97). Nursery rhymes appear, such as *Pussy in the Well*, which Katherine significantly sings before the accident (6, 104-105). The sentence “Top Off, Half Gone, and All Gone” (190) belongs to *Cat and Mouse in Partnership*, a tale collected by the Grimm brothers about a thief-cat who steals the food the mouse and he are storing for winter. Some women at a party are wearing hats “of brilliant green or red and black felt” like the hats fairytale huntsmen wear (92), and Katherine once gives Hester three guesses to find out her secret (148).

In the novel, the well is the place where traditional tales are challenged. The well is a borderland, an in-between space, where universal values and beliefs are questioned. As Gerry Turcotte declares: “it is [...] the source of a plethora of patriarchal discourses aimed at women: declarations of love, proposals of marriage, threats of violence. It is, therefore, the site of multiple generic discourses, including [...] fairytales” (2009: 196). The well is inhabited by the tales told and imagined by the two women: “In the rocks themselves there would be faces of dwarfs and other fairyland creatures, there would be battlements and turrets of silent castles and little steps and slides leading from one cavern to another. Some caves might be lined with jewels” (176); “The fantasy created over the years contained in its invention all that was romantic and beautiful; the fairy-tale lovers and the safe dangers of cosily imagined evil lodged in some distant place. There was the idea of a world of caverns lined with jewels and perhaps the possibilities of magic practices which made wishes come true” (194). The novel shows that these tales, coming from a patriarchal tradition,

are a dangerous double-edged construction. They can both promise and deny freedom. The well grants a prince charming who does not only promise marriage, but also violence and murder. Moreover, it is in the well that patriarchal discourses are kept at bay —the prince is not allowed to come out— and modified —the women fill the well with their own tales, which do not necessarily comply with tradition and can be changed whenever they want. This is illustrated by the scene when they imagine a princess coming out of the well, then they turn her into a prince, and finally into a troll (41-43). Therefore, the well is an ambiguous territory. It is impossible to define it as one thing or the other, as just black or white, but rather a shifting grey. It is the “site of polyglossia” where the masculine and feminine meet (Turcotte, 2009: 197).

The novel is self-conscious about storytelling and storytellers. It is also aware of the manipulation and possibility of change in stories. This can be seen, for instance, in the numerous stories ascribed to the well by each female character; in the stories about the convent that Katherine tells Hester, “describing the same incident over again with added details which made Hester wonder sometimes about the truth of them” (20); or when Mrs Grossman slightly transforms her account of the robberies every time she tells it so as to make it more appealing (131). At the Grossmans’ store, Hester comes across a woman writer, who could be Jolley herself with the story of *The Well* in mind:

we do have such a wide canvas here in town, the potter, the painter, the carpenter, the shopkeeper, the landowner, the orphan, the stock and station agent and the intruder. As a novelist, [...] I need an intruder to distort a relationship. The action goes forward but is governed by the

events of everyday life. Perhaps using the seasons as a kind of hinge of fate and with an understanding of events being inevitable because that's what life's all about isn't it —the rich dark fruit cake of life. (210)

She is going to write practically the same story that is narrated in *The Well* and explains to Hester the literary norms she has to follow:

I'm writing a perfectly horrific little drama set [...] in a remote corner of the wheat. Very regional. It's strictly a novella. In writing it I have to keep to certain rules which have been accepted in literary circles. I'm in trouble already [...]. Yes, the tradition is that the story has a narrator who has gone through all the experiences in the novella and is relating them. I simply have no narrator! [...] Yes, the novella has to be a narrative, fiction of course, longer than a short story but can be quite short for all that. [...] The characters can have names but they are mainly known by what they do in life —their everyday life. (209-210)

Literary conventions are causing the female writer trouble, as she feels constrained by “the rules accepted in literary circles”, literary circles that are, more often than not, controlled by men. It is noteworthy that when Hester suddenly feels hungry in the store, she takes a roll from the counter without hesitation and eats it. The woman writer does the same after seeing Hester do it. This imitation of Hester's brave breach of rules and freedom to do what she wants can be read as the female writer's first step to break away from literary conventions. Hester warns her about a downside: “Sort of eat now and pay later” (209). There may be consequences for that transgression, but it is a risk she has to take to achieve freedom. Later, when Hester narrates her own story, she remembers the writer's instructions (233). In the words of Turcotte (2009: 199):

The world of thrillers, Gothic tales, fairytales, imperialist histories —all are offered as pre-inscribed texts with set conventions which women (like Jolley's Writer) must or are conditioned to follow in order to speak. They are a part of a Master Narrative that prescribes their actions, articulates their desires and their sexuality, even their fictions. (Original emphasis)

It is within the patriarchal system that she will be able to speak and counterattack mastery discourses. As Julia Kristeva argues: “[Women]

must adopt the social-symbolic code in order to function, and our revolts will be fruitless unless they occur within it in ways that can be understood” (in Sellers, 2001: 30).

One of the things Hester liked most as a child was words. Significantly enough, it was a woman, Hilde, who taught Hester new words: “She was a very strict teacher, [...] she made me write four lines of French and four lines of German every morning” (21); “*Trottel du Blöder! Aber Liebchen* say again *Ich möchte*. Make your mouth *Ö-so-Ich-möchte* . . . I wish . . .’ Hilde, [...] patient and sweet voiced, urging her to pronounce words and phrases” (82). Even when she has lost the power that her property used to give her, she keeps her authority through words. The Bordens have her property now, but Hester somehow counteracts Mrs Borden’s new authoritative position by correcting her mispronunciation of the word “naïve” (98). Hester’s shout: “*I challenge thee to mortal combat!*” (190. Original emphasis) is full of meaning from a literary perspective. She challenges patriarchy not only with her “unfeminine” attitude, but also with her words, *herstory*. That is why when she is going to tell Mrs Borden’s children about “a Great-Big-Monster she caught on her roo bar One Dark Night” (232), she has to decide which monster she is going to tell them about, giving a shrewd half smile, “the smallest smile a person can give” (233). This subtle detail reveals that she is probably going to relate her own story and design her own monster.

In *The Well*, both the character of Hester and the text transgress the symbolic order with a view to escaping the patriarchal world and

word. Since the transgression is performed within the masculine norm, the final story blends the traditional and the subversive, a fusion which Turcotte qualifies as “impossible and yet productive” (2009: 200). Thus, storytelling proves to be as ambiguous as the well. On the one hand, it is oppressive due to long-standing laws created by men and which female writers and storytellers, like Hester, have to obey. As Keryl and Paul Kavanagh assert, it is like the game of Scrabble in Jolley’s *Milk and Honey* (1984), which the author uses as a metaphor for this “ancient heritage”: “the words we are able to use in Scrabble are limited by the letters we have and the spaces in which we can put them, and are dependent on the previous moves of all the players in the game” (1991: 161). “In this game one makes what one can out of what one has, *nicht wahr?*”, says Aunt Heloise, one of the characters (Jolley, 1989: 135). On the other hand, it is liberating because Hester can manipulate and adapt the tale to her needs. This liberation can also be two-fold. Hester can use her tale to regain control over the series of events that almost overwhelm her as well as to regain Katherine by imposing her version over hers. Moreover, as both a manipulator and a lover of words, she is capable of using them in her favour whenever necessary, as when she thinks about the words she will use the morning after the accident “to impress” and convince the girl to keep silent (111). In this, Hester is not far from traditional male practices that silence the other. But more positively, her story can be a means of escape and healing, as Nettelbeck notices (1999: 98-99): “we might regard the well not just as the source of Hester’s darkest fears and memories but as the source of

her freedom, as the means by which she can come to grips with the long-hidden past". Turning the events into a gothic tale is a way of facing again those traumatic moments she has just lived through in order to get over them. John O'Brien argues that, at the end of the novel, it is suggested that Hester "will find some new direction through writing (creation as an alternative to repression, destruction, or stagnation)" (1991: 142). In an interview, Elizabeth Jolley states that a way of overcoming traumatic events is "to create fiction from them" and remembers reading a significant quote by Flaubert: "that fiction was the result of a deep and hidden wound" (in Joussen, 1993: 40). That is exactly what Hester is doing. Jolley thinks that "all is not lost" for her: "At the end, when she's about to tell the Borden children this story that no-one's going to believe, she's getting rid of that [...]. So there's a fairly optimistic ending for Hester" (in Joussen, 1993: 42). It is important to remember that a female figure —Hilde— greatly contributed to Hester's introduction to the world of words. The following description of Hester's recovery from a headache clearly illustrates the healing and liberating power of words, which is simultaneously linked to nature, another source of freedom for Hester. Notice how everything is temporarily spoilt by the recollection of the father figure, that is, the symbolic:

As she felt better thoughts and words formed in her mind. She thought about grass [...] At a certain time of the year the grass was rich and sweet smelling. She thought about the word meadow, a grassy paradise — someone had written that about a meadow. [...] Hester, for a moment, recalled her father and thought of him dismissing the flowers, cape weed, with disgust. Grass, she remembered more words in the spreading freedom as the pain seemed to be lifted from her brow; *a fragrant garment of the earth filled with ripe summer to the edge*. And more words; *all spring and summer is in the fields silent scented paths*. Was that Ruskin she wondered. She had all these words copied out in her neat schoolgirl writing. Some lines were even translated into French and German,

Fräulein Herzfeld made her translate everything . . . No headache at all now. She tried to remember where the apostrophe in *fields* should go. (63-64. Original emphasis)

Hester and Katherine's future is uncertain. But the novel suggests that in her role as a narrator and in recognising life as a series of flexible constructions, Hester has found a new type of power: the power of storytelling. This power actually constitutes the foundations of the patriarchal structure in which the economy of property and possession—Hester's former power—is embedded. She has gone to the roots of the system in order to transform it and regain control. It is precisely the gothic mode that she chooses for this purpose. The metafictional side of *The Well* demonstrates the possibility of change. There is indeed an optimistic turn at the end of the story that readers of gothic novels will find surprising.

III.2.7. Conclusion

Following the female gothic tradition, *The Well* uses the genre to criticise patriarchal ideologies, both in content and form. As for the content, *The Well* relates the story of two women in a conservative rural community in Western Australia. The main symbol of the novel is the well. Its unknown content, a mystery which is never solved, disturbs the apparently happy lives of the two protagonists and structures the plot of the story. In its multiple functions as repository of desires, fears, memories and social meanings, the well is a metaphor for female struggle. Significantly enough, folklore has usually linked wells to Mother Nature, and thus to the feminine. The natural landscape, which

is normally feminised, also plays an important role in the story as it dictates the fates of the people of this territory. The connection between landscape and the feminine is especially felt by Hester, to the point that nature is capable of blowing away her worries and fears.

Societies based on patriarchy organise themselves according to a system of gender oppositions that undervalues and discriminates women. They are ascribed to the house and their function is to be loving wives and mothers. Their only way of acquiring status and a valid identity is beside a man. If a woman steps out of these roles, she is automatically marginalised and regarded as monstrous, a threat to the proper working of society. This is the case with Hester, a lonely spinster who runs her own property, is economically independent, and has a complex “unnatural” relationship with Katherine, which involves friendly, maternal and sexual desires. The negative effects of patriarchy are visible in Hester. Not only is she crippled physically, but also psychologically, since she represses her sexuality. Moreover, her confinement makes her ill, as her agoraphobia and frequent migraines illustrate. What is worse, in an attempt to achieve power, a woman may imitate the same structure that oppresses her, and consequently, she may oppress others that are in an inferior position, as Hester does with Katherine. Their relationship is based on mastery and obedience. Although Hester is the one in control and Katherine happily submits, the novel gradually shows that things are not so obvious, that the two women manipulate each other for their own purposes. Hester needs a friend, and Katherine needs a home and economic support after leaving

the orphanage. The accident and the presence of the man in the well bring to the surface the dark side of this friendship.

The interpretations of the enigmatic content of the well are numerous. It may be the corpse of a thief who has been stealing in the area or even Joanna's body. From a psychological perspective, the content becomes more interesting because it opens the door to the female characters' unconscious. They project onto the well their fears and desires, as can be seen in the stories they make up about what its dark depths hide. For this reason, when the corpse is thrown into the well, each woman constructs a different identity for it. For Katherine, it is her ideal Prince Charming, somebody who will give her status and happiness as he will turn her into a wife and a mother. For Hester, it is a thieving beast, somebody who will steal Katherine from her as another man —her father— stole her governess Hilde when she was a child. Hilde was not only her teacher and friend, but also a mother figure. Hester's shock upon finding Hilde pregnant and bleeding was made worse by the instant realisation of her father's affair with her. This event will mark her forever. The consequences are the loss of a mother figure, scorn for men as sexual partners and a traumatic vision of sex.

Regarding form, *The Well* is a metafiction. It reflects on the way its own narrative is constructed, making us aware of how stories are produced. Stories help us to make sense of the world, and transmit moral and social values. The dominant voice has been masculine, imposing its points of view and literary conventions, and fixing the truth. The metafictional strategies of *The Well*, its circular structure and

the constant uncertainty that pervades the whole story demonstrate that truth is flexible and multiple, that it actually depends on the teller. Therefore, the truth imposed by patriarchy is displayed as not universal and open to contestation. This is what Hester does at the end when she invents her own tale to amuse her neighbours' children. She starts giving her version, "her-story". Meaningfully, she resorts to the gothic, a genre which lies between the norm and the revolutionary, and which has been an important weapon for women's expression and struggle for equality. This is perhaps the reason why this open-ended gothic novel strangely ends on an optimistic note.

IV. IN THE WINTER DARK

IV.1. NOTES ON TIM WINTON

Tim Winton is an Australian Westerner by birth and by choice. He was born in Perth in 1960 and currently lives in Fremantle with his wife and his three children. In spite of writing from the very “edge of the world”, he has won admirers and critical acclaim in different parts of the globe. He is a prolific author: nine novels, various collections of short stories, six books for children, a novella, non-fiction and several essays. His stories have been adapted for the cinema, theatre, radio and television, and he has won a great number of awards—including four times the Miles Franklin Award, the most important literary award in Australia. Winton does not find his popularity a burden on his shoulders. In fact, he seems to be quite comfortable with it. He is approachable and always willing to give interviews and talk about his work and life.

He was fond of books when he was a child and decided to become a writer at the early age of ten. He lived with his family in the suburbs of Perth, but his father, who was a police officer, was transferred to Albany, a small ex-whaling town. That shift prompted him to the world of storytelling since he used to invent stories in order to escape bullying:

the walk to and from school was a long walk. And somehow [...] I'd always have some bigger kid fall in next to me. And he lived near me and he was going to victimise me the whole way home [...]. So I realised the only way I could prevent having my head kicked in as a form of entertainment to this bored kid was to tell him stories. (In Denton, 2004: n.p.)

He took a creative writing course at Perth University. His mentor was writer Elizabeth Jolley. He married and had his first child when he was

very young. At the beginning, he wrote both for pleasure and to maintain his family. This may be the reason for his being so productive. Although his first book *An Open Swimmer* (1982) won a major prize, his success really came with the publication of *Cloudstreet* in 1991. It changed his life and took off the pressure of writing for money: "I can afford to blow the morning off and go for a surf. [...] I've worked hard [...]. I owe it to myself. A bit of water over the gills. That's my reward. [...] then coming home blissed out and happy. At one with the world" (Winton in Edemariam, 2008: n.p.). He finds inspiration for his writing in his own personal experiences and in his native land: Western Australia.

Winton is strongly attached to Western Australia. He does not have any doubts about where he belongs. As a white Australian, he does not show any residual tension between the European roots of his ancestors and his Australianness. As he states after a two-year stay in Europe:

I'd been brought up all my life to think that I was European. I'm not even faintly European. I looked at the glories of Europe from behind smoky glass. It was like this huge gulf; I admired but it wasn't hugely connected with me. I felt torn, almost, like torn out of the soil from home. Then when I came back I knew what was going on. I knew if I stayed away too long I'd be adrift, and I felt like I was going to wither up and die. I knew this was where I belong. I know my continent, I know my country, I certainly know my landscape as to what it means to me. No-one's going to be able to convince me I don't belong here. I'm connected to the land and the landscape and the sea and the colour of the light, and the smell of the eucalyptus, the whole thing. I wouldn't say it's a kind of new Aboriginality, I wouldn't ever feel that I had to even chase after the term, but it's a feeling of belonging. (In Jacobs, 2007: 311)

Although his books are set in that specific region of Australia and deal with ordinary lives, people all over the world enjoy them because they also address universal issues such as love, death, family, freedom, responsibility, spirituality or the search for oneself. To the fact that his

books are qualified as “Australian”, he replies that what people might mean is that they are:

true to life as they know it, authentic somehow. I’m more accessible to people of my own culture, but I’m writing for strangers basically, and that’s strangers anywhere. I like to think that if you’re true to the particular the universal will look after itself. I like to read regional fiction. I like novels that are marked by their source. (In Watzke, 1991: 98)

Winton’s strong identification with place and his style recall writers from the south of the United States like William Faulkner or Flannery O’Connor. He admits their influence on him: “Perhaps I am drawn to the South due to the particularity of the region, the fact that it could never be mistaken for being anywhere else” (in Batstone, 1992: 18). Other writers that have influenced him are Mark Twain, Robert L. Stevenson, William Wordsworth or Ernest Hemingway among others (Tague, 2008: n.p.; Jacobs, 2007: 309).

The “tyranny of distance” —as historian Geoffrey Blainey has famously called it— is stronger in the west of the continent. The west is little populated, as most Australians live on the south-east coast. Western Australia is separated by the desert from the rest of the continent and by the ocean from the rest of the world. Therefore, the feeling of isolation is quite literal. Tim Winton recognises this confinement, but he also appreciates its positive side:

Nowhere else on the continent is the sense of being trapped between sea and desert so strong as in Western Australia. In many places along this vast and lonely coastline the beach is the only margin between them. From the sea you look directly upon red desert and from the wilderness there is the steely shimmer of the Indian Ocean. [...] Because we have much more landscape and coastline than people, our shores and shallows are still rich in life, diversity and strangeness. We have perhaps more than our fair share of shoreline miracles, of visitations and wonders and, happily, we haven’t destroyed them all yet. (2000: 38)

It is no wonder that Western Australians have usually seen themselves, and have been seen by others, as isolated from mainstream Australian society and culture. To name just a few historical examples of this marginality, Western Australia became part of the Australian federation only thanks to the votes of immigrant Eastern Staters on the goldfields, a railway connecting the west and the east was not built until 1917, and in 1933 Western Australians voted to secede from the federation, but it never came into effect (Quin, 1998: 3). The location of Western Australia has also stimulated the minds of its writers, including that of Winton. He highlights all the implications of this physical separation as he compares the western and eastern coasts. At the same time, his comparison goes beyond the physical dimension:

West coasts tend to be wild coasts, final coasts to be settled, lonelier places for being last. In Australia the east coast is the pretty side, the Establishment side, the civilized side. It tends to be well watered and blessed with safe anchorages. It is hilly and offers views. It is the social coast, the sensible coast, at times the glamour coast. As in Ireland and America, our west is seen as something of a new frontier, remote and open. Our west coast is mostly a flat and barren affair, blasted by trade winds, vegetated with scrub and heath, drifting with dunes. It doesn't lend itself to the picturesque and its squat little towns with their fish-deco architecture barely rise above sea level. (Winton, 2000: 103)

This feeling of remoteness and solitude is related to Winton's obsession with landscape and to some of the dominant topics in his works such as displacement, isolation and marginalisation.

The natural landscape plays a vital role in Winton's literature. It can be said that his writing actually stems from it. His observations of nature are not just environmental warnings, but also the cue for a more complex examination of mind and times (Jacobs, 2007: 312). The landscape is not a mere background, but a protagonist in its own right.

It has its own life and power, one which places human concerns in a wider perspective (Quin, 1998: 5). The land is a dynamic entity that fills the spirit and individual experience. Winton establishes psychological links between his characters and their physical scenario, exposing how they respond to their surroundings, how they fit in, and whether they succeed or fail in this close relationship (Jacobs, 2007: 310). He admits that it is the landscape that fuels his fiction: "I use a lot of it, I always start a novel thinking about the landscape first. A place I've seen and that struck me. Then I move on to the story and characters" (in Ben-Messahel, 2006: 103). Australian literature has traditionally paid special attention to the landscape. The environment is described in detail, turning into the centre around which the story and the characters revolve. As Salhia Ben-Messahel asserts:

The writer's fictional world is anchored in the physical territory and in the characters' heroic ordinariness. The meaning of life and human fragility are explored through the territory of the mind. Place is not only a geographical entity but a reflection of human imagination, the mirror that reflects how the characters imagine themselves to be; the environment is a distinctive Australian milieu commanding the characters' destiny. (2006: 104)

The increasing interest in Aboriginal culture has contributed to creating a renewed and stronger preoccupation with the environment.

Winton's fiction extends, physically and socially, from the Australian bush to the border of the ocean to the little agrarian towns and the outskirts of Perth. The only exception is *The Riders* (1994), which is set in Europe. The action usually takes place in a rural space and the relationship between the characters and their surroundings is intrinsic and reciprocal. The land is at the centre of human existence, and the construction of social and individual identities are part of that

landscape. This is how Winton explains his belief in the close connection between people and land:

Faces are landscape of their own, I suppose. You can see the seasons in them, the passage of time, of conflagration and drought, of bounty gone, chances lost. You can see the nuggety foundation coming through. [...] Curiously, the land often renders itself in faces too, and it bears similar stories. Antiquity, attrition, fire, torrent, the grinding crash of continents. It is startling to see a body in stone, a figure in water and cloud. It is only at night that trees become men and twigs the writhing bodies of reptiles. It makes the Aboriginal idea of Dreaming so much less quaint, your appreciation a tad less academic. The bush is a beautiful and fearful place. With greatness there is always some intimidation and some magic. (In Ben-Messahel, 2006: 105)

The landscape in his works can be understood as something more than a metaphor for the human body and mind. In fact, it is an extension of both. The land reflects the history of both the land and the characters. People and place, the physical and the psychological, are just one. The synthesis of people and land means that the outside becomes the inside, and vice versa. The inside of the characters is exteriorised through their environment in the same way as it affects them. Consequently, the mapping and discovery of the territory allows the characters to discover their true selves, “realising that the self is both a source and an echo, a ‘here’ and a ‘there’” (Ben-Messahel, 2006: 108).

Winton’s perception of the land is similar to the Aboriginal. He does not regard it as property, but rather as part of oneself:

For the European, Australia has always seemed like an alien land. It has not been friendly to European sensibilities or European agriculture or European settlement. It has taken us years to learn not only how to survive off the land [...] but also how to come to terms with it as an entity. The great aboriginal tenet is that the land does not belong to you, but that you belong to the land. [...] For the aboriginals this land isn’t just your home, it is your icon, your sacred place, your umbilical cord. To be separated from the land is to be put into limbo, to be stuck between life and death. European Australians have had a lot of opportunity to learn that and figure it out, but with the exception of a few individuals, we have not listened to our continental wisdom. (In Batstone, 1992: 20)

This relationship with the land is truly spiritual, and therefore capable of bringing about sublime feelings. Lyn Jacobs relates Winton's amazement about nature to the Christian mystics, and she notices that "concepts of Divine Creation, grandeur, sublimity, or wilderness coexist here with understated depictions of local, distinctive landscapes, conveying 'a sense of the world alive'" (2007: 312). His concern about nature makes him a passionate environmentalist. His fight for the preservation of the Ningaloo Reef, situated at 1,200 kilometres from Perth, got public attention since he donated his A\$28,000 Miles Franklin award for *Dirt Music* to a campaign to save it from developers. He confesses that he also did it out of guilt: "I guess everything I learnt about the marine environment I learnt at the point of a spear. Or a hook, or a gaffe... I knew I was having an impact, and reconciling myself with having killed those creatures is something I think about probably twice a day" (in Edemariam, 2008: n.p.). Lately, he is been involved in a campaign to preserve the oceans and save the shark (Cuttle, 2010: n.p.).

The sea is Winton's passion and the main natural element in his literature. The nature that surrounds Western Australia is represented by the sea and the desert. In *Land's Edge* (1993), he justifies his preference for the sea:

[Western Australians] are coastal people, content on the edge of things. We live by the sea not simply because it is more pleasant to a lazy nation, but because, of the two mysteries [the desert and the sea], the sea is more forthcoming; its miracles and wonders are occasionally more palpable, however inexplicable they be. There is more bounty, more possibility for us in a vista that moves, rolls, surges, twists, rears up and changes from minute to minute. The innate human feeling from the veranda is that if you look out to sea long enough, something will turn up. We are a race of veranda dwellers and, as Philip Drew writes [...]: 'The veranda is an

interval, a space, where life is improvised. The beach, in Australia, is the landscape equivalent of the veranda, a veranda at the edge of the continent'. (2000: 37)

Nevertheless, he does not consider the desert to be the negative counterpart of the ocean. In truth, he claims that, like the ocean, it is full of life (Quin, 1998: 8). He assumes that people choose the sea because the desert is generally a misunderstood spiritual space while the sea is "the mere playground of our hedonism" (Winton, 2000: 36). In addition, his inclination for the sea is a gesture of defiance against the long literary tradition of placing the desert as an elemental force in Australian experience. In that way, he mirrors his Western Australian context. As Bruce Bennet and William Grono have argued, the sea has always been a powerful motif in the literature of this area and has brought about ambivalent connotations: "the sea which confines can also open new worlds to the imagination and the possibility of escape" (in Quin, 1998: 6).

Because of its colonial history, images of displacement, dispossession and alienation in foreign spaces are common in Australian literature. To put it in a nutshell, Australia was populated by European colonisers, who in turn displaced and dispossessed Aborigines from their territory, and later ongoing waves of immigrants have arrived from all over the world. In Winton's fiction, the topics of isolation and dislocation acquire greater relevance in the Western Australian context. The protagonists find themselves displaced from their familiar environment. In that alien space, they are confronted with extreme situations (Quin, 1998: 3). They are ordinary people who go through

challenges and personal crises which they may overcome or not. The author comments that his characters are:

People trying to figure out what their lives might mean and what's left after everything falls over. That seems to me like the stuff of all story down through the ages. [...] Not many of us write out of some impersonal, archetypal reference. We respond to what hurts, what itches, what causes us fear or gives us hope. (In Murizzi and Lawless, 2006: n.p.)

Displacement and solitude often turn the characters into outcasts. Sometimes, their marginalisation enables them to see beyond, to have a clearer perception of life and themselves (Quin, 1998: 4). It is necessary to point out that the characters' seclusion is construed as positive, not as a sign of being asocial or misanthropic. It gives them a chance to think about their lives and life in general, and consequently they acquire some kind of wisdom. Afterwards, it is important not to keep that wisdom to oneself. It must be shared with the rest of the universe (1998: 5).

The past is a crucial element in Winton's fiction. His books explore how people try to find their way into the future in an uncertain present that is bound to the past. The spectre of Australian colonisation does not rest and usually reappears in diverse forms. But the protagonists' own past comes to the surface as well. Thus, historical and personal pasts mingle with the present and the characters have to come to terms with both of them. They "experience the effects of time within a space where time is a never-ending whirl that shapes the characters' indefinite lives". Furthermore, the historical and the personal influence each other: "time is part of the history of the character as History is the definer for the search for identity in a split environment" (Ben-Messahel,

1998: 63). The past always returns for the better or the worse: “the past is unavoidable, it’s there in all my work. The past has its consolations but often it’s just a knife twisting in an old wound. Either way, as Faulkner said, it’s never over” (Winton in Rossiter, 2004: 38).

Winton is very interested in spirituality and mysticism. The author’s Christian upbringing may be the reason, but the religious that is discerned in his books has more to do with the mysterious and the animistic than with traditional Christianity (Quin, 1998: 5). In his stories, there is always a supernatural force which, although it may not interfere in human affairs, it acts as an observer and a counterpoint of human experience. There is a suggestion that there is more to life than what the human being can see. Life is itself “on the edge of something else, something larger and perhaps more rewarding” (1998: 5). This sense of the numinous is usually connected with the land. Winton contends that the rational view adopted by most people limits “the capacity to discover spirituality in the land, to dream visions, to see the numinous in the midst of the ordinary”. However, in the Australian wilderness it is possible to see “quite weird and wonderful things. Once you take the Aboriginal’s instinctual apprehension of the animation of landscapes and of origins and combine that with the white bushman’s love of telling a tall story, the notion of a factual, ‘efficient’ reality becomes very limiting” (in Batstone, 1992: 21). Glimpses of the numinous are often experienced in his books by children and marginal characters. The latter due to their loneliness, and the former due to their innocence. The numinous is perceived instinctively, not

intellectually. That is why his characters are “apprehending but not understanding, getting it without getting it. They are not the kind of people who define what they are sensing. [...] children have the capacity to not worry so much about the answers to life but are more content to figure out what the questions are” (1992: 21).

When he writes, Winton includes both the supernatural and the natural in order to convey a more comprehensive picture. He rejects the term magical realism because the supernatural in his stories is not fake, but real. As he clarifies, the kind of realism he practises is:

a route between realism and the kind of 70s fabulism that was about at the time. [...] What passed for realism denied me a whole wedge of material —the numinous. Surrealism faked it in order to escape restraint. [...] I wanted to include both realms because I feel that this is true realism: the supernatural and the natural accepted as one thing, as inclusive. Life is big enough for these experiences. Those moments of unreality as you call it are just the opposite. The term magical realism really upsets me. It assumes trickery. The weird things that happen in my books aren't devices. [...] this is the kind of world where pigs speak in tongues and angels come and go. And I'm not speaking metaphor here. The world is a weird place. (In Watzke, 1991: 97)

This also explains why his literature is fraught with dreams. When he is asked about the use of dreams in his fiction, he answers that as a writer he feels much freer to create an oneiric world because anything can happen there (in Guy, 1996-97: 127).

Masculinity is another constant in Winton's writing. He challenges masculine stereotypes, claiming that the home, childcare and intimacy are not exclusive of women. Lekkie Hopkins describes his male characters as:

odd and different precisely because of their 'feminine' qualities (their abilities to love, to relate emotionally, to be intuitive, to nurture, to cry, to be hurt) and the consequent lessening of their typically masculine qualities (their lack of desire to exploit, or to dominate, or to be separate, or to be competitive). (1993: 46)

Winton's background has been fundamental in his unorthodox portrayal of masculinity, since his family defied traditional gender roles. According to Winton, his father "was a gentle man who did the ironing, the washing, and was, I guess, not very manly by Australian standards" (in Wachtel, 1997: 68). As for the women, he remembers that his family was basically matriarchal: "All the women were strong and all the men were feckless at best. [...] in my family you got a flogging from the women, and the weak link would always be the man" (1997: 70). As far as fatherhood is concerned, Winton has loved taking care of his children. Following his father's example, he has always considered his children to be more important than his work. He also admits that being a father was more rewarding than going to university:

[University] didn't affect me emotionally in an imprinting kind of way. [...] But having children did change me: it grew me up, it gave me something big. [...] Nothing could take away from how positive it was for me. I wasn't going to be reviewed in the papers for how well I'd kept the child that afternoon. It was something that was personal that was there for me. (In Wachtel, 1997: 80)

Winton's stories usually have no closure or present uncertain endings. When asked in an interview how he decides to end a story, he emphasises the need to get the best structural and emotional unity regardless of the fact that it is not the ideal ending:

Most often finishing a novel has more to do with realizing when enough will do. Many films and novels carry on past their ideal end-points for the sake of roundings-off or even from a failure to see where they've outworn their welcome. As a novelist, I'd rather risk leaving too soon than overstay. [...] So I go out at the earliest opportunity, at the moment that offers the best chance of structural and emotional unity. (In Murizzi and Lawless, 2006: n.p.)

Even though his protagonists are in search of some kind of meaning, the story does not really end and that meaning is not wholly reached or it is left undisputed. The author says that he does not provide endings

because meaning cannot be attained in the space of a novel. He goes on to add that in fact, despite the possibility of meaning, it “isn’t something that’s finally arrived at” (in Guy, 1996-97: 136-137). Accordingly, it can be argued that Winton’s novels have the power to create suspense at the very end, to leave readers wondering about the whole story and making up possible meanings or endings. And most important, this enables readers to take part in the construction of the book beyond the final full stop.

IV.2. IN THE WINTER DARK: THE RETURN OF THE FERAL

In the Winter Dark (1988) is often considered the dark side of *That Eye, The Sky* (1986), a novel about a boy whose father becomes dependent after a car accident and the sudden arrival of a stranger who altruistically helps his family. Winton himself encourages this reading in an interview: “*That Eye* was very much about light. *Winter Dark* is a gloomier book” (in McGirr, 1999: 66).¹ *In the Winter Dark* is a gothic story² about four people who live in the Sink, a secluded valley of the Australian bush, and how their lives are struck by the appearance of a mysterious predator which kills their livestock. Maurice and Ida Stubbs are an old couple of farmers who have lived in the Sink for a long time. They have raised four daughters who now have their independent lives far away from there. Maurice, the narrative voice that opens and closes the novel, bitterly remembers that when he was a boy, the Minchinburys’ daughter shot him and his brothers while they were stealing apples in her orchard. One shot turned his brother Wally blind forever. The woman had gone mad in old age and lived alone with hundreds of cats in her family’s holiday mansion in the valley. Maurice took revenge by setting fire to one of her cats, which spread the fire to

¹ Both books were adapted for the cinema. *In the Winter Dark* in 1998, directed by James Bogle, and *That Eye, the Sky* in 1994, directed by John Ruane.

² According to Winton, the original subtitle was: *A Gothic Romance* (in McGirr, 1999: 67). The fact that this novel has not received such enthusiastic reviews as other works by Winton can be connected with its gothic nature. As Alexandra Rombouts argues: “perhaps it has something to do with expectations of manner and style, perhaps also of subject matter, and it could include [...] a misunderstanding of the positive uses of Gothic” (1994: 92).

the house and the woman inside. His wife Ida is a devoted housewife who moved to the Sink when she married Maurice. Now that she is getting old, she becomes aware of her feeling of frustration at having dedicated all her life to her family and home.

Murray Jaccob is a retired gardener who has just bought the old Minchinbury house in order to keep a low profile in the country. He was married to Marjorie, but his marriage broke up due to their baby daughter's death. She died suddenly in her sleep, apparently of cot death. Jaccob, however, thought that the family cat suffocated her and he gassed it to death. His life changed after his divorce: he became lonely and started to drink. In the course of the novel, he develops a special connection with the fourth character, his neighbour Ronnie Melwater, and starts looking after her as if he were her father. Ronnie is a young girl who moved to the Sink with her boyfriend Nick. She is pregnant and her boyfriend has just deserted her. She is irresponsible and careless with both herself and her unborn baby. In spite of her pregnancy, she often drinks and takes drugs.

The main action in the novel revolves around the characters' search for a wild beast that has gored Maurice and Ida's pet dog and wrecked havoc to Ronnie's livestock. Maurice, Jaccob and Ronnie drive through the forest at night looking for Ida, who has decided to run away from her husband. The climax is reached when she is mistakenly shot dead by Maurice. This adds to their car's overturning and Ronnie's giving birth to a dead baby. After burying Ida and the baby in the forest, Maurice and Jaccob drop Ronnie in hospital and drive away.

The real identity of the predator is never discovered. Several explanations are discussed: a wild cat or dog, a fox, a Tasmanian tiger, an animal escaped from the circus, a domestic cat gone wild in the forest. Nevertheless, the important point is that this strange event serves to bring together the four characters—who have, so far, led quite lonely lives—as well as to unravel their fears and insecurities and to disclose their secrets: Maurice still hates and fears the madwoman; Jacob often thinks about his daughter's death; Ronnie had an earlier abortion, she was beaten by her father and she once witnessed magic rituals with cats in that forest; Ida saw the accident of a circus truck involving wild animals and she is not precisely happy with her life.

It is my contention that the external gothic elements in the novel can be read as a reflection of the characters' inner fears. The figure of the wild cat, which triggers the events in the Sink, is the most prominent symbol and can be interpreted as a manifestation of the personal and historical ghosts that haunt the protagonists. Besides evoking the characters' traumatic histories, the cat acts as a reminder of colonisation.³ Fears regarding the instability of white domination of Australia have always existed: the land has been perceived as half-alien and half-familiar, threatening to revolt against its occupiers at any time. The sudden appearance of a mysterious predator in the Sink proves this, and the protagonists' unsuccessful attempts to control their

³ It may not be coincidental that *In the Winter Dark* was published in 1988, the year of the Bicentenary of the British arrival in Australia. The celebration of this day every 26th January—the so-called Australian Day—is not without controversy because for the native inhabitants this day symbolises invasion, dispossession and marginalisation. For this reason, Indigenous activists labelled 1988 as the Aboriginal Year of Mourning (Elder, 2007: 244).

environment highlight the fact that they may never wholly dominate the bush. All these anxieties are perfectly reflected in the gothic atmosphere that imbues the whole story.

Bearing in mind the distinction between terror and horror, it can be argued that the novel is pervaded by horror. Significantly written by a man, the novel thus conforms to the male gothic tradition. The last part of this analysis will focus on the horrific elements of the story, especially with relation to the feminine. Since the role of the mother is highlighted in every female character, the relationship between motherhood and horror will be explored in depth. Accordingly, my analysis will deal with three vital points in the structure of patriarchal societies and how they are represented here in gothic terms: the image of the female as ambiguous, female demonisation and male violence towards women.

IV.2.1. Inner and Outer Landscapes

The physical space in *In the Winter Dark* is depicted using common gothic imagery. Everything happens in the forest, which is always described as cold, gloomy, mysterious. The following description of the forest at night when Maurice and Jaccob go out to hunt the wild cat serves as an example of how the lack of light is used to create a disturbing atmosphere:

The beam of the spotlight reached out like an arm to make a hot white oval that moved from stump to fence to rock, to climb the trunks of trees and send shadows spilling across the ground. It was cold. We [...] lit up meadows of spiders' eyes, and the sound of the motor in low gear grew stranger as the night went on. Out in the dark there was no definition, no

assurance, nothing familiar, no sign, beyond that floating oval disk, that we hadn't stumbled off the edge of the world entirely. (64)

The forest is also a quiet lonely place outside civilisation, more isolated than any other place in Australia as it is also situated at “the edge of the world”, that is, in the west. The characters are aware of their isolation: “[Ida] She'd stand here at the window and feel new and strange, as though maybe she should get back in the car and take this helpless child to a town, a city, [...] where people might drive past occasionally and wave on their way to somewhere else” (25). Reason does not rule in forests. This is why they can be so strange and confusing for humans, a source of fear and anxiety, especially at night. Maurice's father, who “was frightened of trees”, warned him: “Never sleep in the forest, he would say; everything is above you” (23). The forest does not only inspire terror, but also amazement and awe. To put it differently, it evokes sublime emotions. While the characters admire the forest, they also realise how vulnerable they are. Everything is above them. They cannot control its grandeur. It is beyond their power. They are at the mercy of nature. Maurice even perceives the bush as a kind of cathedral, in a way that brings to mind the Romantics' perception of gothic cathedrals: “You get that big church feeling up there in the forest. [...] The wind sounded like a choir way above” (23). As Sahlia Ben-Messahel states: “The growing power of the forest on the characters' souls draws into relief the supremacy of nature over industrialisation and civilisation” (2006: 135). In the next extract, Ida recognises her vulnerability in the mighty bush:

Ida Stubbs heard shots and flinched [...]. Another shot; she heard it soar over the valley and it gave her [...] that sense of being small, of not really belonging. She'd had it in her chest the day she'd come here after her wedding. And she got it each time she brought a baby back from the district hospital. [...] maybe she should get [...] somewhere where the trees didn't stand over you. (24-25)

Again, the smallness of people in the midst of nature, reflected in the threat posed by the height of trees, preoccupies the descendant of the white coloniser. She is an alien in a land that cannot be fully mastered. Her concern for her newborns points not only to their particular vulnerability, but also to the fact that no matter the number of generations, this feeling of not belonging threatens to be always there.

Another important feature of the forest is the lack of light due to the thickness and the exuberance of its flora. Darkness permeates the whole story as most of the action takes place at night. The weather adds to the sensation of gloom —the wind blows, the sky is often overcast, and there is frequent rain and mist: “the ground spread and slimed and skidded beneath her and the rain was in her face” (86); “Jaccob got out. Wind hustled in the trees up in the distance. The forest” (104). Darkness also increases the feeling of fear and mystery. Since it is impossible to see in the dark, you can never be fully aware of the danger it may hide. You are afraid of the dark because you are actually afraid of the unknown, which spurs your imagination. Darkness invites supernatural phenomena and the appearance of strange creatures: “something stopped him [Jaccob] still as a stump. Between the trees he saw something. A movement. A silhouette. It was travelling. *Loping*, that was the word [...] The shadow seemed to stop. Slip sideways between apple rows. And then there was nothing” (6. Original emphasis). Set in

winter, traditionally associated with darkness, death, and misery (Vries, 2004: 614), the story features the worst weather conditions and the fewest hours of sunshine: “On a winter’s night down this way, the cold darkness is like two black sheets of glass pressing you breathless” (54). The anxiety provoked by the forest is reinforced by the fact that this place shelters an unknown beast that kills farm animals and poses a threat to the quiet lives of the protagonists. Black magic rituals are possibly performed there too. The image of the forest is associated with death and evil.

The gothic is not only an external element in *In the Winter Dark*. The environment in the novel also reflects the characters’ psyche. Sahlia Ben-Messahel asserts that:

In the Winter Dark [...] encompasses the protagonists’ complete disorientation within an eerie environment. The surrounding forest disrupts the inside and liberates the characters’ own darkness of the mind. [...] The oppressive darkness causes the characters virtually to sink into their own geography of the mind so as to reintegrate their shabby existence. This inner space is peopled by wraiths and memory. The dark Sink is into their own psychological void. It is [...] a living organism, an essential protagonist with a capital letter. (2006: 111)

In the following example, the rain outside is a projection of Ida’s crying. She is listening to both her tears and the rain falling:

Back on the pillow she felt the tears running back into her hair, across skin that almost hummed. She heard the rain coming across the valley and it sounded ominous and unpleasant though a long way outside of her. She listened to the rumble of tears across her drum-flesh and tried to breathe. (82)

Loneliness is not only due to the fact that very few people live in the Sink, but it is also a mental condition: “Jaccob ate alone as always, only now with someone else in the house he felt more lonely than he’d felt in all his months here” (27).

Darkness, the ghostly appearance of the forest or the bad weather can all be regarded as clues to the characters' unconscious. Quoting Hemingway, Winton refers to the fact that sometimes in novels only the tip shows, but there is much more underneath (in McGirr, 1999: 115). Each character has a hidden past, symbolically alluded to by the epigraph by Victor Hugo: "There is such a thing as the pressure of darkness" (1). The author states that:

The past is always with you and sometimes it takes over the present. These people are trying to live completely alone, sharing little of their intimacies, their desires, griefs and so on. And yet they live pretty close together. There's quite a bit of guilt in the Sink, a lot of unexpressed hurt. [...] Sometimes secrets are best kept. But also there can be consequences. Some secrets will eat you alive. (In McGirr, 1999: 66-67)

Despite the initial lack of interaction between the inhabitants of the Sink, there is something that connects their innermost fears like capillaries. First of all, despite their differences, they find themselves in the same situation: they are forced to confront both the mysterious creature and their dark hidden selves. Apart from that, Maurice, the most powerful narrative voice in the novel, has the unusual ability to dream and remember other people's thoughts, feelings or dreams. He can sometimes get into other people's minds and have access to their secrets, even those belonging to people who lived a long time ago: "I have an Ida dream all the time. Some nights I have it so bad it has me waking up thinking I *am* Ida" (25. Original emphasis); "This is Ronnie's dream, though it might as well be mine nowadays, I have it so often. It's quite short, and like the others, always the same" (78); "This is not my memory. It comes to me now and then and I see it clear and sharp as though I am there, but it's before my time [...]. I think this is one of my

father's memories. [...] It's terrifying to think you can remember things you shouldn't possibly be able to" (73). The sense of community is quite strong in Winton's fiction in general. He explains that he is very interested in the way we are all connected: "We spend a lifetime learning distinctions that do not exist, defining ourselves against other people and other worlds of existence. But at the end of the day, human life is whole" (in Batstone, 1992: 21). Maurice's supernatural skill connects him with other people, whether he likes it or not: "He tries to separate himself all this time but people force their way into his life. People are connected to one another, like it or not, dead or alive, asleep or awake", comments Winton (in McGirr, 1999: 67).

In this hostile physical environment untold secrets and fears surface within the characters' minds, taking the form of a wild cat. All of them have a disturbing past that involves cats, so when the wild cat appears, it echoes the cats of their past. Maurice is most affected by this. As mentioned before, in the Minchinbury house —where Jaccob lives now— there used to live a madwoman and her cats, who was burnt to death indirectly when Maurice set fire to one of the cats in revenge for her leaving his brother blind:

In a beautiful Guy Fawkes curve the burning cat finds the open door. The old woman shouts in surprise and the white house swallows up the cat. [...] how quick the curtains take, spitting and crackling like fuse-coil, licking up the timbers, the panelling, the drapes. [...] the awful keening noise, the cat sound of her burning. The Minchinbury house roars. The sky drinks it up, the noise and light, the smells of cooking flesh and fur. It's the sound of hell [...]. She's burning and her cats are burning. (90)

The shadow of a cat pursues Jaccob too. As I already explained, he gassed his cat to death after the sudden death of his baby daughter.

Although he found cat's fur in the cot and saw the cat leaving the baby's room that night, he sometimes doubts his judgement:

it felt good making something pay. The [cat's] yowl reached a pitch of fury as the monoxide and the motor and the heat filled the garage. Cot death, they reckoned. Kids die. It's a mystery syndrome. [...] it was years now. Five? Six? Sometimes he wondered if he'd simply needed to think it was the cat that smothered his daughter, that a mystery, a syndrome just wasn't enough. (85)

After his daughter's death, he divorced and also blames the cat for his lonely alcoholic life. An incident in Ida's life also connects her with cats. One rainy night she was driving home with her little daughters when she saw an overturned truck that belonged to a circus. The truck had bars like a zoo cage. She stopped to offer help, but a man said that everything was all right and told her to forget the accident —“Look, this never even happened” (60)—, which was what she did. However, recent events have brought back the memory and she suspects that a wild cat or a similar animal might have escaped that night, and it may be the beast that haunts the forest. Ronnie's past also hides disquieting memories of cats. Some time ago, Ronnie witnessed some “weirdos”, “sort of witches”, performing black rituals in the forest where cats were sacrificed. Her boyfriend Nick took her there one day. She remembers perfectly that when they were nailing a cat to a tree, the cat tore itself free, went to her and pawed her belly (78).

The cat, the most powerful symbol in the story, haunts the protagonists with such force that it is even felt when it is not mentioned. For instance, there are several references to milk —the traditional favourite of cats— (58, 78, 84, 85) or hisses —a typical sound produced by cats— (10, 76). Even the description of the milking

of a cow mixes two indirect references to cats in the “hiss of milk” (58). Real cats, however, appear only in the characters’ memories or dreams rather than in the diegesis of the novel, where, as an absent presence, they signify on many levels.

Cats are traditionally regarded as enigmatic. Although they are loved and kept as pets, they keep an aura of mystery. The reason may lie in their ambiguous behaviour. In spite of the fact that the cat welcomes the comfort offered by the human home, it also enjoys total independence, as if nobody owned it. This can result in the mistrust, and even hate, that many people feel towards cats, which has inspired numerous legends and myths (Turner and Bateson, 2000: 4). A well-known portrayal of the cat as a mysterious and dangerous creature is Edgar A. Poe’s “The Black Cat” (1843), a man’s first person confession of his crimes before being executed on the gallows. His mental deterioration is unravelled as he narrates the brutal treatment and killing of his cat, the uncanny appearance of a similar cat in his life, the murder of his wife when he tries to kill this new cat, the walling-up of his wife in the basement of their house, and finally, how his boastful attitude leads to the exposure of his crime to the police. This gothic tale shares some similarities with *In the Winter Dark*, especially in the equation between women and cats, and the unrecognised presence of the racial other in the figure of the cat, as I will later point out.

In the novel, Maurice is strongly convinced that the mysterious predator is a feral cat and elaborates an impressive theory:

My guess is it’s a feral breed of house cat [...]. This is a cat whose ancestors were house cats maybe two hundred years ago. [...] You know

damn well that this isn't a dog or a bloody pig. Look at this pawprint. That's a cat. A big cat. Two hundred years of feeding in the bush from strays. The big ones, the fast ones, the mean ones survive. The quiet ones. They slowly get bigger, faster, meaner, quieter. You know, it's what they teach at school these days. You know how many litters a cat has a year. Hell, the way we walk through the bush, the big ones'd be well warned, that's why we don't see 'em. God knows how big they get; they're lords of the bush. (52-53)

It is important to get acquainted with the history of the cat in the Australian experience and imagination. Cats are not indigenous to Australia. They were introduced by the first European settlers, although they may have arrived earlier with Dutch shipwrecks. By the 1850s, groups of feral cats had already made their home in the wild. The population increased when in the nineteenth century cats were released in order to control rabbits, rats and mice. Cats are divided into three categories in Australia for management purposes: domestic —those owned and looked after—, stray —those roaming in cities, villages and other human dwellings— and feral —those not dependent on humans and living in the wild. Feral cats can be found in most habitats across the continent, Tasmania and other islands. They compete for food with other predators, particularly foxes and dingos. Feral cats have become a serious environmental problem. They have had a tremendous impact on Australia's fauna. They are believed to have caused the extinction of some indigenous species, endangered others and are regarded as the carriers of some infectious diseases.⁴ Measures have been taken to stop feral cats from spreading, but the brutality of most of them has generated controversy, splitting Australians into those in favour and against. One of those against is writer John Kinsella. In his essay

⁴ "The feral cat (*Felis catus*) - Invasive species fact sheet", 2004: n.p.

“Scapegoats and Feral Cats”, he remembers that as a child he was taught that endemic wildlife was disappearing owing to introduced species such as cats or foxes. Thus, killing a cat or a fox meant saving the environment. He laments that even nature lovers blame feral cats for the extinction of native species. They claim that these wild creatures have destroyed the balance because they do not belong. He contends that the solution is not as simple as the extermination of feral cats. The truth lies “closer to home—that is, within ourselves” (n.p.). The problem is actually caused by human action: land clearing, mining, cars, farming methods, intensive agriculture, and in general, “the culture of profit”. The feral cat is a mere scapegoat: “Removing the cat won't stop the disappearance of native species, it will just delay things” (n.p.).

Winton's use of the contentious issue of feral cats in *In the Winter Dark* can be read as an appeal against animal mistreat. The commitment with the environment has been a common characteristic in Australian literature until the present day. Focusing on twentieth-century Australian literature, it is possible to discern, along with an interest in the peculiarity of the landscape, an understanding of Australian ecosystems and the human impact on the country's nature (Clark, 2007: 440). Writers frequently highlight their natural background. The reason may be, as T. Inglis Moore has suggested, that the environment has been “the background of the nation's story, . . . home of its heroes, the maker of its ideals, and the breeding ground of its myths” (in Clark, 2007: 429). Winton believes that people, besides being intrinsically connected with each other, “have a relationship with

nature, too, one they can't avoid forever" (in McGirr, 1999: 67). He agrees with the Aboriginal tenet that "there are dire consequences from always doing things to the land" (in Batstone, 1992: 20). Hence, the events in the Sink can be construed as a sort of punishment for the abuse of the land and its inhabitants since European colonisation.

The figure of the mysterious cat is commonplace in Australian mythology and Winton also resorts to it:

[Ida thinking] those stories she'd heard about American subs surfacing off beaches near here to get rid of mascots that had grown too big to be kept. Cougars, mountain lions, that sort of thing. And those prints someone'd found in the caves at Margaret River. And everybody the last few years talking about the thylacine, the marsupial dog or cat or whatever it was, coming back from extinction. (88)

Big cats have been spotted since the Gold Rush, but the number of sightings has increased since the Second World War. Theories include "escapes or releases of illegally held animals, descendants of pets kept by goldminers or the offspring of pumas kept as mascots by American airmen during the war years" (Bernard Lagan in Ellis, 2008: 104-105). Another theory, maybe the most popular, is that the thylacine — popularly known as the Tasmanian tiger— is not extinct, but hides in the Australian bush. The term Tasmanian tiger is, in fact, a misleading misnomer. The thylacine is not a feline, not even a mammal. The first colonisers probably referred to this unknown species as such because its striped fur reminded them of tigers, a clear example of colonial appropriation by naming. The following dialogue between Ronnie and Jacob illustrates the confusion surrounding the nature of this animal: "for all I know it might be a Tasmanian tiger.' She didn't laugh. 'Yeah, people talk about that still, don't they?' 'I s'pose it doesn't sound so

stupid really, a marsupial cat, or is it a dog?” (57). The thylacine was a large carnivorous marsupial which used to live throughout Australia, as fossils and Aboriginal cave paintings prove. It disappeared from mainland Australia about 2,000 years ago. Although the exact reasons for its extinction in that area are not known, it is likely that it died out in competition with the dingo.⁵ Its presumed extinction in Tasmania — some people swear that they have seen it— was promoted by the introduction of dogs, the destruction of its habitat, disease and indiscriminate human hunt —as it posed a real threat to farms, it was shot on sight and bounties were frequently offered for its head. It is not certain whether the thylacine was already on decline when Europeans arrived, but human interference surely accelerated its extinction. The last known wild thylacine was captured in 1933 and died in Hobart Zoo in 1936.⁶

The legend of the survival of the Tasmanian tiger is quite popular in Western Australia, where it is known as the Nannup tiger. Winton dedicates *In the Winter Dark* in part to this legendary animal “wherever you are”. The Nannup tiger is thought to roam in the forests of Western Australia, especially near the towns of Nannup, Balingup and Bridgetown. It is precisely in this area where the novel is set. Sightings

⁵ The dingo is a wild dog “found in Australia, in all states but Tasmania. It is not a native animal to Australia, and it is unsure how it arrived [...], but the current theories are: Dingos were brought to Australia 15,000 years ago by Koori people [...or they] may be related to wild dogs in South East Asia, and [were] taken to Australia for trade by sea-farers” (“Dingo (*Canis lupus dingo*)”: n.p.).

⁶ “The Thylacine”, 2009: n.p.; “Thylacine, or Tasmanian Tiger, *Thylacinus cynocephalus*”: n.p.; “Thylacine”, 2008: n.p. The possibility of cloning the thylacine has been studied. However, it is unlikely to succeed due to the conditions of the samples kept. Some people also doubt whether cloning is worth such an effort and expense if serious action is not taken to stop what is causing the disappearance of Australian wildlife.

of the Nannup tiger have been reported from early settlements until the present day, above all during the 1960s and 1970s. The fossils found in caves evince that the thylacine used to live in this region. Although attempts to capture the Nannup tiger have been unsuccessful, reports are usually contradictory and evidence often turns out to be a hoax or a case of misrecognition —as happens with the hunt of the Tasmanian tiger elsewhere—, some people are totally convinced of their existence and continue looking for it.⁷

Hostile feelings towards the feral cat can be connected with the anxiety brought about by immigration in Australia. Kinsella contends that in a “landscape devastated by colonisation” the notion of endemic and non-endemic turns to be selective as for which species can colonise. Some are allowed —such as white Europeans—, while others are not:

There’s a racist subtext at work here. The cat becomes equated with unwanted migrant populations [...]. The cat symbolises the persistent vileness of the white Australia policy —it is the enemy of ‘homogeneous’ Anglo-Celtic Australia. There’s more at stake here than simply ridding Australia of an unwanted killer of native species. (n.p.)

In *In the Winter Dark*, the cat also reflects the fear of all things foreign. When discussing the identity of the predator, Maurice comments that: “There’s no kind of native animal on this continent that can do anything like what we’re talking about here. It has to be something foreign, something introduced” (53). Jaccob also feels the foreign nature of the creature: “the other night I thought I saw something in the orchard. Only a shadow, it was too dark to see, but I sort of felt, knew, sensed

⁷ “Legends of the West”: n.p.; “Nannup”, 2010: n.p.; Longmore, 2010: n.p.

that it didn't fit. Like it didn't belong. I had the idea it was long and bigger than, you know, native animals" (43). Ida even toys with the idea of a possible invasion, echoing national fears: "There were places for hidden things to breed. If they flourished, wouldn't they widen their territory?" (88). Besides, throughout the whole story, the instability of boundaries between the inside and the outside, the homely and the unhomely, is constantly emphasised, as will be later analysed.

From an environmental perspective, the figure of the cat can be linked to colonisation. For instance, the feral cat, according to Kinsella, has become a scapegoat for the destructive effects of colonisation on the landscape as well as a symbol for the colonisers' inability to control their own invasion:

[The feral cat] has been used to carry the sins of the invaders. In a sense, it's a weapon in the transformation of a space into something suitable for occupation. It has been used to erase identity. That's on the philosophical level. In reality it symbolises the inability of the invader to control his/her environment, to consolidate the conquest effectively. Out of control, it shows the destruction such 'settlement' has brought to the land. It is a symbol of failure. To appease the conscience, this stain on the hand must be removed - but no amount of 'out, out' will eradicate the crime because the destruction is all around us. (n.p.)

The cat in the novel brings to the surface the not so old history of colonisation and its aftermath, as this piece of dialogue illustrates. Maurice reminds the others that: "any schoolkid knows that our house cats come originally from wildstocks from India and Europe. In the beginning, this is.' 'But that's ancient history.'", the other characters reply (53). Therefore, if the creature is understood as a feral cat, it can be said that it symbolises the colonisers' inability to manage their own colonising project because they cannot control even the species they introduce in their new land. If the cat is understood as a thylacine or

any other native animal, it can be read as the failure of the Anglo-Celtic colonisation of Australia. In truth, since their early settlements, the colonisers have feared that the domination of the Australian territory is not complete. Consequently, they have mistrusted and feared the bush. These anxieties remain in the collective unconscious of the nation and can be felt in everyday life, as *In the Winter Dark* shows. In the following lines, for example, Maurice recognises the failure of colonisation in the Sink:

The Sink is the kind of place that's always failed to deliver. Soldiers came to this wet little valley thinking it might do good by them, all hidden away, but nothing came of their visions. Before the soldiers, before the wars, my father bought our side of the valley and he saw families come and go. In the end there were only three properties, though. Us, the Minchinburys, and the place across the valley where some hopeful always seemed to be setting up for a fall. (36)

As is well known, the impact of colonisation was not only on the flora and fauna, but on humans too, since Indigenous Australians were almost annihilated by white policies of racial control. But as the gothic reminds us, the past cannot be easily swept under the rug. Sooner or later, it will resurge in one form or another. Australia is haunted by the phantom of terra nullius and its disastrous effects on the native inhabitants. In this light, the cat can also be read as a gothic metaphor for the Aboriginal population. There are no allusions to Aborigines in Winton's novel. Nevertheless, the cat can be interpreted as an uncanny projection of the white characters' historical sense of guilt, and their fear of rebellion and retribution on the part of the colonised:⁸ those who

⁸ In an American context, Poe's "The Black Cat" also offers a veiled representation of the black population as a disturbing cat, as many critics have asserted (for a racial reading of Poe's works, see Kennedy and Weissberg, 2001). Exploring the use of the colours black and white in American literature, Toni Morrison considers that: "No

were apparently conquered may now claim what by right belongs to them. As Gelder and Jacobs assert: “We often speak of Australia as a settler nation, but the ‘uncanny’ can remind us that a condition of unsettledness folds into this taken-for-granted mode of occupation” (1998: 24). There is a significant piece of dialogue between Ida and Maurice, which clearly states that the beast that pursues them has been inherited from their ancestors. In other words, the cat is what Abraham and Torok call a transgenerational phantom: “‘You think we’ve done something?’ she asked. ‘Like “the sins of the fathers” and everything?’ [...] ‘Ida, I’ve tried to tell you. The answer is yes.’” (95). Their words acquire greater significance in the light of former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd’s “Sorry Speech”: “we are the bearers of many blessings from our ancestors; therefore we must also be the bearers of their burdens as well” (2008: n.p.). The idea is further stressed in a radically different context through a reference to Australia’s military enterprises abroad: “In the park beneath the Anzac memorial by the river, some families picnicked. [...] He [Jaccob] saw the ugly war statue and its message LEST WE FORGET” (40. Original capital letters). Although remembrance in this context refers to the deeds of those who died in war, the Anzac memorial acquires more sinister connotations when read against the atrocities committed by the white settlers: LEST WE FORGET. The remains of colonisation can be found in the very heart of

early American writer is more important to the concept of American Africanism than Poe” (1992: 32), that is, in constructing an image of racialised blackness haunting the white American imagination: “a dark and abiding presence that moves the hearts and texts of American literature with fear and longing” (1992: 33). In a similar way, the Aboriginal is usually present in Australian literature even when unnamed.

the Sink: “[Ronnie’s house] had been an old soldier settlement place they’d repaired and filled with potted plants and posters” (8).

The urge for mastery endemic to colonisation is clearly illustrated by the next passage, in a book Jacob is reading: “And when the bells broke through the drowning winds at night, his demon rushed into his heart, bursting all cords that held him on the earth, promising him isolation and dominance over sea and land, inhabitation of the dark” (28). However, it is Maurice that best represents colonisation in the novel. As the following lines illustrate, his father played the role of the coloniser because he did as the first European settlers had done, that is, he tried to master the Australian wilderness by trampling on and hunting every species of the new continent: “Sink people over the years came to call the scrofulous bald pitch on our side of the valley Dick’s Hill, after my father. Dad was a tearer and burner, cleared damn near everything he could find, but he had to stop at the northern boundary because it’s state forest, Crown land” (22). Alexandra Rombouts sees this destructive behaviour as “an inexplicable fear that comes not from the landscape, but from something deep within, an impression perhaps of the lingering presence of the original ‘dark’ owners of the land” (1994: 119). Maurice follows his father’s example. This can be seen when he burns down the Minchinbury house, or later when he desperately attempts to hunt the wild cat. This extract significantly connects the hunting of the wild cat with colonisation: “We lurched and jerked and tossed on the hard and slew and swayed in the soft. We lay weals upon the night, the way we always do in this country, making enough noise

you'd think we were warning every secret and fearful thing to beware and flee" (64). As Maurice is the prototype of the coloniser, the appearance of a predator in the forest destroys his belief in the success of colonisation, in his capacity to control the forest. He finds history no longer reliable or a comfort:

In those days [...] I liked to get by the stove with a volume of my *Pictorial History of Australia at War* [...] so I could get inside myself, all sullen with pleasure [...] and sank into the comfort of history, the terse outlines, the facts, the bare black and white photos [...] history, it seemed to me, was something solid, truthful, unswerving. (13-14)

In her article "A Winter Winner by Winton", Helen Daniel declares that:

the novel is a fable of the feral self and the sinister creatures we have ourselves begot. But *In the Winter Dark* also summons up the spectre of our collective history lying in wait for us, a history for which Australia, like Maurice, has not yet atoned. [...] it is also a profound meditation on the imperative of atonement. (1988: 14)

As happens in *In the Winter Dark*, history in Winton's writing plays an essential role in that he establishes a connection between collective and personal history: "For Winton, place determines personal and national history. The writer's use of topography interrogates the sense of perspective and direction in a vast and multifarious country, and designs characters' lives and destinies" (Ben-Messahel, 2006: 98). The survival of Winton's characters and their happiness will depend on how they deal with both histories. Maurice is an excellent example. In his extraordinary role as dreamer and collector of everyone's memories, he embodies all the histories in the novel: the past of the Sink valley, his own past and that of the other main characters. The following extract illustrates how the land is imbued with a history that Maurice can feel and see:

This is not my memory. It comes to me now and then, [...] but it's before my time, things don't look right. These people ride horses. Their clothes

aren't familiar, and yet when I dream it everything feels in its proper place, and sometimes I think this is one of my father's memories. I have no way of telling. (73)

The cat triggers off everyone's memories generating a feeling of uncanniness. As an unrecognised projection of the protagonists' psyches, it brings about the return of the repressed. The beast wakes up memories of past events and feelings that the protagonists had tried to hide. As Lyn Jacobs declares: "the cumulative unease of a community eventually makes manifest the evil it most fears" (2007: 313). The cat is a negative image that involuntarily repeats itself in the lives of the characters. Maurice is the most traumatised by the recreation of events. He is cursed to remember what he did forever: "Something has happened, and it can't be undone. He'll remember. It'll always be done. When he's an old man, it'll still be happening over and over and over and over" (84). Repetition brings about uncanniness, but it is also therapeutic. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) Freud links repetition to a compulsive tendency to re-enact repressed traumatic experiences in an attempt "to bind their energies and reach a state of balance or even entropy" (Cavallaro, 2002: 68). Therefore, the past does not only come back to unsettle our lives, but also "to mend a damaged fabric" (2002: 68). Unfortunately, none of the characters takes this chance to make amends with their past. Their fear engenders their own destruction. As Winton explains: "Panic is a terrible thing. It makes every obstacle insurmountable, makes help seem like a threat, causes people to destroy everything in their path" (in McGirr, 1999: 67). This is exactly what happens in the novel: Ida is killed, Ronnie loses her child

and is abandoned, Jacob drowns his sorrow in alcohol, and Maurice, whose guilt is killing him, tries to find consolation in talking to the dark.

IV.2.2. You Shall Fear the Unknown

The real nature of the beast that attacks the animals is never known. The only person who is completely sure that a wild cat is to blame is Maurice. He always leads the unsuccessful attempts to hunt it. Maurice's attitude reflects Nietzsche's belief in *Twilight of the Idols* (1889) that "to trace something unknown back to something known is alleviating, soothing, gratifying and gives moreover a feeling of power. Danger, disquiet, anxiety attend the unknown —the first instinct is to *eliminate* these distressing states" (1972: 51. Original emphasis). Maurice's view may be biased by his previous traumatic experiences which are all connected directly and indirectly with cats. Directly, because he set fire to a cat which later caused the burning of the Minchinbury house and the madwoman who lived there, and indirectly because the owner of the cats had previously shot his brother. The other characters, however, are doubtful of Maurice's supposition, arguing that it might just be a wild dog. Sometimes they even think that the killings could have been perpetrated by a man. The beast does not seem to be driven by hunger, but by "killing for the sake of killing", a typical human "lust". Besides, no beast is ever seen in the story, only humans (Rombouts, 1994: 108). Ida is the most suspicious:

No, they weren't imagining it, but... but it could be a trick. Come to think of it, she hadn't actually seen poor Coco's... remains. Maurice had hid it

from her. Out of kindness. Or. No, she'd heard the scream. But still, she couldn't say she'd seen it with her own eyes [...]. Beside the jug was the honey-smelling cast of the print [...]. If she had a bigger hand, like a man's hand... She pulled her knuckles out and then slipped them back in. My God. A man could do that. A big hand could make this footprint! (81-82)

Ronnie also suspects human beings. She thinks that the creature is actually the product of their own fears: "No use looking out there [...]. It's us" (92).

Uncertainty also affects other aspects of their lives. Ronnie and Jaccob have just moved to the Sink, so they hardly know each other and the Stubbses: "[Ronnie and Jaccob] 'I don't know you at all,' she said. 'Neither you should. We're strangers'" (57). Not even Ida and Maurice are an open book to each other: "Ida shook. She looked at Maurice. She didn't know him. Not the way a wife should know a husband" (99). After years of marriage, Ida realises that she does not know Maurice. Now she is afraid of him. She watches him carefully because she thinks that his secrets have something to do with the killings. Maurice notices Ida's new attitude towards him:

I saw myself in the mirror. I looked insane, I guess, not right, and Ida looked suddenly terrified. [...] 'Don't speak to me until you're prepared to tell me what's going on here, Maurice!' She couldn't hear. She was too frightened to listen. 'What is it, what's going on here? Who are you kidding? What kind of sick game, what is it?' (89)

After this quarrel, which ends with Maurice shooting at the roof, Ida definitely does not feel at ease with him any more: "Ida had slept nervously beside me as though I might cut her throat in the night. I could feel her relief as I got out into the morning chill" (92). Ida and Maurice's marriage is put to the test. Unexpressed feelings and secrets are brought to the surface, proving that the gothic genre is at heart a family romance (Williams, 1995: 22-23). Their house, a metaphor for

the family, becomes untidier (83) and starts to deteriorate: “In the morning I woke to the water thunking on to the end of our bed. I’d made a nice old hole in the roof with that shot” (92). The water significantly falls on the bed they share.

Although Maurice is the main suspect, Jaccob and Ronnie are also looked upon suspiciously, especially because they are newcomers arrived from the city. The clash between the city and the country is brought to the fore several times, and it is extended to the opposition farmers versus the rich: “[Ida talking to Ronnie] I’m from the farm and you’re from the city. We may’s well be from different planets” (66). The fact that the Minchinburys come from the city and are rich further complicates Maurice’s turbulent past in relation to the madwoman: “The rich think everybody’s rich. That’s their sin, forgetfulness. Oh, how I hated them, the Minchinburys, them and their fancy city talk” (37).

City-dwellers are regarded as intruders, the others. That is why they do not fit in the forest. Jaccob is described as “a stranger here” (40), and according to Ida, he does not “look right” in his country house, “as though he wasn’t quite master of the place” (96). And this is what Maurice thinks of Ronnie when he meets her: “She didn’t look like any farm girl to me. She ate like she was used to some higher life. It caught Ida’s attention too, and our eyes met and Ida’s brows went up” (48). Ida and Maurice believe that everything was all right until Ronnie and Jaccob arrived, and they blame them for their misfortunes: “None of this is natural. Something is going on here [...] What have these people

been doing? What have they meddled with? What weird rites have they fiddled with? Why did you people come here? she [Ida] thought” (98).

The disturbance the people coming from the city represent is clearly expressed in their inability to keep their country houses properly. This is how Maurice finds Jaccob’s: “I’d never been inside before. It was a mess. That comforted me, in a way. Furniture was haphazard and covered in dirty crockery and clothes. Smudged glasses and an overflow of ash stood on the hearth. So this was how the rich lived” (70). Jaccob and Ronnie’s disturbing presence in the forest manages to slip into the farmers’ property. This is clearly seen after their first meeting, when the Stubbses’ house seems to have been turned upside down by the city-dwellers’ influence: “I [Maurice] sat there all morning on the sofa where I’d slept. The bloody house was full of beer bottles and lipstick smeared glasses, and I was damned to hell if I was about to clean everything up” (83).

The interference of the city in the bush is only one aspect of a wider fear of invasion typical of the gothic: the assault of home by external hostile forces. This anxiety is highlighted in the novel by the frequent demarcation of the inside and the outside: “[Ronnie] She stood at the rail and looked out into the darkness. They weren’t kidding themselves —something was out there” (74); “[Jaccob thinking] I’m scared as shit. If we locked the doors, maybe if...now there’s the cellar” (100). The characters associate the inside with familiarity and protection and they regard it as warm and safe. In contrast, they associate the outside with unfamiliarity and danger, perceiving it as

cold, dark, unsafe and scary: “It was warm in our big kitchen tonight” (13); “It was dark outside, and cold” (14); “Quiet. Cold. I heard the faint clunk of dishes from the house. I went back in, forcing myself not to trot like a child frightened of the dark” (55); “[Referring to Ida] God knows it’s not safe out there [...] Get her in here, dammit, she’ll die out there!” (101).

The inside/outside borderline is meaningfully broken for the first time when the Stubbses’ dog is killed, that is to say, when the unfamiliar threatens the familiar. The dog is normally considered a homely animal and the best friend of humans par excellence. The fact that the predator is assumed to be a cat cannot be underestimated. Despite being a common pet, the cat is also traditionally depicted, in contrast with the dog, as cunning, independent, uncontrolling and untrustworthy (Vries, 2004: 107). This makes it somewhat unfamiliar, and thus dangerous. For this reason, a feral cat—which in the wild has completely lost its condition of pet, its familiarity—arouses a greater sense of uncanniness. Besides, when the cat is interpreted as a thylacine or any other indigenous species, its presence is immediately uncanny because it represents the weird side of the Australian landscape from the perspective of the white colonisers. Although Australia has been home to the white population for more than two centuries, it does not seem to be as familiar for them as it should be. In that extraordinary landscape, there is always the possibility of something hidden, unknown, untamed, that could suddenly threaten someone’s peaceful home and turn it into chaos. It might be assumed

that the uncanny side of the land should be less shocking for the farmers —Ida and Maurice— because the bush has been their home for years. Nevertheless, as has been shown, the bush has always frightened them and now they are as afraid of it as their new urban neighbours.

Since Ida and Maurice want to protect their home in the forest, they flatly refuse to ask for help outside. They reject Ronnie and Jaccob's suggestion about telling the authorities what is happening in the Sink:

'Well, let's get a dogger out here, straightaway,' Jaccob was saying. 'This has gone far enough. Someone's got to tell the authorities and get—' 'Authorities, authorities!' Maurice yelled. 'People suddenly want to be told what to do. This isn't the city, mate.' 'Oh, cut all the country bullshit [...]' 'They don't know what they're on about. They'll tell you it's a dog and they'll take some notes and set some baits and tramp over our land with their badges and uniforms, putting their noses where they're not wanted. They'll laugh at us, you fool. It's just bloody interference.' (97)

In fact, Maurice has a sound reason for not wanting intruders, especially the authorities. He burnt the madwoman and her cats, and got away with it. Nobody knows it, and he is afraid that somebody could come and find out his secret: "Maurice wouldn't want anybody tramping about in uniform on his land. The sight of an officer of any species was enough to get him sweaty" (44). As for Ida's aversion to outsiders, she might have been influenced by Maurice. However, now she is also becoming suspicious of him and feels that he has something to hide: "Ida stood in the doorway [...]. Yes, she thought. What have you got to hide, Maurice?" (97).

Uncertainty is most strongly felt in connection with the bush. They are not entirely familiar with their surroundings: "The valley was quiet but for the sound of the rain and the occasional disgruntled cry of a

bird he [Jaccob] wouldn't know the name of" (84); "[Ida thinking] She was a stranger here, and they were all impostors" (99). This kind of uncertainty brings about fear and distrust towards their environment. On numerous occasions, the protagonists confess that they are frightened of the forest, which they often perceive as strange. For instance, each stone of "a hoard of boulders" on the side of a hill is imagined as "a sleeping beast in the light" of the car (64). And this is Maurice's vision of Ida's innermost fear:

I [Maurice] have an Ida dream all the time. [...] In the dream she stands at the last rise before those thickets which web the hills just beyond here. The children are there, picking mushrooms. They call out and throw cowpats and are happy. She holds their cardigans and watches them play, but in an instant she imagines them being drawn into the thicket, snagged deep beyond the light, as though the place will not yield and if it will not yield it won't be still. She stands there shuddering with apprehension. She clutches their sweet-smelling garments and watches her children. [...] She never told me about this fear. (25-26)

The main cause to fear the forest is that all the characters, regardless whether they are farmers or city-dwellers, feel that they do not really belong in that place. This feeling is not new at all. It is actually the same anxiety that the early settlers felt when they confronted the peculiar —from their point of view— "New World". In an interview, Winton comments on the characters' terror towards their surroundings:

They're terrified of nature. They loathe it because they can't master it. It's that old Australian fear and suspicion of landscape. It confronts them. They project onto it all their emptiness or all their boiling secrets. The land doesn't give a damn about them but they half suspect it's after them. A sort of divorce from nature brings a spiritual vacuum, I think. It's one of the blank spots in the Australian soul. (In McGirr, 1999: 66)

This attitude towards the Australian space has been passed on from generation to generation until the present, as the novel also suggests: "The night is full of stories. They float up like miasmas, as though the

dead leave their dreams in the earth where you bury them, only to have them rise to meet you in sleep” (73). Along with this fear, there is also a sense of hopelessness and failure, alluded to in the very name of the place: the Sink. Despite all the efforts of colonisation to submit the Australian land to the Western canon, the land seems to have resisted domination, as the appearance of an unknown species that devours livestock evinces. The author points out in an interview: “We’re so shocked when we encounter the feral nature of life. Everything’s so domesticated and consumerised that we feel like we’ve got it all under control” (in Guy, 1996-97: 131). The inhabitants of the Sink are forced to confront the primitive and the barbaric. Not even modern technology is able to bring comfort in nature: “Up on the back with the cold handle of the lamp in my fingers and the wind in my eyes and cutting through my clothes, the night and the darkness seemed closer and I [Maurice] felt less protected by the car” (69).

The protagonists’ reaction towards the unknown creature changes quickly from surprise to violence, as they immediately take their guns to kill it. In this they echo the first colonisers, who resorted to violent methods in order to dominate the new environment. Maurice’s killing of a fox, mistaken by the beast, illustrates this point. The fox is not an endemic species, but it has now become part of the Australian environment:

When I saw that red blur ducking away in the bracken only forty metres away, I got off two shots in a hurry. The forest rippled with the noise and I heard a slug smack home. [...] When I got close I saw blood [...]. Then I all but trod on the quivering body of a fox [...]. The beast had terrible mange, which would make it look bigger and stranger from a distance. I’d hit it twice: in the front paw and in the back hip. It shook with pain and didn’t

even look at me. I killed it with another shot and heard the crack tear up into the light. Then I went back to sawing wood. (24)

The characters in the novel do not care much about the damage they can inflict on the bush: “Ronnie stumbled through the granite boulders. This wasn’t the proper world. Tiny marsupials smashed through the bush. All the colours, all the dyes came unstruck and she walked through them. A dam, huge pore in the flesh of the earth. A fence. She plucked a riff crawling through” (11). Human traces are everywhere — farms, cars, fences, dams, and so forth—, and in most cases they turn deadly for the fauna and flora. In fact, animals, either native or non-native, are continuously killed directly and indirectly in the novel. One can even end up thinking that animal corpses are part of the landscape. A lot of them die trapped in fences, a physical borderline that humans build to keep wild nature at a cautionary distance: “On the northern boundary closest to the forest we [Ida and Maurice] came upon the carcass of a roo caught in the fence. It was a doe, fresh-dead with its neck broken in the wire” (20-21); “[In one of Maurice’s visions of the past] The carcass on the fence is still now” (73).

Uncertainty also comes up in situations which blur the distinction between reality and imagination. This happens, for example, one night when Maurice and Jaccob are hunting the wild cat:

everything melted in and out of vision in a dreamy, dislocated way where things were created out of darkness, yielded themselves up to the oval disk, and ceased to be a moment later. I found myself sinking into a matrix of tiny lights, fine black holes, and there was no telling space from matter. A blur settled into view. Big white blur. (69)

Confusing situations —such as dreams, drunkenness and hallucinations induced by drugs— prevail throughout the story: Jaccob

is an alcoholic —“This morning I found Jaccob [...] drunk as a mongrel again” (1)—; Ronnie usually takes drugs and drinks —“All the valium made her light enough to move without muscles, to float” (9)—; there is a scene where Ida and Ronnie get “pissed as sticks” (72); and Maurice seems to possess the strange ability to dream other people’s dreams, as I will later analyse:

I have these dreams [...]. It is as though the things which need telling seep across to you in your sleep. Suddenly you have dreams about things that happened to them, not to you, as if it isn’t rough enough holding down your own secrets. I don’t know how it works —I’m no witch-doctor— but I know I remember things I can’t possible know. I’m not mad. Not yet. (2)

Lack of knowledge and confusion are normally stressed in the text by the constant use of the verb “know” in the negative, emphasising the fact that the characters are frequently at a loss. In the following moments of uncertainty, the word “know” —which I have emphasised— appears. The characters are not sure what they are dealing with and how to act properly, though apparently Maurice is: “‘Why don’t we get a professional hunter down here,’ he [Jaccob] said. ‘We don’t *know* what we’re doing.’ ‘I *know* what I’m doing.’ [...] ‘We don’t even *know* what it is’ [...insists Jaccob]. ‘I’ve told you what it is.’” (71). Ida finds the situation most terrifying because, in contrast with other natural phenomena experienced in the Sink, such as “bushfires and cockeyed-bobs, some floods and droughts and grasshoppers [...] they were the kinds of things which announced themselves; terrifying because you *knew* what they could do —but this, this was worse. There was no *knowing* what might happen” (81). In addition, as mentioned before, the characters do not really know each other: “I realized I [Maurice] didn’t *know* a damn thing

about him [Jaccob]" (65); "He [Jaccob] didn't *know* anything much about her [Ronnie]" (79); "Ida shook. She looked at Maurice. She didn't *know* him at all (99).

Joyce Carol Oates suggests that what we are mostly afraid of is the loss of meaning, because "to lose meaning is to lose one's humanity, and this is more terrifying than death" (1999: 35). The real object of our fears is in ourselves and "it is the anxiety of the individual that the very species may become extinct in our complicity with the predator —the cannibal/vampire [or the wild cat]— within" (1999: 35). The compulsive nightmares and anxieties that continually pursue us are not aberrant products of the psyche, "but the psyche's deepest and most profound revelations. The aesthetics of fear is the aesthetics of our common humanity" (1999: 35). Meaning in general and self-knowledge in particular are, for Winton, intimately connected with landscape, understood as a palimpsest of "strata of memory" (Jacobs, 2007: 318): "if you know your landscape you know yourself", he states (in Guy, 1996-97: 128). The alien forest and the beast that haunts it appear as a reflection of the characters' troubled minds.

IV.2.3. Talking to the Dark

Maurice is one of the last survivors in the valley. This is the reason why he can tell the story. Jaccob is a survivor as well. However, in contrast with Maurice, he chooses silence and alcohol to cure his pain: "There's only me and him left, but he doesn't speak. So I'm the teller" (1). Winton confesses that he chose Maurice as a narrator because he is the least

sympathetic of the characters, and that “sets up a few jangly nerves” (in McGirr, 1999: 66). His supernatural skill at seeing in the other characters’ minds helps him with his narration because he knows everything that happens and happened, turning him into an omniscient narrator of sorts. But it must be said that his omnipresence is not total. There is also a third person narrator who contributes to providing a richer perception of the events and the other characters’ inner feelings. This is just one example: “Then she [Ida] saw their hands. They all had tumblers of whisky in their hands. Maurice stood up and emptied his glass. He noticed Ida then, saw her at the door, and he looked at the empty tumbler and then at the tray she was holding” (98). With regard to focalisation, it often changes from a wide vision to the characters’ perception with no clear markers. These shifts create confusion and contribute to emphasising the “eerie surreal aspects of the tale” (Ben-Messahel, 2006: 157). I have chosen as an example the extract when Ronnie takes Valium and reflects on her future. Here focalisation constantly changes from an external viewer to Ronnie’s perspective and vice versa:

She looked out into the dark and suddenly she was afraid. She had no car, for God’s sake. How would she get to town if she needed to? What was he doing to her? The money was gone, sure, but what else was going on? What about the staying out of music, what about the promises? Oh, Ronnie, you are so dumb, girl. The room was dark and the faces of dead musicians and dead actors peered down at her. She held her belly. It was sinking in and it was like the pills were great white clots in her veins. Too many, Ronnie. She didn’t even know how many she took, these days. (9)

And later when she walks out of the house:

The twisted trunks of redgums walked past, writhing. The ground was billowing now. Never do it alone, Ronnie. Oh, you never needed to in the old days. She came to a delicious bank of grass and lay down in it. Up through the shreds of mist and the towering wet blades, the stars glowed.

No, she saw, they glowered. I know, she thought; I know, you don't have to tell me. (10)

Focalisation plays a vital role at the end of the novel (102-107), when Ida runs away into the forest and the other three characters start searching for her, crazily led by Maurice at the wheel of the car. The constant changes between an external focaliser and character focalisation —and sometimes between a first and third person narrator— match and highlight the tension of the situation along with the high speed of the car and the events. Access to the minds of the four protagonists contributes to giving a fuller understanding of their feelings. In the following passage, narration is external and focalisation shifts from external to internal. Ronnie is the main internal focaliser, but brief focalisations by Jaccob intermingle:

Ronnie sat wedged between the two men, buffeted by their shoulders as the ute thrashed up the paddock. She felt it sway and judder in the waterlogged pasture. They slid to miss stumps and hummocks. Wet grass glittered in the lights. [...] What she saw ahead was a crazy rushing dream. 'Slow down, dammit!' Jaccob yelled. 'Can't see her anywhere. Where the hell is she?' [...] Ronnie saw the grass sliding away to the side as they skidded in a great curve and fishtailed back on line. (102-103)

The external narrator sometimes gives way to Maurice: "Then I heard Jaccob shout. The wheel was gone from between my fingers and the world turned and my head went flat and it put burn behind my eyes. I was cold. I saw the stars return. The whole sky" (105).

Maurice tells his story to the dark as a sort of therapy for his troubled psyche. As Alexandra Rombouts asserts (1994: 101), he brings to mind Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (1798), whose protagonist is doomed to tell his scary tale again and again in search of healing and forgiveness: "Since then, at an uncertain hour, / That

agony returns: / And till my ghastly tale is told, / This heart within me burns” (Coleridge, 2000: lines 582-585). Maurice feels responsible for what happened in the Sink. What he did to revenge his brother is taking its toll: “I could still see poor Wally on the table, tearing at his pulpy eyes, and the cat squealing off in flames. I’d started it all, this whole nightmare” (72). He is determined to put an end to it all, to bury the past forever. He sees in the mysterious predator the reappearance of the burning cat. He hates it so much: “Veteran feuder, are you, Stubbs?”, Jacob once tells him (71). Maurice figures out that by eliminating the wild creature he will be free of his traumatic memories —and those of the others as well— and his peace of mind will be finally restored. Nonetheless, he fails to get rid of his ghosts and everything gets even worse. As a result, in an attempt to overcome his sense of guilt, to make it more bearable, he becomes a narrator. By telling his story, by remembering, he may find comfort and absolution. *In the Winter Dark* begins with Maurice’s words, making readers wonder what has happened, what he has done to feel like that:

It’s dark already and I’m out here again, talking, telling the story to the quiet night. Maurice Stubbs listening to his own voice, like every other night this past year, with the veranda sinking and the house alive with solitary noises the way it always is when the sun’s set on another day and no one’s come to ask the questions they’re gonna ask sooner or later. I just sit here and tell the story as though I can’t help it. There’s always something in the day that reminds me, that sets me off all hot and guilty and scared and rambling and wistful, like I am now. [...] I babble it all out, try to get it straight in my mind, and listen now and then for a sigh, a whisper, some hint of absolution and comfort on the way. (1-2)

When the predator attacks for the first time, he thinks that he is being punished for his crime. Notice the following nightmare: “I dreamt I ran downhill full of holes in the creeping blindness of night, aflame and

screaming. I lit up the valley like a torch and everything saw, everything knew I was being punished. I found the river, dived in, but it was just fuel to the flames. My mouth was a hole. There was nowhere to go” (16). Moreover, he considers his supernatural ability a burden he has to carry on his shoulders so as to pay for his past actions. He compares his situation to a tale from the New Testament about a man possessed by many demons:

Like that old Bible story about the wild man chained up in the tombs, ranting and foaming in all those voices. Call me Legion, he says, because we are many. And the pigs screaming down into the water, remember that? What was he having, delusions? Or was he having everyone’s recollections, was it history that tormented him? What had the wild man done in order to be mercilessly visited by everybody’s dreams? Well, I can’t speak for him, but I think about that poor bastard when I sit out here talking to the dark, or when I wake in the night from a dream that belongs to someone else. (16-17)

The secrets that Maurice gathers in his mind can be equalled to the demons that possess him, not only in their multiplicity, but also in their capacity for torturing him.

To make matters worse, he has to endure his pain alone. No one is there to listen to his sorrow, to comfort him, to forgive him, in contrast with the man of the biblical tale whose demons are exorcised by Jesus: “The wild man had someone come to cast out his demons. But here tonight, like every night, I sit here, and no one comes” (17). In contrast too with the Ancient Mariner, who usually finds someone that listens to his story, such as the Wedding-Guest: “I pass, like night, from land to land; / I have strange power of speech; / That moment that his face I see, / I know the man that must hear me: / To him my tale I teach” (Coleridge, 2000: lines 586-590). This is the reason why Maurice talks to the dark. Darkness is his only companion. A central element in

gothic fiction is the figure of the outsider, a type which can adopt different guises. As Frederick Karl explains: "The outsider, like Cain, moves along the edges of society [...]. While the society at large always appears bourgeois in its culture and morality, the Gothic outsider [...] is truly countercultural, an alternate force, almost mythical in his embodiment of the burdens and sins of society" (1974: 239). In truth, Maurice's condition as outsider can be related to his role as narrator, since it is an attribute that makes him different from the other characters. As Sahlia Ben-Messahel asserts: "He is the I and eye, the teller and observer, who lingers through the other protagonists' lives" (2006: 155). The darkness Maurice talks to is often written with a capital letter. It is a living entity to which Maurice is confessing in search of forgiveness. He cannot defeat his torments by himself. He needs help and sees in Darkness a way out of his misery. Darkness could be compared to a god. As Maurice says at the beginning: "when the dusk comes, [...] the dark begins to open like the ear of God" (2). In this way, Darkness acts as an extrahuman power that rules the universe. It is the numinous element which interests Winton so much.

As the title itself proves, darkness plays an important role in the novel, as is usually the case with many a gothic work. Although darkness can be both positive and negative, it is normally attributed negative connotations. In Winton's story, darkness offers the protagonists a way to face their past —personal and historical— and cure the injuries inflicted by repression. It is a way of exploring their fragmented souls with a view to achieving a stronger, healthier and

more unified self. Unfortunately, none of them grasps this opportunity. Their secrets annihilate them —physically and psychologically—, submerging them more deeply into their own misery. Maurice is offered a further opportunity at the end of the novel when he has no other resources save confronting the dark. But it is also too late for him: “I can’t redeem myself. That’s why I confess to you, Darkness. You don’t listen, you don’t care, though sometimes I suspect you are more than you seem. I live my life. I am an old man. Listen to me!” (110).

IV.2.4. Horrible Mothers, Terrible Fathers

In the Winter Dark is above all a horror story, following the traditional thread of male gothic. As the description of the first victim of the mysterious predator —the Stubbses’ dog— proves, the novel is full of images that evoke the abject: “My palm was hot with blood. In my hand was the severed head of Ida’s silky terrier, still with nerves enough to flex its jaws foully in my grip. That was how I found it, the head left in the collar, the chain snapped, blood pushing out hot” (15). Scenes containing disgusting fluids, revolting smells and corpses are recurrent, reminding us of the fact that we are disintegrating bodies. These are just a few examples: “he [Jaccob] saw the blood she’d left on his arms. It was on her hands, on her jeans” (38); “Ida Stubbs came upon her neighbour puking in the street” (41); “Ronnie skimmed the cream from the turning milk. Bulbs of sweat hung on her brow” (61); “I [Maurice] stood there smelling of petrol and scorched meat. Those sheep had made a lousy fire” (94). The abject also comes up in the form of the joke

about the pig that Ida tells Ronnie.⁹ There are also human corpses, such as Ronnie's stillborn baby after the car accident, or Ida's dead body after being shot by Maurice: "That night we stood by and watched the girl [Ronnie] push out a dead baby. She didn't bleed much, though we worried. She didn't know who she was. We fed her pills and she slept. It happened very quickly. We buried Ida and the child in the forest. It was hard work but we dragged and dug without fuss" (109).

Motherhood is a fertile ground for the growth of abjection. *In the Winter Dark* exposes the ambiguity that is traditionally ascribed to mothers. They are life-givers, but they can turn dangerous. The female characters are simultaneously connected with death and maternity. Ronnie is the most remarkable personification of the abject in relation to the maternal because she is pregnant, with all the implications of this state mentioned earlier in this thesis. This is how she experiences the car crash in which she loses her baby: "This was the clearest moment before the world began to end, before the crushing heat and dark came upon her, squeezing juice out through every orifice and wrapping its rough tongue around her belly in a welter of spasms that forced her ribs into her lungs into her pelvis into her baby" (106). The reference to body fluids, a powerful source of the abject that blurs the

⁹ This is the joke that Ida tells: A man goes past a piggery and sees a pig with a wooden leg smoking a Marlboro. The farmer tells him that pig is his best and loyal friend: "One time [...] the house starts burnin' down [...], he tears inside, drags my kids out of bed, gives them mouth-to-mouth [...] and puts out the fire [...]. That pig carried me home [...] when I broke my leg [...]. That pig helped me shear five hundred head o'sheep [...], worked me out of debt [...], sorted out marriage troubles [...], opens the car door for her [his wife] when she gets home [...]. That's a sensitive pig; clever, compassionate [...] near human!". The passer-by asks him if the wooden leg is a souvenir from its feats. The farmer answers: "Oh, no [...] a pig like that, it'd be a shame to eat it all at once" (67-68).

distinction between inside and outside, is reinforced by her frequent association with milk (58, 61, 78). Moreover, she gives birth to a dead baby, and glimpses of her memories and dreams display that she aborted some time ago (9, 19), which further complicates her relationship with the abject because explicit death is mingled with the maternal.¹⁰

Ronnie is a frustrated mother. Although her reasons and the circumstances of her abortion are never revealed, it seems that she was forced: "There was a big place coming up, all elephantine and distorted. White. A white place. Oh, God, not a hospital! No, not this trick. Oh, they had it all organized. So this was the doctor. With his knife, his fish scraper, his pig-sticker or what-the-hell-ever" (19). She is afraid that somebody may steal her child, an obsession that mingles with her guilt for letting her previous baby be stolen:

They close on her with their great infernal pink bills pointing down at her from the end of looping white necks. And wings, evil white wings. There was purple fire in their eyes. She knew what they were, but they were more than that, you only had to use your eyes. She covered her belly and then they were gone. She got up and ran. (11)

Now she is determined to have her baby at all costs, even though her boyfriend has left her alone in that strange forest:

Ronnie felt the baby flexing his muscles. It was alive in there. It hurt, but she was keeping it alive on her own, with her blood and her water, with everything she had, and it worked. She was a mother. Nothing could stop her being a mother. She had the house, the land, she could grow things. There wasn't anything else. (100)

Her past abortion and her addiction to drugs and alcohol turn Ronnie into a horrible mother. Despite her determination, she realises that she is useless and admits to being a bad mother: "Oh God, Ronnie,

¹⁰ This overlapping also occurs when several animals of her farm are killed in the biggest killing of livestock in the story (38-39).

you're hopeless. There's no one now. Only you and this poor deformed little bastard in you, soaking up the poison. You'll lose him, you know. Him too. A woman can feel it. Mother's instinct. She laughed. Oh, Mother dear. It was bitter between her teeth" (88). She wants to change. She is trying, but she finds it really hard. She is not strong enough and every time she takes drugs, she regrets it because she is aware that they can hurt the foetus seriously:

She held her belly. It was sinking in and it was like the pills were great white clots in her veins. Too many, Ronnie. She didn't even know how many she took, these days. But any of it had to be too much. She felt this swimming creature in her, and she wanted to speak to it, to explain it all, but she was ashamed. She'd read the books, she knew what she'd been doing. Jesus, she thought; one minute you're paying some rich bastard to cut one out of you, and the next thing you're wanting one and you poison it. (9)

Deserted by her boyfriend, who has irresponsibly rejected his duty as a father, Ronnie is in need of help, but the other characters are not capable of offering any. Even Jaccob, the one who gets closer to her, fails.

Her irresponsibility as a mother is constantly highlighted in the book, especially by the other characters. They regard her as a brainless loser on numerous occasions: "Ronnie, the girl", says Maurice. "Weird thing is, I got to like her in the end, but everyone likes the helpless and the vanquished" (2-3). And he once advises Jaccob not to "get involved in that girl. There's no use in it. She's a loser" (71). She is also infantilised, and not only metaphorically, as Jaccob's fatherly behaviour shows: "here she was, being dressed, fed, nursed, and chauffeured by someone she didn't even know" (46). Ronnie reproaches herself for her lack of common sense. What is worse, she has internalised her stupidity

—with the help of other people’s opinions— to the point that she believes that it is one of her natural attributes. It is this pessimistic attitude that partly hinders her success in all the plans she has designed for the future, such as motherhood.

Jacob plays a vital role in the infantilisation of Ronnie. The first time they meet, she is drugged and mistakes him for his father. That is exactly how Jacob behaves:

At noon, he bundled the girl’s clothes up and took them out to the wash-house. They stank of sweat and stale deodorant. Cleaning the small, silly-looking boots, he caught himself smiling; it reminded him of his own father. He remembered his father used to clean all the children’s boots. It was like a devotion, and the thought made him unaccountably happy. He knew he’d wanted it for himself. There’d be no little shoes to polish now. The sudden warmth went and there was bitterness in him. He scraped swamp mud from the little green pointed toes. (22)

Jacob feels bitterness because he was denied the role of father when her daughter died at such an early age. He finds in Ronnie the perfect substitute to show his fatherly skills: “Jacob picked up the girl like she was a kid and took her out” (72). It is perhaps this father-daughter relationship that produces one of the few times when Ronnie is not completely seen as stupid: “She looked so pitiful. He turned the light out and sat by her. She was just a kid. He didn’t know anything much about her. She was as silly as a wheel, though you could tell she knew more than she let on, maybe more than she herself realized” (79).

Another reason for his concern about Ronnie might be that he does not want her to lose her child, as happened to him. Her pregnancy has made his loss more vivid, and thus he worries about her state: “I didn’t know if you’d be sleeping. I brought you some food.’ ‘I don’t want anything.’ ‘You have to,’ he said, trying to sound gentle. ‘For the baby’”

(91). Unfortunately, he is not able to save the child. He experiences again the death of a baby, frustrating his attempt to redeem himself for not saving his own daughter. He does not succeed in protecting Ronnie either, who he had taken under his wing. He abandons her after the accident, and then he does not even try to find out if she is all right. Maybe guilt and shame make him feel more miserable and that is why he pursues his own destruction. This is how Maurice describes Jaccob after the event:

This morning I found Jaccob down at his boundary fence drunk as a mongrel again, and I carried him up the hill to his place and lit him a fire, fixed some food, cleared away bottles and that shoe he leaves around, and I left him there in that big old house before it drew breath and screamed my name. An old man like me can lift him now, for God's sake. He's always drunk or silent and skyward as a monk. (1)

Jaccob's carelessness towards Ronnie might have another interpretation: in abandoning her, he is also punishing her for her negligence, which brings echoes of his ex-wife. Jaccob's feelings towards Ronnie are far from clear. Sometimes he acts as a father. Some other times, she awakens his sexual desire:

He put a hand on her. A curve of her calf muscle had exposed itself, and he ran his hand down the smooth warmth of her skin. It was a woman's flesh, all right. She might be eighteen, twenty maybe. He knew he should take his hands off her, but he ran a palm up her thigh and across her cotton panties. Her little belly was round and hard as fruit, and Jaccob sat there aching with his hand on her till the first cautious bird broke into song, and the light showed the mist rising on the slopes and the sorry lump in his jeans. He saw the hopeful, childlike outline of her face, and he felt the kind of pity he'd always reserved for himself. Little by little, the sun came up on him. (79-80)

The character of Marjorie, Jaccob's ex-wife, also comprises death and maternity —her baby died (7, 27)—, but in a lesser degree because she does not appear personally in the novel. She is only seen through Jaccob's memories and dreams. Her portrayal as a bad mother is thus

unobjective because there is not enough information to pass judgement on her. Jacob blames her for neglecting their daughter and letting the cat approach her:

he remembered those evenings at dinner after the shit had hit the fan, when they were still married but with nothing between them but grief and recrimination, when her scraping knife would say: it wasn't my fault, so don't look at me like that, and his fork would rattle and mutter: for Christ's sake, leave it be. (27)

Anger and recrimination seem to have sparked off the end of their marriage.

Ida is represented as an exemplary mother and wife. Nevertheless, she sometimes thinks that she is careless. For instance, she reproaches herself for encouraging Ronnie to drink so much at the meeting when they both got drunk: "[Ida] was ashamed. That poor girl Ronnie. I let her drink so much —and her with a baby coming. What was I thinking? Where was my brain? [...She] felt old and stupid and sad and pathetic and irresponsible, and, and everything" (80); and she regrets not having a son, which she sees as negative.¹¹ Ida is sometimes linked to the abject side of the maternal and to death too, above all when she is buried with Ronnie's dead baby (109). The fact that she has the menopause is often understood in a patriarchal world as the end of a woman's useful life, because reproduction is thought to be a basic function in a woman: "Years of periods (now mercifully gone), and childbirth (let not one tell you it didn't hurt)" (59).

¹¹ It appears that in a patriarchal society every good mother should have a son, especially years ago, when sons were preferred mainly for political and economic reasons. Unfortunately, despite the achievement of more egalitarian roles for women, today the view that it is better to be a man than a woman is still shared by many cultures in both the East and the West.

Nature is another mother that is depicted as dangerous. The earth has been imagined as feminine since the early ages of humankind, above all in its function as mother. This means that the ambivalence applied to mothers in phallocentric societies is also applied to nature. On the one hand, mother earth appears as child-bearer and nurturing protector, and on the other, as wild, greedy, imprisoning and depriving slayer. It seems that the negative side of this archetype often stands out more than the positive. Mother earth rules over all kinds of life. Her womb brings forth all living things —plants, animals and humans— and their fates are subject to her will, since she masters crops, the seasons, the weather, etc —“In a way I’ve lived my life by the weather (that faithless bitch)”, comments Maurice (14). That is why, in her role as evil mother, she can swallow back into “her womb of death” everything that she gave birth to. Her womb is “a devouring maw of darkness, and as the grave, the flesh-devouring sarcophagus, hell and the underworld, she is the inside of the earth, the dark abyss of everything living” (Neumann, 1994: 188-189). As Erich Neumann reminds us, this interpretation of nature is all but a projection of the human unconscious:

this animated earth is always an inner world, and the inner world of this humanity has populated with its own inner animation the hollow of the cavern which is hell. [...] It is the world of affect, of instincts and emotions, the exuberant energy of the chaotic, the demonic, and the evil in the depths and the shallows of humanity, which seems to be released here. (1994: 190-191)

To put it differently, the dark side of the earth holds what civilisation has always tried to repress. This darkness is especially felt by white Australians due to their difficult relationship with their natural

landscape. In the novel, the characters are frightened by the insurmountable dangers that the bush hides, which finally take the shape of a wild cat. Consequently, this wild animal comes to represent the annihilating power of mother earth in its attempt to devour the protagonists —her children.

The ambiguity that lies in maternity is just one illustration of how women are vilified in phallogentric cultures. As has been stated before, the ghosts that haunt us may be unrecognised projections of our haunted psyche. Taking into account that the wild predator stands for nature, that nature is usually feminised and regarded as dangerous, and that the women are the ones who suffer the counterattacks directed at the beast, then it can be argued that the haunting other in *In the Winter Dark* is a reflection of the fear of the feminine experienced by the male characters. In other words, the mysterious force that pursues them is a female demon in disguise.

The haunting and demonisation of women is an archetypal phenomenon that goes beyond time and space. The Romantics were the first to highlight it, resulting in the prevalent image of the evil female that haunts a man in the gothic literature of the period. It is not coincidental that this occurred when the genre was beginning to adopt a more psychological approach: the recognition of an other living within ourselves, that is, the unconscious. Therefore, if a man is haunted by an evil female, he might actually be confronting himself or part of himself. The Romantics labelled this phenomenon nympholepsy (Andriano, 1993: 1-2). Archetypes, according to Carl Jung, are

“primordial types...with universal images that have existed since the remotest times” (1990: 5). These patterns have their roots in what he called the collective unconscious, “a universal and unceasing stream or ocean of images and figures which drift into consciousness with contents and modes of behavior which are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals” (Jung, 1960: 350). With regard to fiction, Northrop Frye defines an archetype as a symbol or image “recurring often enough in literature to be recognizable as an element of one’s literary experience as a whole” (1957: 365). Accordingly, it can be said that archetypes are those universal recurrent images which, firstly, “show signs of primordial —or at least extremely archaic— origin”, and secondly, “seem to be associated with human instinctual drives” (Andriano, 1993: 4). As far as female archetypes are concerned, it is necessary to point out that they “were created and propagated by men as the traditional writers of civilization. The characters passed down through legend and the oral tradition, even if they originated in female consciousness, reveal a deeply ingrained capitulation to patriarchal doctrine” (Aguilar, 2001: 134).

It must be noted that every woman, or everything that is considered female, is not necessarily an archetype. In order to be archetypal: “She must be not only a haunting female but a demanding feminine force within the male, often felt as an *unheimliche Trieb* [uncanny drive], and usually personified as a goddess/angel, a devil, or a fiendish revenant” (Andriano, 1993: 151-152). Although the fear of the feminine is archetypal, female stereotypes adapt to their geographical,

chronological and social situation as happens in the case of *In the Winter Dark*. As Estelle Lauter and Carol Schreier Rupprecht have argued, archetypes are not “absolute or transcendent or unchanging [...] if we regard the archetype not as an image whose content is frozen but [...] as a tendency to form and re-form images in relation to certain kinds of repeated experience, then the concept remains a useful one” (in Andriano, 1993: 5).

The archetypal image of woman is connected with the two primary human instincts: the erotic and the thanatonic. The former because a man perceives a woman as fascinating, so she is loved and desired, and the latter because at the same time, a man perceives a woman as dangerous, so she is feared (Andriano, 1993: 3). These contradictory feelings of men in relation to women are linked to the universal conception of women as life givers —motherhood— and life usurpers —the fear of woman as castrating other:

What is most interesting about the mythological figure of woman as the source of all life is that, within patriarchal signifying practices, [...] she is reconstructed and re-presented as a *negative* figure, one associated with the dread of the generative mother seen only as the abyss, the all-incorporating black hole which threatens to reabsorb what it once birthed. (Creed, 1994: 27. Original emphasis)

Susan Lurie, challenging traditional Freudian theory, explains that men are afraid of women, not because women are castrated, but because they can castrate, in other words, they possess a *vagina dentata*: “woman is *not* mutilated like man might be *if he were* castrated; woman is physically whole, intact and in possession of all her sexual powers. The notion of the castrated woman is a phantasy intended to ameliorate man’s real fear of what woman might do to him” (Creed, 1994: 6.

Original emphasis). There are two types of castration: genital and symbolic. The latter can be experienced by men and women alike, and it may involve loss of mother's body or breast, or loss of identity (Creed, 1994: 107). In Winton's novel, castration is symbolic. The female characters are presented as bad mothers whose negligence can even kill their children. Symbolic castration also affects the male characters. They are afraid of losing their power, of handing it over to women—or whatever represents the feminine—, and thus of being “feminised”.

What men fear, though often unconsciously, is the crossing of gender boundaries. When they experience the phenomenon of haunting, they experience it as an incursion into their male identity, the return of their repressed side—their “feminine” side—, which is seen as an evil usurper who wants to dominate them. Since femininity is considered to be inferior, they feel that their feminisation is an insult to their integrity. Men fear the feminine in themselves because it means change from a psychological and social perspective:

having been conditioned by culture that gender boundaries must be maintained, that only women should be feminine (which means soft, smooth, unassertive to the point of submissiveness, receptive, open, deferential to men, nurturing, sensitive, motherly, daughterly), and that only men should be masculine (which can only mean hard, rough, firm, courageous, penetrating, fatherly, protective, assertive, aggressive or, better yet, dominating yet gentlemanly and deferential to ladies). (Andriano, 1993: 6)

It is when men feel that their masculine realm is in danger that they turn violent. They do not want to lose control. They aim their violence at women because they are the invaders, the defiants of what Lacan called “the Law of the Father”. This is the case with the male characters in Winton's novel.

In *In the Winter Dark* the demarcation between women and men is brought to the fore several times, adding a new boundary to the ones mentioned before —the inside/the outside, the city/the country and nature/civilisation. On these grounds, despite their differences, Ida — farmer, old, responsible— and Ronnie —urban, young, irresponsible— conclude that their gender binds them together: “We can’t be that different”, says Ronnie. “Well, maybe not that much for us. We’re girls”, answers Ida (69). The next dialogue between Ronnie and Jaccob provides a meaningful example of the separation between men and women: “‘So. Tomorrow night you have to go a-hunting.’ He nodded. ‘Men!’ He shrugged. ‘Do you know anything about shooting?’ ‘No. Not really. I shot rabbits when I was a kid.’ ‘Why the hell are you going, then? [...] Boy. I don’t understand men’” (62). Most violence in the story comes from the men and is directed at the hunting of the wild cat, a symbol of a haunting female fiend. Tradition has usually linked the cat to both the female and the devil (Vries, 2004: 107-108). When Maurice and Jaccob blame cats for their misfortunes, they unconsciously blame women too. This is a plausible explanation for Ida and Ronnie’s tragic outcome, precisely in the hands of men.¹²

¹² Here it is possible to draw another parallel with Poe’s “The Black Cat”. The black cat can be understood as a symbolic representation of the protagonist’s wife, that is, the expression of the feminine side that he represses in his psyche (Reeder, 1974: 20). For this reason, when he tries to kill the cat with an axe, it is his wife who receives the blows: “I aimed a blow at the animal which, of course, would have proved instantly fatal had it descended as I wished. But this blow was arrested by the hand of my wife. Goaded, by the interference, into a rage more than demoniacal, I withdrew my arm from her grasp and buried the axe in her brain. She fell dead upon the spot, without a groan” (Poe, 1994: 1499). In this tale, as in Winton’s novel, a woman is the victim of male violence, apparently directed at a cat.

One of the most important scenes in the novel takes place almost at the end, when Maurice, Jaccob and Ronnie start the crazy search for Ida in the forest. Maurice drives his car so fast that it overturns (105). Maurice and Jaccob manage to get out, but Ronnie is still trapped inside. All of a sudden, they hear a sound out in the dark. Maurice quickly gets his rifle out of the car and points into the direction where “the low, throaty grunt” comes from. Jaccob realises that it is not the beast, it is Ida, but he cannot stop Maurice in time:

Jaccob made it round and drove the old man down in a tackle as the third shot went off. The barrel ploughed mud and muzzle flash. Stubbs’s head rang against the upturned fender. Jaccob hit him and thought nothing and heard the hollow gurgling from out there and he knew the sound belonged to death. Up in the mud and the furrows of light, my Ida drowned. She felt the heat and the wind in her throat. Blood was her only voice. For perhaps a second she had hold of a thought, a memory. (107)

Meanwhile, in the car, Ronnie goes into labour: “Crack! Ronnie heard a tendon snap. Crackack! Brain, soul, something. She was on her way” (107). She gives birth to a stillborn baby. Maurice and Jaccob bury the baby with Ida in the forest, feed Ronnie on pills and, unnoticed, drop her at the emergency entry of a hospital (109).

As this crucial scene demonstrates, all the violence that the male characters direct at the destruction of the wild cat is actually suffered by the women. This chain of connections is more clearly apprehended if it is remembered that the wild cat represents nature and that nature is imagined as feminine. Therefore, it can also be argued that, from a territorial perspective, all this male violence is an attempt to stop the recolonisation of the land by nature. Notice how Maurice once compares Ida to nature, a kind of nature which is significantly out of control, recolonising: “over the years Ida had fattened up. She sort of spread,

like a garden gone wild” (15). This is further problematised by the fact that the feminine is traditionally connected with the unconscious as well. Hence, the damage inflicted on the two women can be read as an attempt to eliminate or control the traumatic past that lies in the unconscious of the male protagonists, which is meaningfully linked to cats. This is well-illustrated by Maurice’s thoughts while he is aiming his gun at the supposed beast, still feeling in control of the situation: “I heard it breathe and I knew I had a moment to kill the past, to fight it and wipe it away. The gun was all buck and flash and *I was still strong*” (107. My emphasis).

Maurice kills Ida by accident. But, on a psychological level, she is murdered because she defies patriarchy. Ida wishes to escape from the world she has been living in so far. Physically, she feels trapped in the Sink. She has never left the place and she regards the forest as a kind of cage which keeps her away from a bigger world she has not been allowed to explore. As Ben-Messahel states, Ida “is portrayed as the deserted mother who gradually and voluntarily heads towards death. She lives on self-denial and her life strikes a chord with a ‘Home Sweet Home bitterness’. Marriage alienates rather than liberates her” (2006: 55). That is why Ida wonders what Ronnie is doing in that place:

She liked the girl in a way. Of course she was rude and disrespectful, but she was so alive and energetic, at least for a girl who looked so pale and badly fed. Reminded her of her younger days. She’d been cocky herself once [...]. Was she deserted? Did she have money? [...]. She wondered what the dickens a girl with all the advantages was doing here. It seemed so wasteful that it made Ida angry and she felt the fingers tighten on her skull. (59)

Although Ida wishes to leave —“Ida Stubbs prayed that this spinning would take her away, out of this place for ever” (76)—, she sometimes

contradicts herself choosing the security of what she knows: "It was warm inside. This was her place, this was what she knew, and it wasn't so bad" (66). The feeling of confinement is reinforced through other images: "she was a convent girl after all" (35); "Her wool suit seemed tight and prickly all of a moment" (45); "Ida got up and went to the window, though all she could see was herself reflected" (66). In relation to imagery of female enclosure, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar state that: "houses [...are] primary symbols of female imprisonment [...apart from other minor symbols such as] ladylike veils and costumes, mirrors, paintings, statues, locked cabinets, drawers, trunks, strong-boxes, and other domestic furnishing" (1984: 85).

From a patriarchal view, Ida is the ideal woman: a nurturing mother and a dutiful wife who takes care of her family and home. But she is tired of conforming to the stereotype. Perhaps that is why she has always desired to have sons. They would have been freer than her or her daughters, because her daughters are a reflection of herself — submissive housewives—, as Ronnie describes them:

It was sad that Ida had never had the son she wanted. The daughters sounded awful. Ida showed her photos of them: greying, sensible mothers in running shoes and corduroys and styleless haircuts. They looked like they ran church youth groups; their smiles hadn't the least trace of fun in them. They looked like slaves to common sense and she felt sorry they were all Ida had. (75)

When she finds Jaccob sick in the village, she behaves like a mother imagining that he could be the son she has never had. In the following quotation, she offers him milk: "She got him back down the street to the milk bar and bought him a drink. '[...] the milk'll put a lining on your stomach.' 'My mother used to say that'", answers Jaccob (42).

Ida questions the real existence of the wild cat. She entertains the idea that the men, especially Maurice, may be the killers: "Ida slipped her fingers into the depressions on the cast [...]. A man could do that. A big hand could make this footprint! [...]. The men. Could it be the men frightening the women?" (82). Apart from suspecting the men, she is brave enough to go into the bush to face the beast by herself. She dares to be active, to take the initiative, to be the hunter, which is traditionally reserved for men. At the same time, it is her chance to run away from her suffocating domestic world. That is why she drops the tray she is holding and rushes out, fleeing, in a sense, from her domestic duties: "Ida dropped the tray and the tea and the pie and the whole business, and went barrelling through the house towards the door" (100). It is precisely during her escape that Ida is able to glimpse the truth:

Somewhere. She was somewhere. Cold. Mud. Bog. Break. Bend. Fence. She kept running. Get in there. See and not be frightened, right into the thickets up there and see for herself. She wouldn't be tricked and frightened. She didn't care what they all were or who they worshipped — she was gonna see for herself. Ida felt the thrill of sense in her as she rode over the ground, blowing fog out before her. It was high time she faced it. It was only bush, only soil, only sky. There was nothing to be afraid of. (104)

As far as Ronnie is concerned, she has always suffered male violence and domination. Her father beat her and her mother was unable to do anything about it: "Yes, he hit her, he was her father all right. Yeah, now he'd take her up to her room and beat her and that hopeless twat of a mother'd shout at him but not stop it and he'd leave her in the room and she'd tear her clothes and smack her face against the wall while they ate their dinner downstairs" (19). This inability on the part of her mother might be the key to Ronnie's role as a frustrated

mother. Mothers are often ineffectual in male gothic. After her father, her boyfriend Nick becomes her new master. Although her real name is Veronica Melwater, he renames her Ronnie (7), making clear that she belongs to him. They move to the Sink because it is his desire. When she is abandoned by Nick, she passes from his hands to Jaccob's, who takes the role of the father. This is how they meet for the first time: "Dad?" Jaccob lifted his face from the dirt. 'Daddy, is that you?'. [...] He twisted over and saw behind him, grafted to his calves [...] the girl from over the valley. Her hair was wet across her blue-pink face, snarled in drifting snot. Her red parka was torn and twisted. She was a mess" (18). Later, he hits her to calm her down. She assumes that this is to be expected from him because, as she is drugged, she thinks Jaccob is her father: "Ronnie didn't dare breathe. Sometimes the man carrying her looked like her father and sometimes he didn't at all [...]. Yes, he hit her, he was her father all right" (19).

This displays how deeply she has internalised her subordination to men, to the figure of the father. The fact that she is normally infantilised makes her look silly and unable to survive on her own. Ronnie's mistreatment proves what Simone de Beauvoir famously wrote about women in a patriarchal society: "Woman does not enjoy the dignity of being a person; she herself forms part of the patrimony of a man: first of her father, then of her husband" (1953: 82). It is worth mentioning that when Ronnie has been quoted above reflecting on Ida's daughters and regarding them as "slaves", she does not realise that she is also a slave. She may not share their ideas on marriage and life, she

may dress in a less boring fashion or her life may not be ruled by so much “common sense”, but actually she has always depended on others and seems unable to have a life of her own. Ironically, her life is even worse than Ida’s daughters’. There are some instances when Ronnie decides to act. Since this means the challenge of “the Law of the Father”, she is violently stopped by the men. Firstly, Jaccob shoots her—thinking she is the wild animal—when she goes into the forest, rather drunk, to hunt that “prick [who] was out there scaring people and she was going there to give him a spanking” (75). Luckily, Jaccob misses the shot. But Ronnie’s end is tragic too. Although she does not die, she loses her baby in a car accident when they are looking for Ida. Later, after hiding the corpses of Ida and the baby, the men wash their hands of Ronnie and drop her at the door of a hospital.

The loss of Ronnie’s baby can be problematised if one takes into account the fact that she is always related to cats. Every time she appears, there are images that bring to the mind this animal: milk, hiss, scraping, etc. For example: “Her boots hissed in the grass” (10); “Straightaway he heard the sound. It was a kind of hissing-scraping noise, quiet but distinct. Jaccob [...] cocked the gun and stepped out. Hiss. Scrape. There it was. Hiss. Scrape. And panting” (76). Her main association with cats is the black rituals she witnesses in the forest. Apart from the slaughter of cats, something disturbing happens there. A cat which is being nailed to a tree escapes, goes to her and paws her belly (78). This can be read as a foreshadow of what will happen to her baby later or as a curse on her baby. Being a witness of these events

relates Ronnie to the figure of the witch. She is afraid of telling the others what she really saw in the forest in case they link her to “one of the weirdos” (74). Her fear is justified as Ida’s questioning about the nature of the baby confirms: “that talk about witches at Bakers Bridge. What was Ronnie up to? Should she trust her? What kind of a baby was she having?” (82). Significantly enough, the cat is the typical pet of the witch.¹³ Witches bring to light again the double nature of women in a phallogentric society:

male ambivalence about female “charms” underlies the traditional images of such terrible sorceress-goddesses as the Sphinx, Medusa, Circe, Kali, Delilah, and Salome, all of whom possess duplicitous arts that allow them both to seduce and to steal male generative energy. The sexual nausea associated with all these monster women helps explain why so many real women have for so long expressed loathing of (or at least anxiety about) their own, inexorable female bodies [...] all this testifies to the efforts women have expended not just trying to be angels but trying *not* to become female monsters. (Gilbert and Gubar, 1984: 34. Original emphasis)

Another woman in the story who is also associated with the image of the witch is the madwoman of the Minchinbury House, the main female spirit that haunts Maurice from the past. She is depicted as a lonely madwoman, confined in an old house and surrounded only by cats: “When he [Doctor Minchinbury] died, he left his daughter there to grow old and crazy” (4). The situation of her house, on a hill outlooking the Sink, emphasises outwardly the psychological burden that it represents for Maurice, “an object that wouldn’t let itself be destroyed” (48): “The house had to be rebuilt since her day —the wooden bits, anyway, but it’s still the same grand, fastuous-looking joint dominating the hill with its wide timber veranda and white-washed stone. There’s

¹³ In English the word “cat” used to mean “stick” which got mingled in popular etymology with the broomstick of witches (Vries, 2004: 107).

nowhere you can be in the Sink where you'll miss seeing it" (4-5). Its features remain typically gothic, in spite of the fact that it has been rebuilt and now it is inhabited by Jaccob. The house is like a ghostly presence, a painful thorn pricked in Maurice's past: "Jaccob's chimney smoke rising like a spirit against the gloom" (3).

The madwoman is extremely dangerous. She is the only female in the book who owns and uses a gun, an instrument which, from a patriarchal view, exclusively belongs to the realm of men. She shot Maurice and his brothers, blinding one of them. Freud connects blindness and castration:

the fear of damaging or losing one's eyes is a terrible one in children. Many adults retain their apprehensiveness in this respect, and no physical injury is so much dreaded by them as an injury to the eye. We are accustomed to say, too, that we will treasure a thing as the apple of our eye. A study of dreams, phantasies and myths has taught us that anxiety about one's eyes, the fear of going blind, is often enough a substitute for the dread of being castrated. (1985: 352)

Notice the amount of times Maurice refers to eyes, especially when he and Jaccob go out to hunt the wild cat. These multiple references can mean Maurice's fear of losing his eyes: "The night was eyes, and I [Maurice] wondered if I'd recognize the right eyes when I saw them [...]. 'What the hell are we looking for, anyway?' [asks Jaccob] 'Eyes,' I said. 'You know what cats' eyes look like?'" (64-65). A phonetic pun between "eye" and "I" sometimes appears in the text: "pushing the light back and forth, sighting along the beam until I felt like I was in it, that it was my eye, that the light was me" (69). The light Maurice is using to look for the beast becomes an eye/I, that is, a metaphor for him, the hunter. This reading gains strength when an eye is reflected in the Minchinbury house, the primary source of the memories Maurice wants to hunt and

kill: “The spotlight made an eye out of one of the house windows” (70). Maurice keeps his eye on the Minchinbury house. He is not at peace after taking revenge on the madwoman. He is still disturbed by what happened to his brother and fears the return of that powerful woman and what she might do to him. He puts all his efforts in the hunt of the wild cat because it epitomises the past for him, and he wants to see it settled and be free forever. This is precisely what he intends to do the night they are going to hunt the cat: “That great looming white place [the Minchinbury house] looked at me as though it remembered [...]. I thought: this night has been waiting for you all your life, Stubbs” (95).

It is quite significant that Maurice relates Ida to the madwoman at some point in the novel, and how he reacts to this in a violent way:

she reached for the wax cast and I felt it hit me in the belly as the shouting got louder and I fell back against the door jamb. Then she began to scream without any words at all and the sound of it hit me harder than anything she could throw. It sent me back out of the room, that high squeal putting ice in me, coldness from another place and another time, it was the crazy woman’s scream pursuing me from the flames. I stood in the living-room and heard it refuse to stop and I went hot and cold and shimmery and saw the gun and reached for it [...]. I shot upwards [...] and saw her mouth go wide and silent. (89-90)

This extract shows that all women in his life, or everything that symbolises the female for him —like cats—, have become the castrating madwoman that haunts him. This can also be seen when Ida reminds him of his daughters and of his daughters’ daughters:

I felt her lips against my throat. She rose from beneath the fug of blankets and her long breasts fell against me, and, strangely, I thought of our daughters, and their daughters. Women. Strangers. But soon my mind was clean of any thought but the grip we had on each other, the configuration we made in the dark. (31-32)

This act of love is felt by Maurice in terms of attraction and fear, because he feels that he does not really know women. They are the other for him.

The association of the cat with the feminine is also reflected in the death of Jaccob's baby. In old Europe it was believed that a cat took away a child's life by sucking its breath when the child slept (Vries, 2004: 108). This is exactly how Jaccob thinks his baby died:

Cot death, they reckoned. Kids die. It's a mystery syndrome. But he'd seen the cat leaving the nursery that night before Marjorie got up to check. Oh, it sauntered out casual as you please, and he thought nothing of it until he saw the fur on the pillow where the face of his daughter had been, warm as blood, not long before. (85)

An overlapping is produced between the woman and the cat, both of whom Jaccob blames for the death of his infant daughter.

IV.2.5. Conclusion

Tim Winton's *In the Winter Dark* is an outstanding example of contemporary Australian gothic. The novel draws on the gothic to illustrate the characters' secrets and anxieties, blending successfully personal and national histories. The author uses common gothic imagery to describe the Sink valley and the dreadful events that occur there, a description which also matches the Western stereotypical view of Australia as an unhomely land. Above all, the novel tackles the return of the past, a constant in the gothic genre. *In the Winter Dark* revisits not only personal traumas, but also colonial anxieties, and relocates them in the present in the form of a wild cat that threatens the protagonists. The story displays the pressure the colonial past still

exercises in modern Australia. The anxieties of the first white settlers persist in the Australian collective unconscious. The colonisers devastated the territory and slaughtered its Indigenous inhabitants. Although this happened a long time ago, feelings of guilt and fear are still very strong: guilt for having wreaked havoc on the landscape and robbed Aborigines of their homeland, and fear that the true dwellers of Australia —both the natural environment and the Aboriginal population— may revolt and claim retribution. These feelings, derived from “the sins” of their ancestors, haunt the white Australian mind like a ghost, a spectre which can adopt diverse forms. In the story, this transgenerational phantom takes the shape of a mysterious predator that endangers the authority of white Anglo-Celtic Australians. This symbol stands for unwanted immigrants too, since the beast is seen as an invading foreign force.

The character of Maurice is the primary representative of colonisation in the novel, as he desperately tries to hunt the beast. The gothic characteristics of the forest add to the fear caused by the presence of the predator. This and the fact that nobody knows what the creature really is imbue the beast with an outworldly aura. In truth, *In the Winter Dark* feeds on the multiple legends about mysterious wild cats that permeate the Australian bush along with the environmental problem that feral cats have come to represent. The appearance of the creature can also be explained psychologically. Since all the characters have gone through bad experiences related to cats, they often assume that the predator is a wild cat. Consequently, the figure of the cat can

be read as an unconscious projection of their troubled psyches. As they often admit, there is nothing out there in the dark but themselves. The cat brings about the return of the repressed, forcing the protagonists to face and make amends with themselves and their past. Unfortunately, they will not succeed and end up either tragically —like Ida and Ronnie— or even deeper in their own misery —like Maurice and Jaccob.

The study of the female characters in the novel also proves to be quite fruitful, as it reveals *In the Winter Dark* as a typical male gothic work. Women are universally linked to nature, especially in their function as mothers. Tradition highlights women's ambiguity. In their role as mothers, they can be nurturing, but they can also take away the life of their child if they do not provide proper care. Almost all the women in the novel are portrayed at some point as careless mothers. Accordingly, they are blamed for their children's death, as is the case with Ronnie and Marjorie. An analysis of the female characters demonstrates, in gothic terms, how women in general are undervalued and forced into the slots patriarchy has designed for them. As long as they remain passive, they are good and exemplary. But as soon as they try to break free and take action, they become dangerous from a male perspective. As a result, they are punished violently. Ida and Ronnie's tragic fates are clear illustrations.

This is problematised if the fact that nature is usually regarded as feminine is taken into account. In this light, the cat turns into an emblem of female power —or the power of mother nature— that threatens the supremacy of the male characters. Given that the

feminine is associated with the unconscious, the cat comes to represent everything the male characters in the novel are trying to repress: their feminine side and their traumatic pasts. That is why, the elimination of the cat is so important for them. Significantly enough, the male violence directed at the cat is suffered by the female characters. Winton's novels are well-known because they defy stereotypical notions of masculinity. However, regarding women, the author seems to be more conservative, as a close examination of the female characters in this novel discloses. Although the story shows stereotypical and archetypal images of women, it does not challenge them at all. After having been presented according to patriarchal clichés —contradictory, subdued to male characters and demonised—, the female characters are all kept at bay at any cost.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Tooth and Claw, *The Well*, and *In the Winter Dark* testify to the vitality of the gothic mode in contemporary Australian letters. My analysis of the three novels supports Gerry Turcotte's contention that the country has successfully developed its own brand of gothic literature. Set in Australia and written by authors of Anglo-Celtic descent, the novels prove that the anxiety felt by the first colonisers in the alien environment has not been fully dispelled from the personal and collective unconscious, and that the gothic is perhaps the most appropriate genre to give vent to it. Lord, Jolley and Winton resort to a whole array of gothic tropes, including typical heroines and villains, the figure of the outsider, mysterious predators, horror, terror, the sublime and the uncanny, darkness, pathetic fallacy weather, and destabilising narrative conventions, all of them imbued with the peculiarities of the Australian context.

In the three novels under analysis, nature takes precedence over architecture, a must in traditional European gothic. The landscape is usually presented as hostile, evoking the widespread image of Australia as an unwelcoming land, a territory beyond Western comprehension. The Australian bush has replaced the typical gothic buildings and it is in the midst of nature that the characters, significantly Anglo-Celtic descendants, have to face danger. Though born and raised in Australia, the characters are afraid of their own landscape because they still perceive it as unfamiliar, in the same way as the first settlers did. This is particularly evident in Winton's novel, where the cause of the characters' distress is a mysterious predator. Beth and Hester seem to

be more at ease in their surroundings, although they are also aware of the dangers inherent in the Australian landscape and both are threatened by the elements. A terrible storm unravels at climatic points in the novels, hampering Beth's search for the watcher and threatening Hester with bringing to the surface the man in the well.

Since early colonisation, Australia's Anglo-Celtic population has been haunted by feelings of unbelonging and unsettledness. The perception of the landscape as gothic is linked to these ancestral fears. Nature resists total colonisation and is always bound to strike back at any time. The characters' sense of unbelonging also derives from the fact that the legitimate owners of the land are the Aborigines. Although there are no Indigenous Australians in any of the three novels, they are an absent presence that haunts the characters. In *In the Winter Dark*, the burden of "the sins of their fathers" makes them fear an act of rebellion or retribution. *Tooth and Claw* and *The Well* are not so explicit about colonisation, but both invite a metaphorical reading. The man in the well and the bees in Lord's novel can be read as defamiliarised forms of the Aboriginal. While the former is regarded as menacing by Hester, the latter are loved and respected by Beth. However, it cannot be forgotten that she always keeps a position of power as a white Australian.

The figure of the enigmatic intruder is central to the three novels. Whereas in *Tooth and Claw* its identity is revealed, allowing Beth to know the source of evil and take the necessary measures to extinguish it, the intruder remains a mystery in the other novels. Lack of

knowledge and uncertainty, both powerful generators of fear, add dread and leave the characters defenceless. No character ever knows the nature of the beast in *In the Winter Dark*, and although Hester in *The Well* is the only one to have seen the corpse, her disquiet stems from the possibility of his coming out of the well or back to life. The uncertainty about the intruders has psychological roots as well. The beast and the man in the well are so difficult to define because they are also the projection of the characters' troubled minds. These distorted incarnations mirror their traumatic memories. In an Australian context, the return of the personal past cannot be separated from what is repressed in the country's historical psyche.

Gothic literature reflects the pain and constrictions that patriarchal ideologies inflict on women. Australia as a nation has been organised around homosociality, showing a strong hostility towards all things feminine. My thesis has analysed the different representations of the female characters as successful heroines —Beth in *Tooth and Claw*—, challengers of the patriarchal law —Hester in *The Well*— and victims in the hands of men —Ida and Ronnie in *In the Winter Dark*. Beth defies established rules by being strong and beating evil on her own. Hester rejects the traditional roles of mother and wife through her economic independence, spinsterhood and sexuality, and by becoming a storyteller in the end. In both cases, the results of defiance are generally displayed as positive and encouraging. In keeping with male gothic, *In the Winter Dark* is imbued with male violence against women, especially when they dare to transgress their roles. Ida and Ronnie defy the

patriarchal law as they decide to take action and confront the beast. Their attempts are brutally foiled by the male characters. Ida is killed by Maurice, and Jacob shoots but misses Ronnie. She also gives birth to a stillborn baby as a consequence of the men's recklessness, and is dropped by them at the entrance of a hospital. The use of guns as a source of male power is relevant in all three novels. While guns are exclusively held and used by Maurice and Jacob in *In the Winter Dark*, in the other two novels guns are replaced or lost by the female characters in a symbolic rejection of male sources of power.

Mothers are pervasive in gothic literature. Whether they are present or absent, they affect the characters in different ways. In the fashion of female gothic, mothers and their surrogates in *Tooth and Claw* and *The Well* are positive but absent. The novels also highlight their teachings as essential for their daughters. Orphan Beth is raised by her grandmother. From her she learns the love of nature by learning the ways of bees, knowledge that saves her life when Roland tries to kill her. In *The Well*, Hester is motherless. As a child, the role of the mother is assumed by her governess Hilde. Their abrupt separation, significantly caused by the interference of her father, marks her forever. It is the root of her crippled sexuality and repudiation of men as partners. She later tries to recreate a similar relationship with orphan Katherine, but it also starts to shake when another male intruder—the man in the well—appears. Hilde's teachings turn crucial for Hester's future. She passes on to her the love of words, a source of liberation at difficult times as well as a form of empowerment when she decides to

narrate her own story. In contrast, *In the Winter Dark* sticks to the male gothic tradition and offers a negative image of mothers, as unreliable, irresponsible and closely connected with the abject. In spite of her pregnancy, Ronnie is careless, drinks and takes drugs. She suffered an abortion in the past and now she loses her baby. Even Ida, the prototype of the good mother, sees herself as negligent and ends up buried with Ronnie's baby. However, the association of mothers with the abject is not exclusive of *In the Winter Dark*. Beth sometimes imagines her grandmother decomposing in her grave, and Hester finds pregnant Hilde in a pool of blood. Motherhood acquires further significance when the traditional feminisation of the land is taken into account. Nature is universally regarded as an ambiguous mother able to kill her children on a whim. This feature is common to the three novels, where the characters find themselves at the mercy of the bush and the women are often associated with nature in one way or another: Beth has gone feral, Hester's old body is compared to her unproductive fields, and Maurice and Jaccob's measures against the predator are actually suffered by the female characters.

My thesis has also approached the formal aspects of the novels. *Tooth and Claw* closely follows the formula of early female gothic, *Jane Eyre* being a clear intertext. It places the stereotypical characters of the persecuted heroine and the villain in the Australian bush, avoiding the supernatural and resolving all the mysteries. *The Well* uses the gothic to criticise Australia's patriarchal society, but it does not comply with typical female gothic. The novel follows its own rules. As a metafiction,

it exposes the mechanisms that construct narratives, which traditionally present masculine values as irrefutable, in order to dismantle them through gothic ambiguity and uncertainty. Hence, the inconclusive ending turns positive, since Hester decides to gain power by taking hold of language, one of the most powerful socialising agents, becoming the storyteller of, precisely, a gothic tale. *Tooth and Claw* combines third person and internal narration through a diary. A similar pattern is employed in *In the Winter Dark*, where Maurice, speaking in the first person, complements the external narrator. His supernatural ability to access the other characters' minds complicates focalisation and offers the reader a richer view of their feelings and thoughts. The female gothic formula applied in *Tooth and Claw* leads to a closed ending, as the villain's death puts an end to Beth's predicament. In contrast, the endings of the other novels are open. *The Well* raises lots of questions about the man in the well and the real motivations that make Hester and Katherine behave as they do, but it refuses to answer any of them. Besides, the future of their relationship after the incident is uncertain. In *In the Winter Dark*, the identity of the beast is never unveiled. The characters do not succeed in finding it and the disturbance it causes never ends.

APPENDIX: SELECTIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHORS

Gabrielle Lord (Sydney, Australia 1946)

Fortress (1980)

Tooth and Claw (1983)

Jumbo (1986)

Salt (1990)

Whipping Boy (1992)

Bones (1995)

The Sharp End (1998)

Gemma Lincoln series:

Feeding the Demons (1999)

Baby Did a Bad Bad Thing (2002)

Spiking the Girl (2004)

Shattered (2007)

Jack McCain series:

Death Delights (2001)

Lethal Factor (2003)

Dirty Weekend (2005)

Monkey Undercover (2006)

Young adult fiction

Monkey Undercover (2006)

Conspiracy 365 (2007) (A 12-novel-series on the Internet)

Non-fiction

Growing up Catholic: An Infinitely Funny Guide for the Faithful, the Fallen and Everyone In-between (with other authors) (1986)

Grace of Angels: Prayers and Meditation for Everyday Living (1995)

Sanctuary: Where Heaven Touches Earth (2005) (co-written with Trisha Watts)

The Nana Diaries

Elizabeth Jolley (Birmingham, England 1923 - Perth, Australia 2007)

Palomino (1980)

The Newspaper of Claremont Street (1981)

Miss Peabody's Inheritance (1983)

Mr Scobie's Riddle (1983)

Milk and Honey (1984)

Foxybaby (1985)

The Well (1986)

The Sugar Mother (1988)

My Father's Moon (1989)

Cabin Fever (1990)

The Georges' Wife (1993)

The Orchard Thieves (1995)

Lovesong (1997)

An Accommodating Spouse (1999)

An Innocent Gentleman (2001)

Short stories

Five Acre Virgin and Other Stories (1976)

The Travelling Entertainer and Other Stories (1979)

Woman in a Lampshade (1983)

Stories (1984) (It includes all the stories of *Five Acre Virgin and Other Stories* and *The Travelling Entertainer*)

Fellow Passengers: Collected Stories of Elizabeth Jolley (1997)

Drama

Off the Air: Nine Plays for Radio (1995)

Non-fiction

Central Mischief (1992)

Diary of a Weekend Farmer (1993)

Learning to Dance: Elizabeth Jolley—Her Life and Work (2006)
(Short stories, essays and poems)

Tim Winton (Perth, Australia 1960)

An Open Swimmer (1982)

Shallows (1984)

That Eye, The Sky (1986)

In the Winter Dark (1988)

Cloudstreet (1991)

The Riders (1994)

The Collected Shorter Novels of Tim Winton (1995)

Blueback (1997)

Dirt Music (2001)

Small Mercies (2006) (Novella)

Breath (2008)

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Scission (1985)

Minimum Of Two (1987)

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The Turning (2005)

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Jesse (1988)

Lockie Leonard, Human Torpedo (1990)

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