by dint of groping

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As part of my feminist practice it is important for me to consider, with great care, cultural activities that are described as specifically feminine. (Whether it be Barbie, Nancy Drew, or Charlotte Brontë — all of whom have been central to my personal experience of the world)

During the past few years I have been combining text from gothic novels written by women with found or "original" photographs. In doing this I am consciously referencing the affinities between the narrative and pictoral arts found in many Gothics. These pictoral images function in a variety of ways. They can represent repressed knowledge in the narrative that helps build a feeling of fixation and suspense as in the veiled painting in the *Mysteries of Udolpho.* They can hold secrets concerning unknown ancestral connections that work practically to make sense of the present or to further confuse it, like the miniature found on Ellena at a crucial point in the *Italian*. In the case of *Jane Eyre* they can offer a glimpse at a characters interior that would otherwise be unavailable. Or else they can echo a sense of immobility, paralytic death and impotence present in the statue at the close of *Shirley.*

I want to briefly discuss two of my past works in which I make use of two novels by Charlotte Brontë. In the first work, *Currer Bell: Four Paintings from Charlotte Brontë's Villette,* I reinterpreted a scene where Lucy Snowe visits an art gallery. She is alone, contemplating a large canvas called "Cleopatra". Lucy describes this Cleopatra.

> It represented a woman considerably larger, I thought, than life . . . She was indeed extremely well fed: very much butcher's meat to say nothing of bread, vegetables, and liquids . . . she lay half reclined on a couch: why it would be difficult to say; broad daylight blazed round her; . . . She had no business to lounge away the noon on a sofa. She ought likewise to have worn decent garments; a gown covering her properly, which was not the case: out of an abundance of material — seven and twenty yards, I should say, of drapery — she managed to make inefficient raiment . . .

Monsieur Paul, Lucy's complicated love interest, finds her examining this highly sexualized and exotic odalisque, deems it improper, and instructs her to sit in a corner and look at what he feels are more suitable paintings for her. This is the situation I have depicted here. The paintings are entitled "La vie d'une femme" and represent four stages of a woman's life.

The text that runs in bars across the photographic image is Lucy's description, her rejection of this man-made representation of woman.

> The first represented a "Jeune Fille" coming out of a church-door, a missal in her hand, her dress very prim, her eyes cast down, her mouth pursed up — the image of a most villainous little precocious she-hypocrite.
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> The second, a "Mariée" with a long white veil, kneeling at a prie-dieu in her chamber, holding her hands plastered together, finger to finger and showing the whites of her eyes in a most exasperating manner.
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> The third, a "Jeune Mère", hanging disconsolate over a clayey and puffy baby with a face like an unwholesome full moon.
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> The fourth, a "Veuve", being a black woman, holding by the hand a black little girl, and the twain studiously surveying an elegant French monument, set up in the corner of some Père la chaise.

The photographs are taken from contemporary fashion magazines and suggest a relationship between the paintings that expressed an ideal of womanhood designed to instruct Lucy and contemporary images of ideal womanhood. The photographic collages are laminated onto canvas so that they reference the painted portraits I spoke about earlier. They are overframed to point directly to the frame as a device. They are then framed again by the painted wall which puts the individual frames in the space usually allotted for the image alone and also functions as a trace of an open book. I am still considering how to make a work out of Cleopatra, utilizing Lucy's practical rejection of this image of female sexuality.

The second work, *A Portrait of Caroline Helstone in the Winding Up: From Charlotte Brontë's Shirley* focuses on the final chapter of *Shirley* and on one of our final glimpses of Caroline. The text under the statue reads:

> She came home in time to water her plants. She had performed this little task. The last flower attended to was a rose tree which bloomed in a quiet green nook at the back of the house. This plant had received the refreshing shower: she was now resting a minute. Near the wall stood a fragment of sculptured stone — a monkish relic: one perhaps the base of a cross: she mounted it that she might better command the view. She had still the watering-pot in one hand; with the other her pretty dress was held lightly aside, to avoid trickling drops. She gazed over the wall along some lonely fields; beyond three dusk trees, rising side by side against the sky; beyond a solitary thorn, at the head of a solitary lane far off: she surveyed the dusk moors, where bonfires were kindling: the bonfires looked soft; their red flame bright: above them, in the sky whence the sun had vanished, twinkled a silver point — the star of Love.

In *Shirley*, Brontë invokes a traditional romance plot but she interrupts it with a narrative of female friendship. The relationship of Caroline and Shirley posits a danger to the traditional plot because it offers an alternative. Through a series of complicated events the traditional narrative tramples the alternative. Some critics, Rosemary Jackson in particular (in her book *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*), criticize Brontë for succumbing to the usual happy ending. In spite of the twinkling star of love, to me this ending is incredibly sad. Shirley goes mad and Caroline mounts a plinth as if to become a statue in a walled garden. She becomes dumb and isolated. She is to be married.

Although *Villette* and *Shirley* are considered to be Gothic novels, I do not make use of the passages that exemplify their Gothic attributes, such as ghostly nuns or madwomen in chains. I am, however, currently working on a project that perhaps better addresses the topic of this panel discussion. In my new work I am again interested in the representation of the female hero in Gothic novels, but more specifically her relationship to the architecture that frames her.

The work isn't completed, which unfortunately makes it difficult to refer to, so instead I will briefly discuss only two of various texts I am planning to use, these being Anne Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*.

The 1764 publication of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* is credited with marking the beginning of the Gothic novel. It and many other novels of "unreason" that soon followed were seen as radically reacting against the rational confinement of Enlightenment thought. Although Walpole's novel

included many Gothic ingredients — a feudal society, a castle, a sensible female hero and her valiant lover, a tyrannical patriarch (who may or may not possess an evil eye), representatives of the Catholic religion and their respective institutions, underground tunnels with secret doors, the discovery of obscure ancestral connections and even an unparalleled death by huge helmet, it is Anne Radcliffe who is responsible for creating Gothic atmosphere with its anti-Enlightenment melancholy purple tint, mist-ridden nocturnal scenes and picturesque descriptions of landscape, as well as gloomy and sublime Gothic edifices. Mrs. Radcliffe was immensely popular in her day and had a varied readership. She influenced many prominent figures of English and French literature such as Byron, Shelley, Walter Scott, the Brontës, Jane Austen, George Sand, Balzac and the Marquis de Sade.

Ellen Moers in *Literary Women* states that although Anne Radcliffe did not overtly speak feminist doctrine the way her contemporary Mary Wollstonecraft did, she too had ideas about what Moers describes as "female self-hood". Moers explains this through her discussion of the Radcliffe heroine as the "travelling woman".

> 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 female substitute for the picaresque, where heroines could enjoy all the adventures and alarms that masculine heroes had long experienced far from home in fiction.

This quote is important to my study because it presents the idea that heroic acts are occurring in traditionally non-heroic, female, private, passive space. What constitutes a heroic act? I don't know exactly but I do know that they exist in a variety of forms: In the form of Lucy Snowe's intense intellectual debates of reason versus nature and what that means to women whose socially prescribed role is aligned with nature (yes, even in the 1850s Charlotte Brontë

recognized the inadequacy of the nature/culture binarism); Choosing to bring on psychosomatic illness, opting out, suicide through starvation or even madness; Finding the courage to make the break (all Radcliffe heroines escape without the help of their valiant lovers); Or, having the courage of Emily in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* to leave the "relative" safety of her bed chamber and give herself over to the unknown, the forbidden.

> Her imagination was pleased with the view of ancient grandeur, and an emotion of melancholy awe awakened all its powers, as she walked through rooms, obscure and desolate, where no footsteps had passed probably for many years, and remembered the strange history of the former possessor of the edifice. This brought to her recollection the veiled picture, which had attracted her curiosity, on the preceding night, and she resolved to examine it. As she passed through the chambers, that led to this, she found herself somewhat agitated; its connection with the late lady of the castle, and the conversation of Annette, together with the circumstance of the veil, throwing a mystery over the subject, that excited a faint degree of terror. But a terror of this nature, as it occupies and expands the mind, and elevates it to high expectation, is purely sublime, and leads us, by a kind of fascination, to seek even the object, from which we appear to shrink.
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> Emily passed on with faltering steps, and having paused a moment at the door, before she attempted to open it, she then hastily entered the chamber, and went towards the picture, which appeared to be enclosed in a frame of uncommon size, that hung in a dark part of the room. She paused again, and then, with a timid hand lifted the veil; but instantly let it fall — perceiving that what it had concealed was no picture, and, before she could leave the chamber, she dropped senseless on the floor.

Janet Todd points out that his passage exemplifies the Burkean Sublime which she defines as the human fascination with what should repel, for the forbiddingly grand, for the half-known and the hidden (in *The Sign of Angelica*). But this passage with the sexual nature of its lifting of the veil reminds me of Freud's essay on fetishism, where the young boy, after looking up the skirt, is horrified because what he thinks should be there is not.

Female heroes of gothic novels exist mainly in a state of confinement enforced either by a specific tyrannical patriarch like Radcliffe's Shedoni or

Montoni. Or the source of the confinement is less identifiable but equally as evil. They are shut up within castle walls, manor houses, or walled gardens (like Caroline). Because of this, an important relationship exists between the female hero and windows. In the most literal sense they are the only way in which the female hero is able to view the world. But for Catherine (the first Catherine), from *Wuthering Heights*, the meaning of windows goes deeper. — windows represent possibilities.

Cathy's initial separation from Heathcliffe is caused by a dog bite she incurs while together they spy on the Linton family through a window of Thrushcross Grange. Once bitten, the Linton family takes Cathy in to nurse her injury. When she finally returns to the Heights, she is no longer the half savage and hardy and free soulmate of Heathcliffe, but rather what appears to be a young woman sporting impressive curls and stylish dress. The dog bite initiates a "particular" sexuality in Cathy. She reveals her plans to marry Linton despite her love for Heathcliffe. Later, as she suffers from the illness that will soon ~~kill her~~, she demands that the window be opened. She wishes to be out of doors, to be away from Thrushcross Grange.

They are a weak spot in the architectu

You can see or even break through them

end her life

They provide opportunit to relate to the other side both other sides.

> "You may fancy a glimpse of the abyss where I groveled! Shake your head as you will, Nelly, you have helped to unsettle me! You should have spoken to Edgar, indeed you should, and compelled him to leave me quiet! Oh, I'm burning! I wish I were out of doors — I wish I were a girl again, half savage, and hardy, and free; and laughing at injuries, not maddening under them! Why am I so changed? why does my blood rush into a hell of tumult at a few words? I'm sure I should be myself were I once among the heather on those hills. Open the window again wide, fasten it open! Quick, why don't you move?"

In using the various texts I hope to be able to create some kind of coherence or dialogue between them that suggests their history and their relationship to one another. Sometimes this will mean concentrating specifically on architectural details such as windows or else representing confinement more subtly by invoking the interiority of the mind (like in *Villette*).

The women in these novels do not simply exist as the "angel of the house." The house, whether it be an exotic Italian castle of Mrs. Radcliffe or an aged English Brontëan manor house is a site of intense political activity, a space where the heroes rebel against the subordinate role imposed on them by virtue

of their sex. They escape the castle like Emily, they die in protest like Cathy, or they strike an even bigger blow by burning down the house like Bertha Mason.