TERRORIZING THE FAMILIAR: POSTWAR WOMEN WRITERS AND THE AMERICAN GOTHIC LANDSCAPE

By

Christi Taylor

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ABSTRACT

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The American literary tradition and especially the gothic tradition are founded upon the violence inherent to the founding and expansion of the United States. This thesis attempts to locate an appropriation of the largely male-authored violence of the nineteenth century into postwar feminist works, namely *Haunted: Tales of the Grotesque* and *Bellefleur* by Joyce Carol Oates and *Hangsaman* and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* by Shirley Jackson. Grappling with women's issues such as pregnancy (both planned and unplanned) and childbirth, domestic violence, and sexual abuse, these works resituate violence into a feminist framework, illuminating the ways in which women can resist victimization, and overpower patriarchal oppression in the domestic space (both literal and ideological).

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INTRODUCTION

The American nineteenth century saw an outpouring of novels that grappled with the nature—and the inherent violence—of the American condition. Writers such as Hawthorne and Poe expressed this violence brilliantly in its different forms, from the judgment of Hester Prynne on the scaffold to the resurrection of Ligeia. In many of these cases, however, violence is male-authored, leaving the women in their texts victimized rather than ultimately empowered. In the twentieth century, many American novelists have found inspiration in their literary forerunners of the nineteenth century; two in particular stand out: Joyce Carol Oates and Shirley Jackson. Oates and Jackson have managed to rewrite the dominating nineteenth-century motif of female victim of male-authorized violence, instead showcasing the ways in which power can be derived from violence—rewriting women as overcomers rather than passive victims—using the avenue of the domestic. Gothic works by these authors, most notably Oates' *Bellefleur* and *Haunted: Tales of the Grotesque* and Jackson's *Hangsaman* and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, reimagine the domestic space—encompassing both the literal private sphere of the home and the ideological space of women's issues—as one of resistance against these systems of violence. Jackson and Oates are rewriting the nineteenth century gothic, but in these postwar works, women are resistors rather than victims. They are no longer prisoners confined to the domestic sphere but masters of it; this mastery allows them to overcome the violence therein, even if that means resorting to violence themselves. The unique, blurred genre of the domestic gothic is the ideal mechanism for reimagining the function of the home: the haunted house becomes a metaphor for the intrusive and oppressive force of patriarchal violence; but ghosts can be and are driven away. Oates and Jackson rewrite the inherently violent, male-authored space, using its own conventions to undermine its oppressive power.

Before I dive into the significance of these iconic postwar writers, I need to first take the time to outline the gothic as I will be approaching it in this project. In broad terms, the definition I will be using is fiction that evokes terror—potentially by way of the supernatural, but not necessarily—and that illuminates the "tension between the individual and society" (Hoeveler and Heller xi); this tension is what sets the gothic apart from straightforward horror fiction: the gothic makes a political or social statement. Further, I am interested in the strong emotional response evoked by the gothic, which will be especially useful in this essay that deals frequently with domestic fiction and women's writing, writing that is often defined by the sentimental. The sentimental *also* evokes a strong emotional response, though while this response is intensely positive (maternal joy, empathy, love—emotions that are almost transcendent and otherworldly in the same way that the gothic can be called supernatural), the emotional register of the gothic includes fear and anxiety. More specifically, I am interested in the American gothic, which Charles Crow describes most simply as "the imaginative expression of the fears and forbidden desires of Americans" (1). Though the gothic tradition originated in England, it was perfected, arguably, in the United States. Although English history goes back much further than American history, the United States has a rich and complex background, from its founding to our contemporary moment, that is ideal for investigation through the gothic. American history is laced with atrocities that make the gothic inevitable; from Brockden Brown to Oates and Jackson, writers in the United States have teased out an American identity that is shaped by guilt, anxiety, and fear. There is a distinct violence inherent in American History: the United States established itself as a nation at the expense of the identities of the marginalized Native Americans and have continued to exploit the margin—slaves and women, the poor—to further capitalist and patriarchal aims. Leslie Fiedler provides an excellent outline of the American

gothic in his foundational work *Love and Death in the American Novel.* He argues that many significant American writers utilized the Gothic, "the tale of terror in a thousand forms, as the story of slavery and black revolt, of Indian warfare, of urban violence, of quiet despair in the world of the freak and invert and the maimed" (142). Thus, the American gothic vision would separate itself from its English predecessor in the same way that early Americans abandoned their English nationality:

> A dream of innocence had sent Europeans across the ocean to build a new society immune to the compounded evil of the past from which no one in Europe could ever feel himself free. But the slaughter of the Indians, who would not yield their lands to the carriers of utopia, and the abominations of the slave trade, in which the black man, rum, and money were inextricably entwined in a knot of guilt, provided new evidence that evil did not remain with the world that had been left behind. (143)

Despite its separation from tyrannical England, the American identity, supposedly founded on principles such as freedom and equality, defined its freedom by oppressing other groups. The nation did not open its new freedom to everybody but instead continued to perpetuate the oppressive cycle left behind in England.

America's selective version of freedom resulted in the othering of individuals. These individuals are essential to gothic literature because they haunt society in the same way that ghosts haunt houses. The gothic genre, however, allows marginalized groups to define their own forms of identity and agency, as returning to Crow indicates: "The Gothic has given voice to suppressed groups, and has provided an approach to taboo subjects such as miscegenation, incest, and disease. The study of the Gothic offers a form for discussing some of the key issues

of American society, including gender and the nation's continuing drama of race" (1). Thus the gothic is a productive forum for exploring the issues that haunt the American identity, as we will see Oates and Jackson do repeatedly in their work. The gothic I aim to work with is a distinctly American one, lacking the ancient, labyrinthine castles of England and featuring instead "the indisputably American terrain of the forest" (1), tales taking place alongside significant American holidays such as Christmas and the Fourth of July and American tropes such as the backyard barbeque and the supermarket.

These icons of American identity bring me to the second tenet of the American gothic that is crucial to my work: as a genre, the gothic draws upon issues and horrors that already exist in American society. There is no need to invent new horrors, because "the materials for powerful art, especially Gothic art, are about in abundance in the New World" (13). This notion is especially important to my work because, as I will discuss later, it undermines criticisms faced frequently by female gothic writers that their works are too rooted in violence, too disturbingly gruesome and grotesque. I am arguing here, as I will argue later in this study, that these critiques lose their weight as it becomes more apparent that gothic writers are ultimately drawing upon the violence already present in American society to comment on this culture and to expose something inherently violent in our historical moment. Again, the violence of American history and the very founding and expansion of the United States illustrate this point: violence is not an invention of the gothic; rather, the gothic appropriates this violence and comments upon it, often redistributing agency in the process and giving voice to those who, historically, lacked it. Elements of Hawthorne's short stories are pulled directly from the Salem Witch Trials; the violence of Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* mirrors American treatment of Native Americans.

I would like to take the practice of gothic authors drawing upon America's violent past further, as I also observe contemporary gothic writers drawing upon their predecessors, reimagining and appropriating precursory gothic works. In the same way that violent American history lends itself to the creation of gothic fiction, so does early gothic fiction lend itself to the creation of more current works that are products of both contemporary issues and movements and of their influential past. As Helene Meyers argues,

> Contemporary women writers adapted and adopted the tropes of an already gendered literary tradition to address the sexual politics of their own time…Whereas the nineteenth-century gothic, according to Ferguson Ellis, explored the domestic violence that was officially repressed in order to maintain the ideology of the home as a safe haven, contemporary Gothics critically engage with feminist discourse on violence against women. (19)

It is almost impossible not to find traces of Poe and James in Oates and Jackson; these contemporary works offer a distinctly feminine and feminist counterpoint to both an influential male gothic tradition and to a heavily patriarchal history. I am interested in the ways in which these female-authored texts appropriate the same tropes and conventions found in the gothic work of nineteenth-century men, such as Poe, explicitly, in Oates' *Haunted: Tales of the Grotesque* and Jackson's use of the name Blackwood in *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* as a tribute to Poe's *Blackwood Magazine* (Hattenhauer 180), and others, more subtly, in *Bellefleur, Hangsaman,* and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*. Jackson has been compared explicitly to Hawthorne and Faulkner as well, revealing the gothic roots that are central to her work. As Crow reminds us, "all gothic stories are family stories" (15) and I see the role of the family and the

domestic at play in these narratives, in a way that previous gothic texts do not achieve.[1] The ability to juxtapose history (lower case, family history; issues of the domestic and the familial—the private sphere) and History (upper case, history of a nation—the public sphere) is universal in both of these writers, and this practice constructs a narrative that is almost entirely unique to these gothic works from the female perspective.

I have already referred frequently to violence in my overview of the American gothic; it is important to clarify exactly what I mean by violence in the contexts in which I will be working. I will be drawing primarily from Zizek's assertion, outlined on the very first page of his book *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* that,

> subjective violence is just the most visible portion of a triumvirate that also includes two objective kinds of violence. First, there is a "symbolic" violence embodied in language and its forms…Second, there is what I call "systemic" violence, or the often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems. (2)

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[1] Crow, Charles L. *History of the Gothic: American Gothic*. Cardiff: University of Wales, 2009. Print. Crow is loosely quoting Anne Williams in *The Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic.* In this context he is referring to the unique interconnectedness of the American gothic, gesturing toward my reading of contemporary gothic as a retelling of its predecessors and of the broader American landscape as its own domestic space, complete with a deep (and violent—perhaps even cursed) "family" history.

[2] Poovey, Mary. *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1988. Print. This essay is an example of ideological violence (the church and the discourse of science at odds over the treatment of women) manifesting in subjective violence (this debate gets played out, literally, over the body of the pregnant or laboring woman, often resulting in a more painful and distressing labor).
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Reading Oates and Jackson through Zizek's notion of a triumvirate of violence illustrates that while physical, subjective violence is certainly at the heart of many gothic moments (especially domestic ones), it is enabled by the more truly dangerous and damaging subjective violences: that perpetrated by language and the systemic, ideological violence that allows for oppression and victimization of women. The gothic genre also showcases, almost to an extreme, that by attempting to overcome violence one is by definition committing violence as well. These circular acts of violence are illustrated by the seemingly inevitable nature of the violent responses to patriarchal oppression enacted by the women in Oates' and Jackson's fiction. I am also drawing from Hannah Arendt's discussion of violence, and especially her assertion that "in private as well as public life there are situations in which the very swiftness of a violent act may be the only appropriate remedy…under certain circumstances violence—acting without argument or speech and without counting the consequences—is the only way to set the scales of justice right again" (64). The subjective and objective violence that permeates society perpetuates more violence, as there are instances in which one can only respond to violence with violence, which is illuminated in the works of Jackson and Oates.

As I begin to outline the unique role of women in the gothic tradition, I must turn to discussions and definitions of the female gothic. I am, in some ways, uncomfortable with this distinction. Ideally, there would be one, universal gothic genre, leaving gendered distinctions unnecessary and anachronistic. I believe this is generally the case; however, as I am attempting to locate the feminist politics of two female gothic authors, I also believe this is a necessary distinction to make for the purpose of this essay. Also, because these writers frequently meet criticism that does not seem to extend to male authors (centering around their excessive violence especially) I would like to treat the female gothic as something separate, to work through the

presence of violence in these texts and the work this violence does. Ellen Moers describes the female gothic as, very simply, "the work that women writers have done in the literary mode that, since the eighteenth century, we have called the Gothic" (90). Also present in Moers' female gothic are "fears about sexuality and childbirth" (Davison 205). She goes on to point out, rightfully, that her definition of the female gothic depends on an understanding of what the *gothic* is, a term that is more difficult to place. If the gothic is a means of expressing "the fears and forbidden desires of Americans" (Crow 1), then the female gothic is expressing these concerns as they relate to the subjugation of and violence against women, but also expressing imaginatively the means for overcoming subjugation and violence. The female gothic is ultimately a space to explore, specifically, women's issues and issues of the domestic in gothic terms.

When talking about the female gothic it is also necessary to outline the feminist politics that will inform this work. Primarily I am drawing from the "personal as political" feminist framework of the second wave, during which Oates and Jackson were both writing. First coined by Carol Hanisch in the 1960s, this ideology "did not mean that individual acts were the best way to effect political change but rather that we can often trace the disabling patterns we experience in our personal lives to larger political and social causes" (Tromp 38). This framework does not inform any of these authors prescriptively; their work is far more complicated than what can simply be read as personal as political, but I am interested in the way their writing both incorporates and then complicates this idea. I am also looking to take the personal as political ideology a step further, exploring the ways in which violence at the level of the personal or domestic stands in for the violence of the American domestic landscape as a whole. In other words, the violence experienced on a personal or domestic level in works by

writers such as Oates and Jackson should not be trivialized as merely personal as it is representative of a larger feminist politics and is indicative of a greater sense of American violence, especially violence toward women, both in the literal, physical sense and in the ideological sense as described by Zizek. Thus the excessive physical violence occurring on the very personal level in these texts is illustrated as a larger systemic violence that begins to point to the public, political nature of violence. The personal as political ideology is also a space in which the gothic can easily and impactfully manifest itself, illustrated, for example, in the first chapter of Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born*, as she recalls a moment of gothic intrusion into the sentimental:

> In a living room in 1975, I spent an evening with a group of women poets, some of whom had children…We talked of poetry, and also of infanticide, of the case of a local woman, a mother of eight, who had been in severe depression since the birth of her third child, and who had recently murdered and decapitated her two youngest, on her *suburban front lawn*…Every woman in that group who had children, every poet, could identify with her. (24, emphasis mine)

In this passage from Rich, quintessential images of the domestic—a living room full of mothers, a suburban front lawn—are intruded upon by the gothic. Moreover, the mothers in the account sympathize with this gothic scene of infanticide, challenging both the safety of the domestic space and the assumed unconditional purity of motherhood, two themes that appear again and again in the gothic fiction of postwar women. Throughout this essay I will return to these themes to illustrate the ways in which the perceived narrative of the domestic as a space of the sentimental and traditional comfort is false; in fact, the domestic space is often one riddled with

anxiety and violence—and, again, this anxiety experienced at the personal, subjective level is being experienced, in the same way, on the political level of the national, American domestic.

As I am beginning to articulate, the ideology of the personal as political is heavily rooted in domestic and suburban fiction. As Juliann Fleenor states in *The Female Gothic*, "From the typewriters of the anonymous authors of Harlequin Romances to those of Phyllis Whitney and Victoria Holt, the Gothic lives, perched on the drugstore and supermarket racks where we can purchase it with our detergent and canned soup" (4). Gothic and suspense fiction have historically been associated with the suburban, middle class woman; as in Fleenor's example, these are the consumers of the gothic, but that is not to say the gothic should be trivialized as a subordinate, sensational "hobby," separate from literature, as the gothic speaks to larger social issues, even when its subject matter, like its consumers, are concerned with the domestic. The gothic fiction by Oates and Jackson that I will explore in this essay takes up issues of the gothic domestic: the anxiety surrounding patriarchy and the violence inherent in "women's issues," such as the home and the private sphere; pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood; and the compulsion to perform proper female role.

SECTION 1. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND "ONCE UPON A TIME": JOYCE CAROL OATES' *HAUNTED* AND GOTHIC SAGA

Oates, perhaps more than Jackson, has had her feminist politics challenged. Her stance on her own feminism is ambiguous. She is sympathetic to the feminist movement, but states she "cannot write feminist literature because it is too narrow, too limited. I am equally sympathetic with male characters as with female, which has been a source of irritation to some feminist critics" (Johnson 111). This interview, however, was conducted in 1982 and I would argue that Oates' own politics, as well as the feminist movement as a whole, have shifted, so that identifying equally with men and women is, in fact, a feminist move. Other feminist scholarship has taken issue with the female characters in Oates' fiction, saying, for example, "there is not one convincingly fulfilled or happy woman. Many of her women are, in fact, the antithesis of the liberated woman. They are cunning, jealous, suicidal, petty, fawning, miserable women who want comfort, sex, money, and men" (Grant 29). I would argue, however, that this critique is missing the point, that Oates' painting of these flawed female characters is an entirely feminist strategy, as she uses such characters to critique the patriarchal society that forces them to function in this problematic way. Critics have also attacked her for the violence of her works and for the "sheer *number* of works she has written. It has been pointed out, to her displeasure, that she fails to 'write like a woman'—whatever that means" (Johnson 130). Oates faces criticism for her incredible productivity, or in other words, for having an output similar to Stephen King or Dean Kootnz (with the difference that her work can easily be called high art) which apparently does not translate to "writing like a woman." While this context is important, Oates' work speaks volumes for itself, and unpacking this will reveal a feminist politics that is present, whether Oates and her critics acknowledge this or not. I will work to identify this politics in two of her

texts, *Haunted: Tales of the Grotesque* (1994) and *Bellefleur* (1980), the first novel in her expansive Gothic Saga.

Moving achronologically, I would first like to work through *Haunted*, and even further, begin with the afterword, as it reveals important pieces of both her thought process in crafting this collection of grotesque works and her influences—most significantly, the influence of Poe—on the stories in this work. When asked about her literary influences, Oates frequently cites Joyce, Lawrence, and Kafka. It is not until later interviews that she begins to identify Poe as an influence as well, and this collection of short stories works to further locate Poe's influence on her writing: "Poe's influence upon the literature of the grotesque—and the detective genre—has been so universal as to be incalculable. Who has *not* been influenced by Poe?" (305) The title of this collection alone immediately reveals the role Poe will play in these stories, though significantly, Oates alters Poe's original title, *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, in two ways. First, she removes "arabesque" from her title. The OED defines "arabesque" as "designating the Arabic language, or Arab or Arabian in character, appearance, or style." This style is generally elaborate and ornate. Oates' decision to remove this word for her title reinforces the distinctly American nature of the stories in this collection: they are not laced with Eastern, exotic ornateness but are instead products of the American tradition. Moreover, her omission of "arabesque" suggests that this collection will contain all of the physicality of the grotesque, a particular type of horror qualified as gory and bodily. Oates reinforces this attention to the body in the afterword: "the grotesque always possesses a blunt physicality that no amount of epistemological exegesis can exorcise" (305). Oates' word choice here—exorcise—is interesting, and points to the second alteration. Along with removing "arabesque", Oates also adds the word "haunted" to the beginning of the title. She reworks Poe's title with this qualifier,

suggesting there is something recurring in these texts, that her characters and contexts are haunted, in the twenty-first century, by something that Poe did not identify in his own collection of gothic stories. This notion of being haunted recalls my discussion of the haunted house as a metaphor for intrusive patriarchy: Oates' collection seems to be haunted by the influence of the violently male dominated society of which her characters are a product.

I am focusing so heavily on Poe's influence on Oates because of the phenomenon I identified earlier as an important component of the American gothic: the drawing from prior writers to recreate a work, bringing in contemporary social and historical contexts. Poe's *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* are teeming with violence, often against women at the hands of men, such as the living burial and bloody teeth of "Berenice" and a similar entombment of Madeline in "The Fall of the House of Usher." Both stories result in the literal burial of apparently living women, marking an insistence of their ultimate passivity and impotence. In her collection, Oates deliberately rewrites two significant nineteenth-century short stories, James' "The Turn of the Screw" to "The Accursed Inhabitants of the House of Bly" and Poe's "The Black Cat" to "The White Cat," and in so doing "voices the repressed sexuality of James' ambiguous tale" and "frames the seemingly unmotivated violence of Poe's protagonist in the context of power/gender relations within a contemporary middle-class American family" (Araújo 91). There is an agency, then, in rewriting this collection of tales as a woman, and taking ownership of the violence perpetrated by Poe and his characters. There is agency, too, in the female characters of these stories, that we do not see at play in Poe's original narratives, and finally, an agency in the social commentary Oates is making by way of these violent works. As Susan Araújo states, "Both stories give bodies and voices to canonic female characters – the murdered wife of Poe's narrator and Miss Jessel, the famous governess of James's story [to]

disclose Oates's feminist intent in reshaping the moulds of gothic literature, in order to place the female body and female subjectivity in other positions than that of ghost or victim" (91). In rewriting Poe and James, then, Oates is also rewriting the social and feminist politics by which their characters are shaped.

Although the whole of *Haunted* is a fascinating case study in female-authored violence, the third section of the four-part collection is most revelatory of a feminist social and literary narrative. The second story in this section, "Don't You Trust Me?" takes place in a dystopian America, reminiscent of Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, during which "desperate women were likely to accept the new conditions, and have their babies, as The Moral Law of the Land decreed" (154). This overregulation of the female body, taken to a dystopian extreme, echoes second wave feminists such as Mary Poovey who unpack the violence rendered to the female body when religion and science meet, and are at odds.[2] However, it also speaks to the contemporary debate surrounding abortion and the rights that a woman has to make choices concerning her own body, though the story was written in the nineties. There is a compulsion in this story to carry a pregnancy to term, regulated under "The Maternal Statute", and even looking into abortion as an option "was punishable as a misdemeanor" (154). The story further pits men against women, as "men turned informers to The Bureau of Medical Ethics," and "betrayed even their own wives, out of malice. And greed: informers were paid as much as five hundred dollars for information leading to arrests" (155). Moreover, the story complicates the notion that women are inherently maternal, by bringing an extreme version of the abortion debate to the forefront:

[2] Poovey, Mary. *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1988. Print. This essay is an example of ideological violence (the church and the discourse of science at odds over the treatment of women) manifesting in subjective violence (this debate gets played out, literally, over the body of the pregnant or laboring woman, often resulting in a more painful and distressing labor).

the women in this story go to great lengths—highly dangerous and illegal—to terminate their pregnancies; they do not embrace the idea of a pregnancy and the possibility for motherhood and are in fact devastated by it.

The procedure takes place in a home, with "what appeared to be a kitchen table…placed in the center of the drafty, dim-lit room" (155). Oates reimagines the domestic space, blurring the private sphere with the public space of the doctor's office and the discourse of medicine. Further, she reimagines these blurred spheres as gothic: the home becomes terrifying, and the doctor, far from an apparently safe and comforting authority figure, wears "a long white apron badly stained with blood" and gives his patient "a soiled cotton smock" (155) as he urges her to hurry to undress and begin. Because she has only brought enough money to cover the procedure itself, she cannot afford anesthesia—though the crude use of "carelessly administered chloroform" (157) from which women were dying is unsettling—and must therefore undergo the abortion while fully conscious; thus, the medical procedure, meant to free women from the constraints of an unwanted pregnancy, becomes a painful act of violence. Upon the patient's hesitation to begin the procedure, the doctor asks, "Don't you trust me?" which "had been her lover's query too, forgotten until this moment" (157). Aligning the doctor and the violence of the abortion with the patient's lover suggests that the act of sex is itself violent in this society, where there are no options for women who become pregnant. Again, the violence in this narrative, while fictional, is clearly born out of Oates' contemporary politics (both at the time of the story's publication and in our current moment) and the attempt by conservative and religious groups to restrict access to abortion and even contraception. Here, Oates is not pulling from past violent acts of the nineteenth century but from contemporary ones, which is perhaps even more deeply terrifying.

The gothic intrudes on the domestic (turned public) space in "Don't You Trust Me?," and the domestic and the gothic are again combined revealingly in "The Premonition," in which a mother, Ellen, and her two children presumably murder their abusive, adulterous husband and father right before Christmas, and are visited by the dead man's brother, the narrator of the story, who claims to sense something amiss in the house—though he presumes that the women are victims, rather than killers. What is striking in this story is the juxtaposition of holiday scenes, rooted in the domestic and familial, and domestic violence, and the interplay between these two extremes. Before the gothic Christmastime scene, there is a flashback to a markedly American holiday—a Fourth of July picnic at which Quinn (Ellen's now dead husband) is brandishing "a double-pronged fork in one hand, his electric carving knife in the other" (175). Up to this point, there is nothing unusually dark about this scene: it is a holiday, and Quinn is manning the grill, so naturally he his holding these instruments. Yet the narrator, Quinn's brother Whitney, seems to sense the gothic undertones of the scene, in the same way that his "premonition" leads him to Quinn's house at Christmas. Whitney is unsettled by "the whirring of the electric gadget, the deadly flash of the blades" (175), rendering this innocent holiday scene gothic. The hint of perceived violence turns into actual violence, as another flashback reveals "how, many years ago, at a family gathering on the lawn of the Paxtons' estate, Quinn had suddenly and seemingly without provocation slapped his young wife's head" (183). Again, the domestic—a family gathering—is tinged with the gothic and, to reiterate my earlier point, Oates does not need to invent this scenario. This is not the fantastic gothic of Lovecraft or M. R. James but a very real, tangible gothic scene that is enacted again and again in American society.

There is power, however, in this violence, as Oates illustrates in the scene that takes place in the story's current moment. It is, as stated, Christmas, and Whitney walks into the house to be

greeted with a heavily domestic, even sentimental scene. The kitchen is spotless, "all the overhead lights were on, glaring. Surfaces gleamed, as if newly scrubbed…the available space in the kitchen, including the large butcher block table at the center, was taken up with packages and Christmas wrapping paper, ribbons, address labels" (182). The family, or what remains of the family, appears to have just finished their Christmas preparations and have cleaned up spotlessly following this familial act. Yet despite this, Whitney senses something is wrong, though he is convinced the Quinn is the agent of the perceived violence rather than his wife: "What if Quinn had done something to Ellen and the girls, in a fit of rage?" (175) Ellen and her children are enacting traditional female roles, preparing for the holidays and maintaining a spotless kitchen, which seem to prevent Whitney from connecting the act of violence to them—they are perpetuating the order of the domestic space, and it is this domestic order that allows them to get away with murder. They are covering up a murder scene, but because the role they are performing is so embedded in Whitney's consciousness, he is not alerted to the unordinary situation before him.

For all of Whitney's extra-sensory abilities, his misconceived understanding of the female role and the domestic ideal prevent him from realizing what Ellen has done. He attributes their actions to typical female behavior, remarking on their selflessness as they industriously prepare for the coming holiday despite their plans to travel abroad in the very near future: "How like women, to be thinking of others at such a time!" (182) and later, "Ellen and the girls must have been working for hours. Whitney was touched, and a bit bemused, by their industry: for how like women it was, buying dozens of gifts which in most cases no one really wanted" (184). Whitney trivializes the actions of Ellen and her daughters, and in turn trivializes their final act of revenge against Quinn. When observing the wrapped gifts, he notices, "quite poignantly, Quinn's

name had been omitted, and Whitney felt satisfaction that Ellen had taken revenge of sorts upon her selfish husband, however petty and inconsequential a revenge" (186). His understanding of female ability and gender roles means that he cannot understand Ellen's subversive and violent power. To him, violence can only occur at the hands of Quinn, who he perceives to hold unconditional power over his family, because Quinn has the means to commit both domestic and systemic violence. This constraining feminine ideal is actually empowering Ellen, as it allows her to act violently without consequence or fear of discovery from Whitney, and to overcome the abusive Quinn through the very femaleness that kept her in the damaging relationship. Female biology works to their advantage as well: "And there was that particular odor—a cloying, sweet, rancid odor, as of blood…With a thrill of repugnance, he wondered, now, if the blood-heavy odor had to do after all with menstruation" (185). Again, Whitney's perception of femininity and womanhood causes him to trivialize the situation in the home—which he describes explicitly as "Quinn's house" (185), not Ellen's—as something distinctly female, not possibly a deliberate display of power and agency but simply a biological condition. The scent of a murder can be mistaken for the undertones of menstruation because Whitney reduces Ellen and her daughters to their reproductive capacity and cannot even comprehend their more active capacity for murder. Their planned trip abroad is the final act of subversion and power gained from murdering Quinn. They will travel to "Paris. Rome. London. Madrid" (182); in other words, through their act of violence they are able to leave the confines of the abusive, American domestic space.

This short story showcases most obviously physical domestic violence, but it also illustrates the ideological—or as Zizek would describe, systemic—violence committed against women, even by someone as benign as Whitney. As stated earlier, Oates recalls backlash for her tendency to sympathize with both men *and* women, undermining her feminist inclinations. This

story exemplifies this tendency well, as Whitney is also a victim of Quinn, as shown, for example, in his flashback to the Fourth of July picnic, when Quinn mockingly threatens Whitney with the same carving knife that made Whitney so uneasy. Contrary to the criticism, I find Oates' sympathetic portrayal of Whitney inherently feminist, as it shows that violent patriarchal power embodied by Quinn harms not only women but *everyone*—violence is not simply harmful to women but harmful period, and needs to be challenged even more heavily because of this. However, Oates then complicates Whitney's sympathetic position, as his frequent generalizations of Ellen and of women in general contribute to the ideological violence enacted against women, which is also problematic. I have already discussed some of these generalizations, but Whitney continues, "How women crave being lied to—being deluded! Poor Ellen!" (180) and, "A distinctly female atmosphere in the room, Whitney thought; with an undercurrent of hysteria" (181). His characterization of Ellen reduces her to a helpless figure who *needs* to be saved, rather than one capable of using any means necessary to protect herself and her family, which *also* does violence to Ellen, even if this violence is not physical. His concluding thought, and the concluding moment in the story, is, "How characteristic of women, how sweet, that they trust us as they do…and that, at times at least, their trust is not misplaced" (187). Ironically, the story hinges upon Whitney's misplaced trust in Ellen and in the inherent passivity and weakness of women. His statement about trust recalls a similar statement from "Don't You Trust Me?" as women are understood to trust in the authority of the male figure, and are punished when this trust is misplaced.

The male authority figure appears again in "Thanksgiving," which, like "The Premonition," relies heavily on the sentimental construction of the American holiday, in this case, one rooted in the United States' history of violence against Native American populations.

In this story, like in "Don't You Trust Me?", we see a gothic blending of the public and private spheres, as a teenaged girl and her father do their Thanksgiving grocery shopping—a task connected to the private sphere but nonetheless situated in a commercial public space—on behalf of the girl's mother, who is suffering an undisclosed illness and cannot do the shopping herself. The town, too, seems to be ailing, as the narrator and her father arrive at the A & P and are greeted with a mysteriously apocalyptic scene: "the smell of smoke and scorch was strong…the front of the store was blackened and the plate glass windows that ran the length of it had plywood inserts here and there. The posters…had begun to peel off the glass, and the building itself looked smaller…as if the roof was sinking in" (222). The inside of the store does not fare much better, as produce and meat have been left to rot, sections of the puddled floor have caved in, and roaches are "scuttling about" (228). Araújo observes that "the supermarket assumes the status of a postmodern gothic setting replacing more traditional gothic images – such as the castle, the monastery, or the haunted house" (101). Thus the terror traditionally located in the enclosed space of the haunted house or the castle is now relegated to the public space, though one that still resonates with the domestic sphere. Further, the supermarket is in ruins, which is evocative of the ruins found frequently in the English gothic tradition, but reinvented in a distinctly American setting.

By rendering the act of grocery shopping violent and horrifyingly grotesque, Oates is commenting on the ideological violence performed when women are relegated to certain roles and confined to domestic duties. Araújo describes Father as "a passive and powerless figure in need of being rescued" (103); on the contrary, I read Father as the very embodiment of patriarchal power that contributes to the formation of the domestic. The authoritative presence of Father drives the action of the story: the narrator is afraid to stand in for her mother and perform

her domestic role but Father urges her along, telling her to "Hurry up!" (226) and that "Mother is counting on you, girl" (225). Araújo classifies "Thanksgiving" as a "rite of passage narrative" that "examines the performance of female labor as exemplified by the mother's domestic tasks…*whose efforts are recognized as somehow heroic*" (104, emphasis mine); this rite of passage is entwined with the grotesque and the gothic. The narrator must learn to perform to social standards, as illustrated by her father's regulation of her actions in the supermarket. Social standards of female labor are determined and enforced by a patriarchal system. In "The Premonition" Ellen is able to overcome this patriarchal violence and regulation through her own act of violence; the narrator of "Thanksgiving" states repeatedly that she "hadn't any choice" (226). She must participate in this domestic performance, though by imagining performed domesticity as violent and the space in which the performance occurs as a war zone, Oates is also crafting a type of heroism in the narrator's performance and therefore in the larger female performance of the domestic role in the face of ideological violence when there isn't any choice.

The short stories in *Haunted* together illustrate Oates' feminist politics surrounding agency and the Gothicized domestic space. *Bellefleur*, published fourteen years previously, also provides a commentary regarding the home, the feminine role, and the gothic's function in depicting these issues. While the compact short story as a genre is ideal for conveying the gothic aspects of domestic confinement, as in *Haunted*, in which enclosure is functioning both narratively and stylistically through the limited space of the stories themselves, *Bellefleur* is a deep, sprawling, and complex novel that begins the collection of novels that Oates calls her Gothic Saga. The temporality of the novel is strange and unsettling; it is difficult to pin down exactly when the novel is taking place, and the frequent jump from one narrative standpoint and from one historical moment to another makes for a jarring reading experience. This experience,

combined with the textbook gothic nature of the novel (with its old estate and mansion recalling the castle of the English gothic, its rich and violent, and supposedly cursed, family history, and its reliance on folklore and myth) makes *Bellefleur* a fitting first novel in the Gothic Saga and an excellent novel through which to examine the American gothic tradition as it is played out in contemporary fiction.

The strange temporality of *Bellefleur* makes its approach to pregnancy hard to pin down. Based on an incomplete family tree provided by Oates, as well as the presence of planes and cars at the end of the novel, I would place Leah's pregnancy with Germane during the early twentieth century, not quite regulated by Victorian standards and ideologies but still set during an historical moment that enforced the regulation and covering of the pregnant body. Even though it is difficult to pinpoint the exact timeframe of the pregnancy and birth, the scenes encompassing these moments (and in fact the novel itself) *feels* archaic, as though it is a nineteenth-century work, which makes the grotesque depiction of Leah's pregnancy and subsequent birth striking. Leah is not the angel in the house, participating in the sentimental practice of glowing pregnancy and childbirth, but is animalistic and monstrous:

> She was to grow colossal with her pregnancy so that, in the final month or two, her very features appeared gross: the mouth and the flared nostrils and the eyes visibly enlarged, as if a somewhat ill-fitting mask had been forced upon her. Her lips were often moist, there was spittle in the corners, a certain feverish breathlessness that enhanced her beauty—or was it the curious *power* of her beauty—and made Gideon look away, stricken. She was his height now…and he was terrified of her. (55)

There are many elements at play in this passage that signify a discomfort with both the physicality of the pregnancy and with the feminine power that pregnancy affords to Leah. Oates evokes the uncanny in this description of Leah, whose pregnant body seems to be masked: clearly Leah, but unsettlingly altered. It is a *forced* uncanny; she did not don the mask voluntarily; however, there is power in this altered figure and altered state, hence the sense of monstrosity that the description invokes. Her growing figure stands in for this growing sense of power, which Gideon picks up on as well, though to him this power is terrifying because it threatens the order of their marriage, with him as the authoritative center and her as the passive wife.

She is not only grotesque in appearance but animalistic in behavior, voraciously eating "raw beefsteaks" with her fingers "as the dead-white skin of her belly tightened over the swelling mass…and even her neck thickened so that, though still lovely, and columnar, it must have been the size of Ewan's" (58). Leah's voracious appetite for food, along with her pregnancy, exemplifies female appetites and desires and the patriarchal discomfort that is expressed when these desires go unregulated. Leah's failure to perform her traditional gender role that would involve carrying her pregnancy modestly and passively is described in animalistic terms as the ability to self regulate is essential to femininity; not having this ability calls her femininity into question, despite the fact that this behavior exists *because of her pregnancy*. Simply performing biologically falls short here; she must also perform her femininity behaviorally.

Leah's behavior can be viewed not only as a *failure* to perform her gender role but a *refusal*, investing her with the power to resist the demands of her husband and others in the patriarchal household. This power is a distinctly feminine one, as the frequent remarks to her beauty interspersed throughout these grotesque descriptions illustrate. She has become

grotesque—uncannily bloated and large—but there is still power in her beauty; she behaves inhumanly but remains lovely while doing so. Moreover she is aware of this power, and highlights rather than hides it: "She grew negligent—or was it contemptuous—and thought, Why be ashamed of the way I look? Why not take pride in myself? And so she stopped wearing pearls and earrings" (58). The narrator's qualifier—she is not negligent but contemptuous, intentional—is essential to the reading of Leah's power: she is not failing to perform, then, but refusing, by taking off her jewelry and abandoning these feminine constructs and behaviors. There is agency in refusal that is not present in failure, and Leah exerts this agency by accentuating the grotesque physicality that has become tied to her power: "She began to wear…brightly colored gowns, some of them floor-length, with wide rakish sleeves, or decorate beads or feathers, or handmade Spanish lace: and sometimes the dresses had open necklines, so that Leah's full ripe astonishing breasts were partway revealed" (59). Rather than push her toward passivity, Leah's pregnancy instills in her a rebellious command and a bodily presence that she accentuates, very pointedly, to assert this agency.

Leah's grotesque pregnancy culminates in a gothic, violent birth. Violence seems to induce her labor, as her contractions begin while she watches her husband's best friend die in a horseracing accident. The moments leading up to the birth are not cloaked in sentimentality and maternal joy but are horrific, as "after the stench of blood in the room, and the first sight of the infant's head between Leah's smeared thighs, caused not only aunt Veronica to fall down in a dead faint but Dr. Jensen himself…Cornelia spoke first, saying, 'It should be suffocated at once'" (102). This initial scene introduces the passage outlining the birth, and begins to hint at the unusually terrible nature of the infant; we would not expect an aunt to faint under ordinary circumstances, perhaps, as women were often present at and helpful during childbirth in the

novel's temporal moment, though it is not entirely shocking that an attending woman would faint during an unusually severe birth. What is surprising, however, is that Dr. Jensen is also shocked into fainting, marking the failure of the discourse of medicine and the male authority representing the institution. It is Leah's mother who controls the situation: "Della, having elbowed the other women aside, ignoring her daughters wailing (for Leah, in her delirium, *wanted* the creature), said simply: 'I'll take care of it. I know what to do'" (102). It is still unclear what, exactly, Leah has birthed; however, Della's willingness and ability to act shows that as a mother, there is something that makes her cognizant of the gothic aspect of motherhood and the domestic, and she has a mastery of this gothic moment in a way that Dr. Jensen and the public discourse of the medical field does not.

Also telling is the referral to the baby as "the creature," calling to mind Mary Shelley's Frankensteinian grotesque and the perversion of childbirth that takes place in her foundational nineteenth-century gothic novel, and foreshadowing the condition of Leah's child. The child, "It—they—[who] can't be allowed to live, [who] must be put out of their misery" (103), is born conjoined, "not one baby (and a giant baby at that) but two babies: then again not *two* babies (which would have been quite within the normal order of things) but one and a half: a single melon-sized head, two scrawny shoulders, and at the torso something hideous that resembled, in Jensen's feverish imagination just before he fainted, part of another embryo—" (104). This grotesque scene of a haphazardly pieced-together baby, horrific enough to cause chaos and fainting, is also reminiscent of Frankenstein and the methods involving the Creature's birth, and the fear of the afterbirth as outlined by Moers: "*Frankenstein* seems to be distinctly a *woman's* mythmaking on the subject of birth precisely because its emphasis is not upon what precedes birth, not upon birth itself, but upon what follows birth: the trauma of the afterbirth" (93). What

Moer's means here is the same notion of unconditional and immediate maternal love that Rich describes in *Of Woman Born*. This falsely ubiquitous sense of sentimental motherhood is best counteracted by the gothic; the moments following the birth are hideous, and not representative of sentimental maternal love. In fact, Leah is not present in this moment at all but nearly unconscious, overcome by the awful birth.

On its own, the birth of conjoined twins—if all else goes well—is, while concerning, not a scene of horror as it is presented in *Bellefleur*. What truly makes this moment grotesque is not the conjoinment itself but the nature of the conjoinment, and the way in which the baby appears: normally, from the waist up—"only two arms, two tiny fists" (104). At the torso, however, the catalyst of the terror is revealed: "Two somewhat abbreviated legs, and part of an abdomen, and rubbery-red slippery male genitalia, possibly oversized—it was difficult, with all the commotion, for Della to estimate—growing out of the abdomen of what appeared to be a perfectly well-formed, though somewhat large, baby girl" (104-5). The juxtaposition of the sexes is too horrifically grotesque for the attendants of the birth to bear, pointing to a larger discomfort with the physical embodiment of the blurring of gender; there is extreme discomfort with the presence of two sexes in one body because, aside from being physically repulsive, it allows for the possibility of the fluidity of gender, a fluidity that the traditionally aristocratic Bellefleurs are not ready or willing to accept.

Moers weighs in on this dually sexed, monstrous child, noting that as literature progressed into the twentieth century, women writers shifted from "giants or animaloid humans" to "aberrant creatures with hideous deformities or double sex: hermaphrodites" (108). As earlier scenes of Leah's grotesque pregnancy reveal, Oates is incorporating both the dated tropes of the giant, animalistic reading of the grotesque and later tropes of the hermaphrodite, adding another

layer to the strange temporality of *Bellefleur*, and to the generational and genealogical significance of Leah and baby Germaine: Germaine represents a new and more modern generation, and the modified social constructs of this modernism. She must first, however, inherit only one sex. Again, the authority of the mother, and not the doctor, allows for the elimination of the child's distressing extra organs and limbs, restoring order, literally—bringing an end to the scene's chaos—and ideologically—maintaining a rigid physical and therefore social sex and gender divide; though order can only be restored violently, "with one, two, *three* skillful chops of the knife" (105). Della enacts the Freudian moment of castration; Germaine becomes female through a violent removal of the penis and her femininity can persist because of this new lack. However, Freud is also challenged here as his understanding of the female genitals as monstrous is reversed—the baby is monstrous because of the presence of the male genitals that exist beside the female ones; castration must happen to overcome the monstrous male genitals.[3]

The absolute horror upon realizing Germaine's extra, male genitalia seems to suggest a conservatism surrounding gender and femininity. And indeed it does, for much of the Bellefleur family; but the scene of Germaine's birth and of Leah's grotesque pregnancy leading up to it also foreshadow the very blurring of gender roles that the elimination of combined sexes in one body

[3] Moers, Ellen. *Literary Women*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976. Print. When discussing Freud and the uncanny n her chapter "Female Gothic," Moers states, "No reference either to woman writers or to their monstrous creations was made by Freud in his study of Gothic horror, called in English "Freud on the Uncanny." But Freud does refer there to the perception of the female genitals as monstrous…Freud locates this perception not in female but in male fantasy, or more precisely…puerile fantasy" (109). Moers notes the importance of the *female* gothic—"where woman is examined with a woman's eye" (109)—alongside this male-authored study on the gothic. The female gothic plays an important role in providing a counterpoint to the traditional, centered gothic: when a woman examines a woman, it is not femininity that is monstrous but masculinity, demonstrating the female gothic's ability to turn the male perception of femininity on its head.

seeks to undo. Germaine's birth acts as a springboard, sending Leah into the public sphere as she begins to negotiate contracts and attempt to acquire more land on behalf of the Bellefleur family. She believes that Germaine holds a sort of power, and as a result the child often accompanies Leah on these trips, "for Leah would have been uneasy, for reasons she could not have articulated, if the child were left behind…after a few minutes of hugging and kissing and whispering, during which Leah had no idea what she said, it might have been simply baby talk, she would invariably know what strategy to pursue" (385). Leah's agency, strangely, becomes tied to Germaine; however, instead of motherhood leading to a passive loss of identity and confinement to the domestic space and domestic role of raising a child, Germaine's violent birth and Leah's role as her mother lead her out of the domestic space.

The "personal as political" narrative written thus far into *Bellefleur* encompasses the personal nature of the female body and of childbirth, which then speaks ideologically to the construction of gender roles and gender politics. There is a second aspect of this narrative written into the novel as well, concerning the politics of the violent American past, recounted to children in the form of a fairy tale. Here physical and systemic violence are intertwined to work against the "domestic novel's tendency to disengage from larger historical themes" (Patterson 4), as the historical reality of institutionalized racism and murder of Native Americans is recounted in such a way that is designed to instill a similar ideology into the next generation, by way of the fairy tale: "Once upon a time, the children were told, a seventeen-year-old Indian boy was lynched not a mile away, hanged from a great oak on the lakeshore drive. The oak was called the Hanging Tree" (388). The violent American historical and political past invades the domestic sphere, and the especially "safe" space of the children's nursery. Bellefleur elders recount a historical narrative of Native American persecution and massacre by white settlers, many of them

Bellefleurs, by way of the seemingly innocuous fairy tale, in a chapter entitled “Once Upon a Time…” This chapter is reminiscent of Fiedler’s discussion of the violent undertones of the American past that make their way, again and again, into the American novel: not even the nursery is exempt from the ideological violence that haunts the family and the nation. Relating this violence using a domestic and sentimental trope of childhood speaks to the same type of ideological violence that penetrates the domestic sphere. The personal history of the family is entwined with the larger ideological History of the nation, making the domestic narrative just as important as the public and political one.

SECTION 2. OUT OF THE FOREST AND INTO THE CASTLE: JACKSON'S *HANGSAMAN* AND THE BLACKWOOD MURDERS

Shirley Jackson occupies a strange, almost enigmatic space in literature and scholarship. Although she was a successful and popular writer, until recently, scholarship on Jackson has been lacking, perhaps because of this popular status: sensation fiction has not been given space in critical scholarship until recently, despite the fact that as "a talented writer who focused on female anxieties and the contradictory pressures of domesticity" Jackson "represents an obvious case for scholarship" (Murphy 4). Further, Jackson's work has been dismissed for "the notion that [she writes] private, apolitical fiction" (Hattenhauer 191); however as I have argued, private does not indeed transfer to apolitical and there is value in the personal as political ideology, as Hattenhaur agrees: "The opposition of self and public breaks down. Even the unconscious, of course, is political" (191). Even more complicating, Jackson is not *only* a writer of sensational or horror fiction but also of domestic fiction, so as Bernice M. Murphy notes, "critics have not quite known what to make of her, a problem caused by the fact that she operated in two popular and yet frequently marginalized genres: those of horror and the gothic and the so-called domestic humor that appeared in women's magazines during the 1950s" (Murphy 11). That Jackson occupies two literary spaces is not troubling but ideal for the purpose of this study on the domestic gothic, and as my analyses of Jackson's work will reveal, she does not only occupy two mutually exclusive spaces but manages to combine the domestic and the gothic in a significant way. In *Shirley Jackson's American Gothic*, Darryl Hattenhauer outlines the ordinary (read: domestic) nature of Jackson's work and her tendency to move away from this sense of the ordinary: "Often her settings will first appear ordinary but then emerge as extraordinary. As Kari J. Winter notes, 'Female gothic novelists uncovered the terror of the familiar' (21). Jackson's

characters usually end up gothic victims" (5). Although I find the first part of Hattenhauer's reading useful in its portrayal of Jackson's unsettling move away from the ordinary in her works and in the female gothic tendency to disrupt the familiar, of which the domestic space is an example, I aim to illustrate that although Jackson's characters may appear initially to end up as victims, as Hattenhauer notes, they ultimately resist and overcome this victimized status by way of the gothic. Reading both the subtly gothic *Hangsaman* and the more overtly terrifying *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, I hope to showcase the domestic as a space of resistance rather than one of pure victimization.

Also significant in Winter's claim, cited by Hattenhauer, is that female gothic novelists are working with the familiar. Although in this reading, Winter is referring to the everyday and ordinary, I would also like to think of the familiar here as the collection of gothic texts that already exist and are ingrained into the American imagination, and the ways in which female gothic writers, and here Jackson in particular, are questioning and reworking such texts. *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, for example, is in direct conversation with Hawthorne's *House of the Seven Gables* (as evidenced by the titles alone, both referring either directly or indirectly to the castle and its architecture). Like Oates' reimagining of Poe, Jackson draws from Hawthorne to rewrite the story of the confined woman—not the spinster Hepzibah but Constance—suffering from ruin and a cursed, volatile family history and the scorn of a village. *Hansgaman* is also drawing from the familiar, though not in the literary sense but in the historical one, as a disappearance of a college student named Paula Weldon from Bennington, the inspiration for the setting of the novel, is also said to have influenced Jackson. Moreover, the murders in *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* very closely mirror the infamous Lizzie Borden case (119). Thus Jackson illustrates Crow's claim that the gothic does not need to come from the

imaginary but rather from reality, and from the seemingly ubiquitous horrors experienced every day in society.

Hangsaman occupies two domestic spaces: protagonist Natalie Waite's home, and her prestigious all-girls college, chosen by her father, that stands in for the domestic sphere in the absence of the actual home. The novel is remarkable for its use of doubling, both of people and of the landscape, as the text will show many variations of Natalie's father and also of the forested garden of Natalie's childhood. The novel's opening takes place at the Waite home, as do the first glimpses of the gothic space occupied by Natalie and her mechanism for coping with the violence being done here. Natalie's life is controlled almost entirely by her pompous, self-important father; in fact, the novel illustrates a common trope of the traditional gothic involving "an underlying oedipal or incestuous struggle between a powerless daughter and an erotically powerful father" (Murphy 130), though Mr. Waite's power manifests far more strongly in the form of the intellectual rather than the erotic. It also illustrates the *female* gothic by way of "the central character's troubled identification with her good/bad/dead/mad mother" (130). Mr. Waite's power in the home is made even more absolute by Mrs. Waits extreme passivity and almost impotence; she is an alcoholic and unable to perform neither her domestic nor maternal role adequately.

Though Arnold Waite's control does not extend to physical violence on his part, it does indirectly lead to Natalie's sexual assault at the hands of one of his party guests. Like in Oates' "The Premonition," the quintessentially American setting of the backyard party becomes a violent space, both ideologically and overtly. The Waite household acts as a space for Arnold to assert his power, as his wife is made to cook and his daughter is made to serve his many guests. Moreover, the edge of the Waite property becomes a traditional gothic setting, full of trees,

"growing together silently…almost enough of them to be called a forest…the darkness…not yet absolute, but the light came by some unknown means, since there was no moon and the lights from the house could not reach this far" (42). The illusion of the home's safety and protection does not extend to the trees among which Natalie and the "strange man" (40), a guest of Natalie's father, settle, and Natalie is aware of this: "The danger is here, in *here*, just as they stepped inside and were lost in the darkness" (42). Hattenhauer calls this unnamed strange man "another of [Arthur's] doubles" (104), asserting the power both men have over her, and the violence inherent in both types of power. Arnold's systematic violence is damaging as is the physical and sexual violence Natalie experiences at the hands of the guest: "Oh my dear God sweet Christ, Natalie thought, so sickened she nearly said it aloud, is he going to *touch* me?" (43). Significantly, Natalie *does not* speak here, illustrating the hold that male control has over her and the many types of violence inflicted by this control.

When the man is leading Natalie to the wooded area, she recalls that they are the same "trees where Natalie had once encountered knights in armor" (42). This trope of the imagined space of Natalie's consciousness reappears in the text. She mentions this same picturesque, treed setting earlier in the narrative, where a younger Natalie "delighted in playing pirate and cowboy and knight in armor among the trees" (22). This image appears one more time, when Natalie, now away at school, is implicated in a hazing ritual, removed from her bed, and taken to an undisclosed location on the college's forested ground, recalling a "cops-and-robbers effect [that] conveyed to Natalie the fact that the night's escapade…was something these people might not care to do in daylight, with their faces uncovered" (58). Even as the power dynamic has shifted from Natalie's oppressive patriarchal home to the somewhat complicated space of the all-girls' college, and as the dorms have replaced the traditional domestic space of the home, Natalie turns

to the imagined and remembered spaces she knows, giving her an out and a sense of escape from these overwhelming power structures.

Natalie's most effective imagined construct in dealing with her violent surroundings takes the form of a detective interrogating her for a murder she has apparently committed. Hattenhauer also characterizes the detective as "a double of her father the inquisitor" (104) and mechanically the novel supports this reading, as there is an interweaving of both the detective and Arnold's dialogue, an interchanging of these two male authoritative voices that makes it difficult, at times, to distinguish between the two. However, while the strange man in the woods reinforces the violence of Arnold's power, the detective, despite the male authority of his voice, is Natalie's claim to power. Her mechanism for dealing with the powerlessness she feels at the hands of her father is creating this second male voice whose authority she undermines—he seems unable to prove her guilt and he is unable to make her speak against her will: "'I can't tell,' Natalie said back to him in her mind…'I refuse to say'" (5)—and who believes her capable of asserting agency in a powerful, pointed way, through an act of violence and in fact murder. That Natalie must imagine a violent encounter as an escape from the violence of her own situation is of course problematic, though it reflects a trend taking place around the time *Hangsaman* was written, the same time Sylvia Plath was writing *The Bell Jar*. Betty Friedan talks about the perception of the housewife as a "two-headed schizophrenic" (23) which is a fitting analogy for Natalie Waite's experience as well: she moves from one patriarchal space to another (even the college is home to yet another of Arnold's doubles, the dominating Arthur Langdon) and seems unable to escape the violence of this control, while at the same time she is attempting to craft her own female voice as a writer and her own agency as a young adult. Mental illness is a fitting way to categorize the consequence of this ideological, sometimes even

physical, violence, and there has been speculation that the novel is in fact explicitly about schizophrenia.

Natalie crafts the detective and the murder case as an outlet and escape from the violence she experiences at home with her father; she creates Tony, her "most important fantasy figure" (Hattenhauer 108) in response to the similarly oppressive space of the college and dorms, and her professor Arthur Langdon, whose name foreshadows his similarity to her father. Hattenhauer notes the significance of Tony's character, stating, "Tony's dominant trait is power…Unable to feel empowered, Natalie imagines a figure common in the empowerment fantasies of the unempowered: she imagines that Tony is magical" (109). Here the gothic comes into play in Natalie's imagination by way of fantasy (different from the violent gothic present in her imagined accuser of murder). Tony exerts this power by taking Natalie, once again, into a forest. Tony tells Natalie she has been in this forest several times, emphasizing that the two girls are aspects of one personality and consciousness since, as we know, Natalie has in fact been among trees and foliage before, always at times when power is being negotiated. She notes the palpable darkness created by the trees, which mirrors the setting of her assault, though the trees are even more heavily personified, "waiting in the darkness ahead, quietly expectant…bent over her, trying, perhaps to touch her hair…they leaned forward to watch her" (210). It has become natural for Natalie to feel threatened in this setting because of the violence she has experienced there before; however, unlike before, this time Natalie escapes the forest unharmed. She loses Tony and becomes afraid, calling for her but not receiving any response. Tony is gone; she is able to let her go because now, as power is again negotiated in the forest, Natalie exerts an agency she lacked previously. This agency allows for her escape, albeit subconsciously: "Realizing after she had moved that she was walking, she began to go quickly ahead on the path. Blundering on

alone, she came out at last, almost crying (thinking, What is it I know that means steadiness and warmth and a home? Arthur Langdon? Elizabeth? and their names were meaningless)" (211-212). Natalie grasps for domestic comfort but realizes finally that it cannot be found amid the current power structure, pointing to the meaningless of her father's double and her own double in Elizabeth, Arthur's troubled and victimized wife.

Hangsaman spans multiple versions of the domestic space; *We Have Always Lived in the Castle,* however, quite significantly, takes place almost exclusively in the titular house, with the exception of Merricat Blackwood's (the younger of the two sisters and protagonists) journey into the village for a shopping trip, a scene that may have informed Oates' similar account of a hostile and terrifying shopping trip written thirty years later, "Thanksgiving." My earlier discussion of Oates' short story points to the ideological violence of assigning separate spheres and separate roles for women, and confining and limiting them to the kitchen and the related tasks of performing the domestic role. *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* makes a similar critique but pushes it even beyond Oates' critique of separate spheres: Merricat's sister, Constance, is so affected by the domestic ideology that she is too afraid to leave the home at all. Like the ailing mother in "Thanksgiving" who sends her husband and, more importantly, her daughter to perform her domestic role in her place, Constance entrusts Merricat to enter into the public setting of the village in service of the domestic. And Merricat performs this, though grudgingly: she is a target of violence in this public arena, though not overt physical violence. Rather, the villagers taunt her with chants and stare, horrified, as she approaches. She is even cornered and interrogated, by a man likely three times her age. The hostility of the village and Merricat's resultant fear at entering the public illustrates the power of ideological violence: there is no threat

of physical harm that we can see; her fear comes from her vulnerability and lack of power in the public space.

Merricat also harbors violent thoughts about the villagers (physically violent, in this instance), however, and is not entirely innocent. She imagines "burning black painful rot that ate away from the inside, hurting dreadfully. I wished it on the village" (6) and envisions them dead, "lying there crying with the pain and dying…stepping over their bodies" (8-9). In fact it becomes clear as the narrative progresses that the villagers' hostility toward the girls is the result of their own extreme violence: much of the Blackwood family, barring Uncle Julian (who still suffers, victim to severe mental illness rather than death) and the two Blackwood girls, are murdered. Initially it appears as though Constance is the killer (who goes to trial but is acquitted) but it is later revealed that Merricat has actually committed the crime and Constance is simply covering for her. This bit of dramatic irony reveals the effect a different type of violence, one that Zizek refers to as the objective violence of language. Constance is named a murderer and suffers for this act of naming: she becomes confined to the home and feared by everyone around her, made into a monster and a victim. The strength of the violence of language is such that she is called a murderer by the townspeople and this naming alone is enough to relegate her to her home out of fear, without the need for any physical move to keep her confined.

The murder is also significant for its illustration of the dangers of ideological violence by way of separate spheres, and of the ways in which women may violently reclaim the domestic space when overcome by this violence. While the family is alive, Constance is the embodiment of traditional femininity: she occupies the space of the kitchen, thanklessly preparing the family's meals and acting as the perfectly passive daughter. The kitchen also becomes a space of resistance, however, and the domestic act of preparing food becomes a vehicle for murder, as

Merricat murders the family by slipping arsenic into the sugar (which she knows Constance does not eat). Just like in Oates' "The Premonition," the very domesticity that oppresses the girls becomes a means to their resistance. First a place where Constance is subject to female oppression and made to perform her traditional role, the kitchen later becomes a space of (albeit violent) power and resistance. Thus the victimizer/victim binary that embodies the sisters becomes complicated: they are certainly guilty of murder, but like in Oates' short story and many other narratives surrounding the violence of the domestic sphere, it seems that murder is simply a breaking point, almost inevitable, that comes from constant confinement and oppression. Thus, Merricat (and Constance by association) are guilty, and are victimizers, but they are also victims, and are actually victimized twice over – by their own family and the traditional gender norms that they impose, and by the villagers who are uncomfortable with this exertion of female power. Lynette Carpenter summarizes this discomfort: "But female self-sufficiency, Jackson suggests, specifically women's forceful establishment of power over their own lives, threatens a society in which men hold primary power and leads inevitably to confrontation" (198). Murder, however extreme, is in this case an establishment of power: this uneven power structure is harmful not only to the women who are victimized but, eventually, the oppressors as well, from whom the oppressed will inevitably attempt to claim power. The villagers will try to "right" this shift in power balance; however, before they do, another threat to the female power in the Blackwood house will materialize.

Cousin Charles is most obviously and immediately threatening to the Blackwood girls because he is clearly after the fortune kept in the home. However his more insidious threat is that to the female power structure that has been born from Merricat's murder of the family. The home was a space of female victimization because of the male head of the household; when Constance

acts as head of the house, there is balance. Charles makes possible a return to imbalance, to the male dominated home that drove Merricat to murder. Merricat envisions this threat by way of the supernatural, referring to Charles as "a ghost, but a ghost that could be driven away" (61). The blackwood "castle" becomes the haunted house of gothic tradition, even evoking the ruinous castles and rich family histories of the deeply historical English gothic. The domestic space is overtaken by the unwanted and threatening male presence, as Charles moves to establish himself as the patriarchal head of the house—as Roberta Rubenstein states, "Persevering as if in male sexual penetration of female space" (140)—with Constance submissively relinquishing her agency in the home, except to provide meals and comforts—the same oppressive dynamic that drove Merricat to murder. Again Merricat seems willing to assert power in driving away Charles; however like in the village and like with her family, her violent desire to overpower others stems from an ideological violence that is being committed against Constance and herself.

Cousin Charles figuratively and ideologically brings violence into the Blackwood home when he appears unasked and usurps the domestic power; he also literally brings violence to the house when he sends for a village firefighter (and by extension a group of villagers) when the top story of the manor is engulfed in flames. There is no physical violence exerted when Merricat travels into the village at the novel's opening; her experienced violence is ideological or imagined. When the public sphere (in the form of the village mob) moves into the domestic space of the Blackwood house, however, violence is inevitable, as "Jackson puts the feminine and masculine Gothic in dialogue by having the home destroyed partially and having one of those responsible, Merricat, roam the ruin while the locals wander the larger arena" (Hattenhauer185). Rather than put out the fire, a woman in the group insists, repeatedly, to "let it burn" (104); the firefighter does put out the fire but proceeds to pick up a rock and "in

complete silence he turned slowly and then raised his arm and smashed the rock through one of the great tall windows" (105) which sparks the mob's riotous attack on the Blackwood house. Like the failure of the doctor, the public authority figure, during Leah's unsettling birth, here too the authority figure representing the public fails, causing harm rather then preventing and quelling it. The domestic space is revealed to be penetrable, first by Charles and now by the group, and not the safe haven it is so often imagined to be. The sisters plan to take refuge in the woods, inverting the notion of the safety of the home contrasted by the threatening, dangerous forest. The crowd finally disperses when it is announced that Julian Blackwood is dead, and the girls return to the sanctuary of the home, finally devoid of all male presence (barring Jonas the cat), where they can carry out their version of the domestic ideal, governed by female balance. They bring back domestic order, scrubbing down the kitchen and preparing a feast and, this time, completely ignoring everyone who tries to enter the home in the coming weeks. A significant takeaway in the novel, as John G. Parks points out, is that "the real horror of the novel comes not so much from the unpunished murders by a 12-year-old child, but largely from the inexplicable madness and violence of the so-called normal and ordinary people of the world outside the Blackwood home" (248). These "outside" people, representative of the public sphere, illustrate the inherent, ever-present violence, even among seemingly normal people. Another of the novel's horrors is the capacity of this violence to penetrate the home, rendering it unsettlingly vulnerable and unsafe.

CONCLUSION

Shirley Jackson died in 1965, at age 48, leaving at least one unfinished novel. Joyce Carol Oates is still publishing at an impressive rate, the most recent of her Gothic Saga novels having come out in 2013. It is impossible to say whether Jackson's novels would have evolved alongside the feminist movement; we can say with certainty, however, that Oates and other prolific female gothic novelists have been informed and influenced by shifting feminist politics in the United States. Margaret Atwood, for example, embodies the practice of gothic texts pulling from real rather than imagined life in her 1985 novel *The Handmaid's Tale* which takes to the extreme the religious fundamentalism that is threatening, even in 2014, women's reproductive rights, again illustrating the gothic and violent threat to women that is present in both our fiction and our society. Flannery O'Connor is another example of a distinctly American author, whose works are dependent on the American south and the southern gothic tradition. There are pages and pages to write about these women, and pages more to write about Shirley Jackson and Joyce Carol Oates. By choosing these two writers, I hope to have located a specific and significant aspect of the postwar gothic: the gothic novel reimagined by women who draw upon both nineteenth-century tropes and traditions and actual social and feminist politics that allow for a unique violence (or violences: Zizek's lingual, systemic, and subjective) against women. By taking ownership of this violence, Oates and Jackson are able to claim the terms of violence, no longer subject to male control but explored through the productive lens of feminism: not violence for violence's sake but reciprocal violence that, as Arendt claims, "[sets] the scale of justice right."

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