

Norse Romanticism:  
Subversive Female Voices in British Invocations of Nordic Yore

by

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## ABSTRACT

The mid-eighteenth century publication of national British folk collections like James MacPherson's *Works of Ossian* and Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, placed a newfound interest in the ancient literature associated with Northern/Gothic heritage. This shift from the classical past created a non-classical interest in the barbarism of Old Norse society, which appeared to closely resemble the Anglo-Saxons. In addition to this growing interest, Edmund Burke's seminal treatise, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, provided a newfound aesthetic interest in objects of terror. The barbaric obscurity and exoticism associated with the Norse culture provided the perfect figures to explore a Gothic heritage while invoking the terror of the sublime. This interest accounted for a variety of works published with Gothic themes and elements that included Old Norse pagan figures. Though a few scholars have attempted to shed light on this sub-field of Romanticism, it continues to lack critical attention, which inhibits a more holistic understanding of Romanticism. I argue that "Norse Romanticism" is a legitimate sub-field of Romanticism, made apparent by the number of primary works available from the age, and I synthesize the major works done thus far in creating a foundation for this field. I also argue that one of the tenets of Norse Romanticism is the newfound appreciation of the "Norse Woman" as a democratized figure, thus opening up a subversive space for dialogue in women's writing using the Gothic aesthetic. To illustrate this, I provide analysis of three Gothic poems written by women writers: Anna Seward's "Herva at the Tomb of Argantyr," Anne Bannerman's "The Nun," and Ann Radcliffe's "Salisbury Plains. Stonehenge." In addition, I supplement Robert Miles' theoretical reading of the

Gothic with three philosophical essays on the empowerment of the imagination through terror writing in Anna Letitia Aikin (Barbauld) and John Aikin's "On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror" and "On Romances" as well as Ann Radcliffe's "On the Supernatural in Poetry."

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## INTRODUCTION

"Facing to the northern clime,  
Thrice he traced the runic rhyme;  
Thrice pronounced, in accents dread,  
The thrilling verse that wakes the dead;"

*Thomas Gray, "The Descent of Odin"*

### I. Overview

The mid-eighteenth century experienced fervent enthusiasm for the revival of national pasts, provoking a wide array of writers to use ancient material in literary tropes and themes to reconstruct stories of idealized romance, liberty, and chivalry. The publication of national folk collections like James MacPherson's *The Works of Ossian* and Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, placed a newfound interest in the ancient literature associated with Northern/Gothic heritage. This shift, the antithetical movement away from the classical past, created a non-classical interest in the barbarism of the Old Norse, who appeared to closely resemble the Anglo-Saxons. Because Old Norse literature was made available through several Latin translations of the *Poetic Edda* and *Poetic Saga*, eighteenth century medieval enthusiasts translated the poems into vernacular English, using them in place of yet-to-be found Anglo-Saxon poetry, and often citing a linguistic heritage that connected the two cultures and thus made for a seemingly natural appropriation. In addition to this growing interest, Edmund Burke's seminal treatise, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, provided a newfound aesthetic interest in objects of beauty and terror. The barbaric obscurity and exoticism associated with the Norse culture—its pagan ways and heathen practices coupled with its harsh, icy climate—provided the perfect conditions to

explore a Gothic heritage while invoking the terror of the sublime. This burgeoning interest accounted for a variety of works published with Gothic themes and elements that included Old Norse pagan figures. Though a few scholars have attempted to shed light on this sub-field of Romanticism, it continues to lack critical attention, which inhibits a more holistic understanding of Romanticism as an age clinging to the past in its overt anxiety about the approach of the modern world. I argue that “Norse Romanticism” is a legitimate sub-field of Romanticism, made apparent by the number of primary works available from the age, and I synthesize the major works done thus far in creating a foundation for this field. I also argue that one of the tenets of Norse Romanticism comes as the newfound appreciation of the “Norse Woman” as a democratized female figure, thus opening up a subversive space for dialogue in women’s writing using the Gothic aesthetic. Robert Miles provides a theoretical mechanism for the Gothic aesthetic as a carnivalesque, dialogic mode that uses the subversion in power/knowledge to create a space for discourse. I provide analysis of three Gothic poems written by women writers through Miles’ lens: Anna Seward’s “Herva at the Tomb of Argantyr,” Anne Bannerman’s “The Nun,” and Ann Radcliffe’s “Salisbury Plains. Stonehenge.” In addition, I will supplement this theoretical reading with three philosophical essays on the empowerment of the imagination through terror writing in Anna Letitia Aikin (Barbauld) and John Aikin’s “On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror” and “On Romances” as well as Ann Radcliffe’s “On Supernatural Poetry.”

## **II. Defining Norse Romanticism**

Admittedly, the topic I have undertaken for this research project is relatively unknown, but research into this field reveals much more material than seems initially

available, likely because the lack of widespread critical attention has not yet led to a more synthesized collection of scholarship on Norse receptions in British literature. Because of this, the majority of the sources in this project are primary sources, with some interdisciplinary supplemental texts that help to create a larger picture of what kinds of issues in the cultural arena are bringing these Norse representations to light. In an attempt to create a more organized trajectory, it seems most beneficial to situate this subject historically, examining the scattered scholarship available thus far, and then making necessary critical assertions about some of the specific texts being produced within this environment, specifically in the British Romantic Age.

Thomas Percy's *Five Pieces of Runic Poetry* (1765) is the first collection of Norse poetry in translation in English, and it becomes a source of reference for several eighteenth and nineteenth century writers. In the preface of this text, Percy not only uses the term "Gothic" to describe ethnic qualities of the writing, thus ascribing location to the Gothic style, but also appropriates Norse poetry as part of England's national heritage because of the linguistic connections between shared Germanic origins (Rix, Norse Romanticism). Percy's work sparked a new interest in Norse themes, and a number of translations followed. In 1770, Percy published an English translation of Paul Henri Mallet's *Northern Antiquities* where he corrects Mallet's conflation of Celtic druidism and Nordic paganism in his edition of the work, but not before it led to a large enough misunderstanding that it appears in literature during the period (ibid).

Mallet's *Northern Antiquities* results from a national project in Denmark where he realized that "the pagan background of Denmark warranted its own treatment" (Jochens 235). This work, published in French to acquire more widespread readership, surveyed

the common pagan history of the Nordic countries and followed with a volume of Old Norse translations and illustrations (ibid). It is also from Mallet's text that the "liberty and equality of Germanic-Scandinavian women continued to thrive among French intellectuals" (237). In seeking to dispel the cultural stereotypes that the Scandinavians were primitive and boorish, Mallet "with a bold but completely unsupported hypothesis," creates the idea that the pagan God Odin and his men escaped the sacking of Troy and established a new culture of classical learning in Ancient Northern Europe, and men like Percy and Thomas Wharton continued to construct it (Ross 43).

Margaret Clunies Ross, a medievalist specializing in Old Norse, including its eighteenth century translations, provides greater clarity to Percy's *Five Pieces of Runic Poetry* by re-publishing it in 2001, adding more historical context to the project and illuminating some of the nuances in translation. Eighteenth century translators were often translating the Icelandic sagas and eddas from Latin into modern English, and the limitations of doing so sometimes affected the meanings, which accounts for variations in eighteenth century writings of the topic and added to some of the confusion around Celtic and Nordic pagan practices.

In *The Norse Muse in Britain*, a book resulting from a larger international research project on "The Norse Muse," Ross analyzes eighteenth century poetic theories about ancient poetry and Norse translations in the works of British writers such as Thomas Gray, Thomas Percy, William Herbert, and James Johnstone. She details public enthusiasm over Norse poetry and pagan myth by reviewing a number of artistic and literary works and their reception in contemporary literary circles and associated periodicals. Ross examines Norse-themed artwork by the likes of Blake, Fuseli, and



Romney, adding the realm of visual media to the discussion that had neither been critically examined by this lens before nor since. Her analyses, though, are restricted to an aesthetic fixation on the sublime, arguing that these works are direct responses to the aesthetic of terror represented in the Burkean theory of the sublime. She also mentions Anna Seward's "Herva" poem and claims that it is a feminist version of the original myth, though she does not provide a close reading to explain how or why, nor does she mention any other women writers using the same motifs.

Margaret Omberg and Robert Rix are two other modern scholars who have published on this Gothic revival. Omberg's dissertation from the University of Uppsala (1976) acts as a sort of survey of Scandinavian influence in the eighteenth century with added critical attention to the appropriation of Scandinavian themes and imagery. She credits James MacPherson's *Ossian* as having sparked the interest in a period of heightened national interest in the non-classical past, though *Ossian* locates a Gaelic origin. Like Ross, Omberg discusses Mallet, Percy, and MacPherson's works in translation, all of which were used as Old Norse reference points to eighteenth century writers. Omberg also connects the ethnic "Gothic" with the cult of the sublime, liberty and chivalry, and the original (primitive) poetic genius, explaining their significance to the cultural climate of the Romantic Movement. She discusses the Scandinavian influence on Coleridge, Scott, Southey, Blake, and Wordsworth, but mentions no women writers of the same period. Omberg concludes with the decline of interest in the North in the early nineteenth century and the multitude of criticism surrounding it, but she does not account for its continued use despite this criticism in the nineteenth century and

through the Victorian age. Omberg provides a solid foundation, but she leaves room for new additions to the research.

In “Romancing Scandinavia: relocating chivalry and romance in eighteenth-century Britain” Robert Rix examines the development of the eighteenth century theory that metrical tales of chivalry originated with Nordic scalds (court poets) and influenced Anglo-Saxon culture. Rix argues that this theory emerged as a result of a perceived need to develop a vernacular canon in an effort to orient English heritage nationalistically. He notes that this practice placed England at a point closer to European literary progress and that it was dependent on Gothic inheritances, which again renders the movement to a non-classical heritage. He credits Thomas Percy and Thomas Wharton as the main proponents of the theory, though their ideas somewhat differed.

In “Thomas Percy's Antiquarian Alternative to *Ossian*” Rix posits that Percy’s Norse anthology paired with his *Relics of Ancient English Poetry* were conceived as part of the same national project and in direct response to James MacPherson’s *Ossian*. Rix also points out that since *Beowulf* had yet to be discovered, Percy was arguing that the Norse odes were similar to how Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry would have been written. Rix further argues that the text-based manuscripts were Percy’s counter response to the seemingly dubious accounts of oral history in *Ossian*. This reveals national ethnic competition within the British region and provides peculiar differences in the poetic pieces produced by women writers, who after survey, appear to have been generally more inclusive of a variety of national British cultures.

In “Gothic Gothicism: Norse Terror in the Late Eighteenth to Early Nineteenth Centuries” Rix addresses the lack of critical work in the field of Old Norse traditions as a

subspecies of terror writing. He, like Omberg, briefly surveys the use of Gothic/Norse terror in English writing starting in the 1760s into the early nineteenth century, explaining the paradoxical practice of both “othering” the Gothic by its foreignness while simultaneously appropriating it as part of England’s own cultural past. Rix’s intention is to “complicate the map of Gothic Literature” by showing the way heroic masculinity used in Gothic terror provided a more “wholesome” kind of terror (2). He explains the way political discourse used a Gothic past to exemplify heroic power against despotic rule. Rix also fleshes out some of the ethnic inconsistencies that came about because of mistranslations like the Celtic and Nordic traditions being conflated and yet also used against each other by critics making racial or religious diatribes.

Near the beginning of my research, in April 2012, Rix edited an anthology for *Romantic Circles* entitled, “Norse Romanticism: Themes in British Literature, 1760-1830.” It includes Norse-themed works from twenty-one canonical and lesser known British writers, all men with the exceptions of Anna Seward and Ann Radcliffe. Rix’s intention is to show a geographical fascination with the North that has not seen the same critical attention as the fascination with the East. Rix notes that the works included in the anthology:

generally lack the contextual framework, commentaries, and annotations which are needed to give meaning to their use of Scandinavian material... Their writings (in most cases not available in modern editions) are interesting in their own right for the success they enjoyed at the time; but they also help to reconnect the poems of the major Romantic figures with their original literary context. (Rix, Norse Romanticism)

Barret Kalter published a piece called “DIY Gothic,” complementing the work done by Rix, Omberg, and Ross while also providing in-depth insight into Thomas Gray, one of the first male poets to work in the Norse Gothic. Kalter discusses the Gothic in its

aesthetic representation in material culture and architecture, its literary manifestations, and its national/ethnic implications as determined by Thomas Gray. Kalter makes similar observations about the Romantic nostalgia tied to the Gothic in the face of modernism as Ross, Rix, and Omberg. However, Kalter argues that Gray used this as a way to reinvent rather than just recollect English cultural heritage and did so in strict opposition to a classical past. Kalter, like Omberg, notes the political associations in Gothic works of liberty and disorder. What emerges here is the idea that the Gothic opens up a space for new, possibly transgressive discourse. Kalter also claims that Gray makes a clear distinction between gendered pasts: Gothic Middle Ages as masculine and Greek antiquity as feminine. Rix too, discusses this heroic masculinity in his “Gothic Gothicism” article, and the gender dichotomy provides a new point of dialogue when examining other works, especially the readings of Norse legends by women writers.

While Ross and Omberg provide surveys of Scandinavian influence on British Romantics, both lack solid critical scholarship on women writers of the age who were using the same Nordic styles, themes, and tropes as the men. In addition to poetic works, Anna Letitia Aikin (Barbauld) and John Aikin co-authored two critical pieces in 1773 dealing with the Gothic sublime, one called “On Romances” and the other “On Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror.” In “Pleasure” they posit that tragedy is the most favored form of fiction, precisely because of human nature’s propensity for “devouring” tales of the supernatural, shipwrecks, murders, and other grisly subjects (Aikin and Aikin, “From Pleasure”). They conflate the Gothic Romance and Tales of the East as having a powerful influence over the mind, regardless of critics who dismiss them, because of the “genii, giants, enchantments, and transformations” that take place in the stories (ibid). What is

most beneficial about this piece is not only that a woman is engaging critically with the theory of the sublime, but also that the Gothic and the East are brought together as foreign entities, exoticizing an ethnic element to the subject. In “Romances” they argue that fictive creation is of the most superior genius because of the “enchanted” effect it has on such a wide range of people, luring them all into the “fairy land of fiction” (Aikin and Aikin, “On Romances”). The Aikins conclude that this passion and curiosity that drives the horrible in the imagination is what “teach[es] us to think,” because it keeps a free-flowing set of transgressive ideas in view (ibid). This conclusion speaks volumes to the way the Gothic tradition allows for alternative discourse and, as I argue, is the reason so many women of the age wrote in the Gothic style when it was so difficult for them to have a public voice.

A number of women were writing in the styles suggested by the Aikins, and their Norse themes generally fall into two types of representation. The first is the actual re-creation of Gothic moments with terror writing, often utilizing pagan mythological beings and the horrors of battles, death, and/or gore. The second is the sublime representation of Nordic landscapes and seemingly phantasmagorical spaces in nature. Sometimes both of these uses will appear in the same work and often operate in similar ways. Some of the women writers working in this space, though there are others, are Anna Seward, Ann Radcliffe, and Anne Bannerman, all of whose Norse poems have yet to be critically analyzed until now.

During this time when English translators were bringing Norse heritage to public view, publications in travel writing also showed an increased interest in Scandinavia. While this moves away from the more literary representations of the subject, these travel

pieces reflect new literal and physical engagement with Scandinavian culture, nature, and society. In tandem with the appropriation of Norse literature, these interactions reveal and contextualize social and political spheres that are changing. Arnold H. Barton's article "Iter Scandinavicum" does not strictly deal with Norse paganism nor medieval Norse influence, but it traces a number of travelers' accounts to the Northern countries in the eighteenth century, including Mary Wollstonecraft's. The accounts show, as Barton notes, that the Nordic lands were revered for their sublime and picturesque beauty comparable to the Alps encountered by many on the Grand Tour. Contrarily, the North is associated with wildness and barbarism rather than the culture of classicism, which again, suggests a move towards acknowledging non-classical sentiments. Additionally, travelers frequently make comparisons between the North and their own countries, and share an appreciation for the lasting folk traditions in rural Scandinavia. Barton notes that travelers were usually somewhat outcast from their home nations, traveling to the North to experience what they deemed the last unspoiled idyll. Based on Barton's analysis, this adds a new dynamic to nationalist movements involved in the Nordic resurgence in Britain—that they may have been visiting and writing in a moment of cultural identity crisis to identify with an untainted past un-fraught with revolution.

One of the most influential British women of the Romantic age, Mary Wollstonecraft, also made a Scandinavian voyage. Wollstonecraft's epistolary travelogue of her trip to Scandinavia reveals a woman who is well versed in the Burkean theory of the sublime and Gilpin's picturesque. She frequently describes the landscape in this manner and often institutes elements of what seem nearly supernatural and otherworldly about her surroundings, sometimes imposing direct references to pagan mythical figures.

She makes sweeping and sometimes narrow comparisons between the perceived barbarism of the North and the cultured manners of the French, but she further details the many similarities and differences between Denmark, Sweden, and Norway often praising the level of liberty she sees as being greater than in England. She expresses an affinity for the rural folk, and she brings to light the way women in some areas are treated as second-class. Some of her commentary is openly critical of the English system, and other times she seems to be making comparisons between close-but-foreign neighbors that reflect as much about England as they do about Scandinavia.

To further situate this historically and culturally, this resurgence in Nordic themes created a new enthusiasm in Scandinavian political dealings as it related to English interests. Norse allure becomes a physically manifesting catalyst. Anna Agnarsdóttir's "Iceland under British Protection During the Napoleonic Wars," explains Iceland's position between Danish dependency and British imperialist rule during Napoleon's military campaigns. In 1810, British King George III claimed all North Atlantic dependencies between Denmark and Norway to be under British protection after consulting Englishman Joseph Banks, who became the go-to expert on Iceland and a pivotal figure in Anglo-Icelandic dealings after a prolonged stay on the island in the 1770s (257). Most noteworthy is that Banks cites the Icelanders' glorious past of sailing and exploring as a primary reason for political interference, having read the sagas from friends in Iceland (262). He believed they had been crushed by Danish rule and that they could be re-glorified by British governance and provide great sea-faring contributions to the Royal Navy (263). Though there are many economic and trade relations discussed in this piece, it becomes apparent that political dealings were highly influenced by national

identity, and Banks' affinity for Iceland's heroic past led him to seek an imperialist influence over their country, a Nordic appropriation of the most literal sense.

### **III. The Creation of the Norse Woman**

While there is very little scholarship on Norse receptions, let alone the women writers or their female images, Jenny Jochens' *Old Norse Images of Women* provides a detailed historical view of the image of the "Norse woman" spanning from its first appearance in Old Norse literature to modern depictions. Jochens argues that the conception of the valkyrie, the woman warrior, and the woman avenger figures are the result of fantastic and imaginary creations (210). As mentioned in Section I, Mallet's *Northern Antiquities* was largely based on untested hypotheses about Old Norse culture and life, and Jochens argues that "the nature of the nordic independent woman appears to have first surfaced" in Mallet's works (235). Mallet argued that in the Northern culture, women were not perceived to be objects possessed for male pleasure, but rather "to be their equals and companions" (236). With these views in mind, it is easy to see why, as Margaret Clunies Ross and Lars Lönnroth note in "The Norse Muse" research report, there is ample evidence showing Norse themes as popular topics among female writers in the Romantic era (16). In light of the push for constructing a national Northern identity, appropriating a Nordic past as ancestral heritage, and in the growing discussion about social equality, there are few better figures for concerned women to explore than the independent women of their newfound history.

While Jochens' placement of the creation of the Norse woman helps to define a new movement among Romantic writers working with this figure, Jochens argues that the image is always a subject of the male gaze, even in Old Norse literature, because "most



strong women are images constructed by male imagination” (214). While this may be the case in Old Norse literature, Jochens fails to account for the number of strong women figures that are created at the hands of women during the resurgence of Norse imagery in eighteenth and nineteenth century Britain. When a woman warrior or avenger is created by a woman, it complicates the claim that this figure is merely a sexualized object, existing solely in the sphere of male fantasy and disregards any agency she may have in its conception. This complication is precisely what I explore in the poems by Seward, Bannerman, and Radcliffe.

## THEORIZING THE GOTHIC

### I. Historicizing and Gothicizing the Gothic

In the realm of Gothic Studies, there is no consensus on how to categorize the “Gothic,” and various critics identify it as a genre, a sub-genre, a literary mode, an aesthetic, a thematic motif, an emerging theory in its own right, or a combination of two or more of those designations. Additionally, with the rise of the term “female Gothic” in the 1970s, the conception of a female Gothic space continues to evolve with the changing waves of feminism and thusly the way we read Gothic texts, deemed so by equally ambiguous measures (Miles 7). Though this presents some challenges in defining a Gothic space with precision, the mode that presents itself most prevalently among the women writers in this research is the theoretical Gothic aesthetic conceived by Robert Miles, not only because the texts themselves seem to operate in this way, but also because there is evidence of this same approach in the eighteenth century theoretical and philosophical texts on this topic, some of which are written at least in part by women.

In order to clarify the theoretical mechanism by which this operates, it is important to dissect the integral parts and explain their functionality. Miles depicts the Gothic as a discursive space that allows transgressive discourse through the Bakhtinian carnivalesque and dialogic nature of the form and the concepts of both genealogy and the power/knowledge of discourse derived from Foucault. Miles acknowledges:

that before one can theorize the Gothic as a response to a ‘gap in the social subject’ one needs to recoup the Gothic’s contemporaneous meanings, itself a theoretical task. But this is only to say that the route through to a deeper understanding of Gothic’s cultural meanings is a literary historical one; and if that ‘route’ is to lead anywhere, it must be theoretically sensitive. (4)

While he defines the Gothic as an aesthetic, it is an aesthetic that is theoretically charged. It is also important to note that Miles uses the term “historical” with literary specificity, “we encounter the vicissitudes, not of events, but of discourse...occurring in the highly mediated form of literary expression” (5).

Miles argues that the Gothic is carnivalesque because of how the “generic multiplicity...and what one might call its discursive primacy, effectively detach the Gothic from the tidy simplicity of thinking of it as so many predictable, fictional conventions” (4). There is ambiguous fluidity in the term “Gothic,” but this is also the nature of the Gothic text. Miles further suggests that the concept of “‘genealogy’ alerts us to an inherently ‘carnavalesque’ quality of ‘popular’ writing, writing growing out of ‘ideological’ and/or ‘discursive’ material” (5). Bakhtin’s dialogic appears in “moments of upheaval [that] suggest challenged authority,” and further “in the dialogic space of the Gothic suppressed voices find a hearing” (6). As when Miles uses the term “historical” with specific modification, he acknowledges that these Bakhtinian concepts are equally modified: “one encounters, not contending ‘voices,’ but contending ‘discourses’” (ibid). Miles identifies these discourses as “national origin, the sublime, genius, vision, reverie, a congeries tied together by a pedagogic concern for the self and its integrity” (ibid).

With the presence of discourse, the theory moves into Foucauldian territory. In the discussion of sexuality and gender, Miles contends with the term “female Gothic,” arguing that there then must be a “male Gothic,” designating not only the sex of the writer but also arguing that “at the same time the textual differences that validate these coinages are discursive structures, precipitates of culture” (8). Miles identifies these moments of gender “cross-over” where “female writers mount interventions in the male

Gothic, or vice versa, or when female writers hold up to scrutiny the conventions of ‘female gothic’ itself, or male writers ‘male Gothic’” (ibid). It is in this particular space where the majority of my analysis dwells—in these moments where Romantic women writers cross-over into seemingly male Gothic conventions.

Miles argues that

Foucault’s genealogy is the antithesis of the word’s conventional meaning, history, not as a neat line of hegemonic descent, but as ‘carnival.’ Yet the Gothic aesthetic incorporates conventional ‘genealogy.’ The nation’s most prized characteristics—patriotism, a love of liberty, respect for women, the English genius for constitutional monarchy—are traced back to our Germanic, or Gothic, origins. (ibid)

I will add to this paradox the fact that in the eighteenth century, the “Gothic” as an ethnic ancestry is largely a construction, perpetuated by Mallet and his contemporaries, as addressed in Chapter 1. These most prized characteristics are largely imaginary. It is in this way that genealogy, as defined here by Miles, becomes carnivalesque and dialogic, offering discursive possibilities. Miles further notes that genealogy, as defined by Foucault, can never be singular because it “must begin with the discourses that in some sense precede the writing,” and yet it will not “content itself, arbitrarily, with the fate of a single genre” (9). The web of multiplicities becomes even greater when genealogy is paired with the Gothic: “No ‘single dialectic’ includes all Gothic writing, and no single ‘genealogy: there are only supplementary readings” (ibid).

Finally, in attempting to gain a historical grasp on the Gothic, Miles incorporates Foucault’s theory of discourse “as technologies of power based on systems of knowing” even though “Foucault’s theory repudiates the notion of a ‘gap’ by knowing out wholesale the language of the unitary self” (11). Miles addresses this seeming conflict by asserting that “Gothic writing is dialogic writing with a difference” (12). He incorporates

Foucault's notion that discourses are not only producers and transmitters of power, but that they also expose its fragility and undermine that power: "As Gothic writing touches upon the sensitive and sensitized joints in the representation of the self, so it assumes the duplicitous character of Foucault's discourse which simultaneously supports and renders fragile, backs and thwarts, power" (12-13). As Miles notes, the aesthetic of the Gothic is "ideologically charged," initiated by nostalgia, in a renewed interest in antiquarian origins that is "predicated on loss" (31). Miles accounts for the many nuances present in the Gothic—it's ancestral/cultural heritage, literary conventions, and aesthetics—and argues that "Gothic writing does not absorb [them] as it finds them. They are, rather, mediated, and as a result, always on edge, with the 'hazardous play of domination' verging on turning, on giving way to an opposing strategy" (32). It is precisely in these moments of turning, in the hazardous play of domination, that I analyze the subversive discourse present in Romantic women writers using Gothic spaces and imagery.

## **II. The Aesthetic of Gothic Terror**

In 1773, Anna Letitia Aikin (Barbauld) and John Aikin published two essays in *Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose* that directly engage with the imagination as a space for discourse: "On Romances" and "On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror, with Sir Bertrand, a Fragment." In "Romances," the Aikins posit that it is in "the writer of fiction alone, that every ear is open, and every tongue lavish of applause" (Aikin and Aikin, "On Romances"). They argue that "it is however easy to account for this enchantment" because "the gloom of solitude, the languor of inaction, the corrosions of disappointment, and the toil of thought, induce men to step aside from the rugged road of life, and wander in the fairy land of fiction" (ibid). In this sense, fiction is inherently

enchanting and escapist. The Aikins continue to catalog some of the various hypotheses accounting for the nature of fancy and the paradox of deriving pleasure from that which should cause terror. While they do not offer their own distinct reading of this sublime paradox, they end the essay with the insistence that fictions created to “please the imagination, and interest the heart” not be devalued because “they teach us to think, by inuring us to feel: they ventilate the mind by sudden gusts of passion; and prevent the stagnation of thought, by a fresh infusion of dissimilar ideas” (ibid). This final sentiment is exactly the kind of dialogic space the Gothic allows in its ability to subvert the verisimilitude in fiction and is thus a perfect vehicle for marginalized voices to shed light on their position.

In “Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror,” the Aikins continue the discussion seen in “Romances,” beginning with another explanation on the paradox of the heart to passionately “dwell on objects of pure terror, where our moral feelings are not in the least concerned” (Aikin and Aikin, “From Pleasure”). The Aikins argue that tragedy, “the most favorite work of fiction,” derives its inspiration from terror (ibid). The Aikins offer Norse images specifically as subjects for terror:

The old Gothic romance and the Eastern tale, with their genii, giants, enchantments, and transformations, however a refined critic may censure them as absurd and extravagant, will ever retain a most power influence on the mind, and interest the reader independently of all peculiarity of taste. (ibid)

The Aikins go to greater lengths to discuss the hypotheses around the psychological responses to images of terror stating dissatisfaction with current solutions “to the well-wrought scenes of artificial terror which are formed by a sublime and vigorous imagination” (ibid). The Aikins provide their own theory for the paradox:

This is the pleasure constantly attached to the excitement of surprise from new and wonderful objects. A strange and unexpected event awakens the mind, and keeps it on the stretch; and where the agency of invisible beings is introduced, of “forms unseen, and mightier far than we,” our imagination, darting forth, explores with rapture the new world which is laid open to its view, and rejoices in the expansion of its powers. (ibid)

In other words, the experience of terror writing provides the sublime traversal of alternate worlds, allowing for new discourse and subversions that, as the Aikins note in “Romances,” teach us to think.

Radcliffe’s posthumously published essay “On the Supernatural in Poetry” (1826) makes a clear distinction between terror and horror presented as a dialogue between two travelers. “Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them” (150). Radcliffe’s definition of terror, which she also attributes to the effect of Burke’s sublime, aligns itself well with the Aikins’ piece and the conception of the Gothic as a carnivalesque, dialogic space in that there is an awakening of the mind that offers a chance at exploring a new world or experience. Radcliffe also posits, “if obscurity has so much effect on fiction, what must it have in real life, when to ascertain the object of our terror, is frequently to acquire the means of escaping it. You will observe, that this image, though indistinct or obscure, is not confused” (ibid). Gothic terror then, according to Radcliffe, allows the imagination to identify the source of terror and find a means of liberating oneself from its grasp. Indeed it is through the escape of fiction that liberation can be had by means of whatever one decides to create.

### **III. Contextualizing the Gothic**

As I show, the women writers addressed here are partial products and producers of their respective society, participating in discourse that reveals the issues of the age,

partially outlined in Chapter 1. The late-eighteenth century is notoriously associated with revolution and the turn to modernism, and is an age rife with political and social manifestos, changes in power structures, and the inevitable conflicts that ensue. Women's equality is just one of the issues to arise, most notably in Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, published in 1792, and in the Bluestockings movement still flourishing in this period, of which Anna Seward and Anna Letitia Barbauld were members (Miegon 25; Rix, "Gothic Gothicism" 10).



## ANNA SEWARD'S WOMAN WARRIOR

### I. Introduction

“Herva at the Tomb of Argantyr” is based on an old Northern legend from a thirteenth-century text called *The Saga of Hervor and King Heidrek*, and it comprises a dialogue between Herva and her father over a magic sword (Tyrfing), which is also cursed (Rix, Norse Romanticism). In the preface to the poem, Seward states that her version is a “bold Paraphrase, not a Translation” to Dr. Hick’s literal translation in *Thesaurus Septentrionalis* because his prose “have a vulgar familiarity, injurious to the sublimity of the original conception.” Seward greatly expands the original poem in length and places particular emphasis on the discussion of inheritance rights between daughter and father. This poem offers exactly the type of gender “cross-over” that Miles explains as a source of dissonance in the Gothic aesthetic.

### II. “Herva at the Tomb of Argantyr. A Runic Dialogue”

The poem begins with Herva circling the tomb of her dead ancestors, demanding that they rise to give her the sword. The imagery is conventionally Gothic with tombs, graveyards, and ghosts tangled in a dark, unruly forest.

ARGANTYR, wake!—to thee I call,  
Hear from thy dark sepulchral hall!  
Mid the forest’s inmost gloom,  
Thy daughter, circling thrice thy tomb,  
With mystic rites of thrilling power  
Disturbs thee at this midnight hour!  
I, thy Saufferlama’s child,  
Of my filial right beguil’d,  
Now adjure thee to resign.  
The charmed Sword by birth-right mine! (ll. 1-10)

This is already a rather carnivalesque setting given that women were not granted familial inheritance rights from their fathers in Seward’s contemporary society. The

conditions of the Gothic, and the belief that women had equal agency in Old Norse culture, allow the opportunity to experiment with that equality transposed in material for an eighteenth century reading public.

Herva's ancestors do not rise up from the grave, so she continues to demand their appearance, shouting the details of her familial line that connect her as the sword's recipient. She begins casting spells and incantations, eventually threatening them.

Spirits of a dauntless race,  
In armour clad, your tombs I trace.  
Now, with sharp and blood-stain'd spear,  
Accent shrill, and spell severe,  
I wake you all from slumber mute,  
Beneath the dark oak's twisted root! (ll. 27-32)

Herva takes on a very gender ambiguous role for the time, standing in armor—a role traditionally reserved for male knights—and wielding a spear that is not only sharpened and ready for battle but that is already bearing the blood of one she's fought and possibly killed. She positions herself as solitarily ready to engage in combat against the ghosts of her ancestors and father over her rights. While the image of a female knight is not unheard of in English literature (Spenser's Britomart, for example) Herva certainly complicates the role as a female knight pushing against patriarchal authority.

With no response, she begins calling each of her ancestors by name, cursing their forms with “ghastly” decay to become the prey of reptiles if they do not allow her to have the sword (l. 47). Her father, Argantyr, finally rises. He chides her for her unfriendly voice and warns against using such incantations because of the unintentional “mischiefs of the Runic Rhyme” (ll. 56). He tells her that the sword fell from his “unwary grasp” during battle and was seized by a knight (l. 69). She knows this is untrue and says:

Warrior, thus, with falsehood wild,

Seek'st thou to deceive thy child?—  
Sure as Odin doom'd thy fall,  
And hides thee in this silent hall,  
Here sleeps the Sword.—Pale chief, resign  
That, which is by bright mine!  
Fears't thou, spirit of my sire,  
At thy only child's desire,  
Glorious heritage to yield,  
Conquest in the deathful field? (ll. 75-84)

This response reveals a number of transgressions. Herva continues to stand in opposition to her dead father, not only accusing him of falsehood but also continuing to demand from him what she deems hers, all the while adorned in the bloody accoutrements of battle. She is both demanding and threatening in the non-traditional sense in that she poses no blatant sexual threat. Herva is not sexualized at all, and in fact, is revealed to be a virgin maid. She bears the threat of bodily harm and the danger of uprooting the patriarchal power structure, wielding weapons and standing courageously alone prepared for and offering physical conflict. Additionally, she expresses the desire to valorize her heritage on the battlefield, an ambition traditionally associated with chivalric knighthood.

Argantyr responds, calling her “Daring Herva,” imploring her to heed his warnings.

Virgin, mark thy boding word,  
Sullen whispered o'er the sword!  
It prophesied Argantyr's foes  
Should rue its prowess;—yet that woes  
Greater far his race should feel,  
Victims of the Cruel Steel,  
When, in blood of millions dyed,  
It arms an ireful fratricide,  
Maid, no erring accents warn;—  
Of sons to thee, hereafter born (ll. 89-98)

The curse of the sword is thus revealed, but it also shows the sort of ambiguous power position Herva poses in negotiating the exchange of the sword. The sword is a

killer of men, and Herva is not a man, so the sword poses no risk to her or her female posterity. Herva, while in possession of the sword, has the ability to completely subvert the patriarchal system. In the extreme scenario—in the carnivalesque version of this power system—all of Herva's male posterity will die, meaning her maternal line will carry on through the marriage of her daughters (whose husbands' male lines will also inevitably be eliminated) while her male descendants will be the new Gothic figures forced to haunt their family tombs as spectral corpses.

Herva is unrelenting, holding steadfast to her original demands.

Argantyr—hear thy daughter's voice,  
Spells decree an only choice!  
Or, in perturbed tomb unblest,  
The silence of sepulchral rest  
Shall no more thy sunk eye steep,  
Close no more thy pallid lip,  
Or, ere this night's shadows melt,  
Mine the Sword, and gorgeous belt (ll. 107-114).

It is not clear if Herva refers to the spell she threatens or the charm of the enchanted sword. Either way, the decree reveals a paradoxical flaw in the system that Seward continues to tease out of the poem. Regardless of whether it is a wise demand, Herva's birthright allows her access to the sword, which has the effect of mortally subjugating her male descendants. This subverts the condition most women experienced in Seward's contemporary situation of remaining subservient in male negotiations at the hands of their fathers, brothers, and husbands, who had the very real power of defining the kinds of lives women experienced both in the home and society. Herva calls on the tradition of inheritance, of birthright, to enact this fate much the same way Seward's contemporaries used inheritance and birthrights to place women in subservient positions.

The sword begins to rise out of Argantyr's tomb and Herva tries to ease his worry by noting how the sword does not harm her. She thirsts the more for battle.

Lo, the Sword, a seeming brand,  
Blazes in thy daughter's hand!  
Nor perishes that hand beneath  
Vaporous flames, that round it wreath,  
...  
Thee I quit for fields of blood!  
Nor would I, on its fateful range,  
This Sword, with all its meteors, change  
For the Norwegian sceptre.—Lo,  
Death, and conquest, wait me now!— (ll. 159-162, 166-170)

Argantyr continues to lament Herva's choice, but she does not listen to him. She performs more spells, aiding in making the ancestral tombs hidden from predators and further decay, allowing the dead to sleep undisturbed by worry over her unborn offspring. Argantyr then calls her "...the source of woes" and claims he may never again see Odin's halls (l. 213). Her dead ancestors begin to gather around her disapprovingly, but she tells them to sleep and then leaves.

Herva's constant refusal to listen to the warnings and lamentations of her male ancestors, the ones who become most affected by her insistence on inheriting her woeful birthright, reveal the same kind of troubling reflection of women's husbands and fathers making decisions on their behalf without consulting or including them. This subverted reflection is precisely what the carnivalesque offers in this poem—the world turned to reveal the unseated self. In these subversions, the discourse is such that the self stares back at the self, and man and woman appear equal.

## ANNE BANNERMAN'S WOMAN SCORNED

### I. Introduction

Bannerman states in the preface to this poem that it is an alteration from the work *Cecile, ou le Sacrifice de l'Amilie* from Madam Genlis's *Theatre of Education, Vol. II*. Bannerman gives the following synopsis and the way in which she has altered the poem, with a didactic move that elicits a sense of foreboding.

To remove the only obstacle to a sister's marriage, Cecilia gives up her patrimony, and retires to take the vows in a convent in Provence; but, previously to her profession, a fortune is left her by a relation. This restores her to the world. In the following pages, the story is so far altered, that the heroine completes her sacrifice. It may be objected, that the regret, and almost intolerable misery, which succeed it, are wholly inconsistent, with a mind capable of such exalted generosity. But, let it be remembered, that, in a moment of enthusiasm, we may do what we will repent for ever. (Bannerman 36)

### II. "The Nun"

The poem begins with typical Gothic imagery, setting a scene of gloom and darkness for the female protagonist:

Yes! It is done; the frightful conflict's o'er;  
And peace is fled,—to visit me no more.  
Immur'd forever in this living tomb,  
How my soul sickens at her hated doom! (ll. 1-4)

The end of this stanza shifts to the reader: "To you I breathe the accents of despair,/ On your deaf ear the tale of sorrow pour,/ Till death shall bring to all my woes—a cure" (ll. 8-10) This meta-literary move to the audience, to Bannerman's reading public, implores them to listen to her tale, asking them to play a role in her discussion. Though the protagonist states that her speech falls on deaf ears, she still speaks, an act that entices one to listen. Bannerman already sets this poem up didactically, which continues the

anxiety over what the poem begs to tell. Bannerman does not specify what the initial sacrifice of patrimony entails, whether it involves a monetary inheritance or a loss of ancestral privilege or something else. At this point, it is not clear what metaphor the nun signifies.

Bannerman continues with more sublime imagery of terror, the nun lamenting her perceived entrapment and her eternal suffering for having made such a sacrifice.

Grim as the grave, before my troubled eyes  
I saw the giant form of terror rise;  
...  
Ye frowning cliffs, whose hoary tops sublime  
For ever mock the ravages of time! (ll. 29-30, 32-34)

She then turns to a figure she calls the “Var,” whom she witnesses on the cliffs (l. 41). She genders this figure male and explains his role as a wanderer constantly braving the elements, but who always has the prospect of returning to society. The nun compares her situation to his and paints her own as the worse.

Weary and faint, at eve, his shivering form  
Sustains the fury of the polar storm;  
...  
No faithful partner, breathless with her fears,  
Welcomes the wand’rer, with a flood of tears,  
To lull his sick’ning spirit to repose,  
Around, horrific, howl his shaggy foes.  
Still fancy dreams, for hope assists her flight,  
Of scenes far distant, of renew’d delight;  
Again, with rapture’s swelling tide oppress’d,  
He clasps his children to his burning breast,  
...  
The pathless desert, lock’d in endless frost,  
The long long prospect of the shipless coast,  
Forgotten all; fair freedom’s magic power  
...  
A few short months to drag the iron chain,  
And triumph leads him to the world again.  
But me, no hope shall soothe, no time release;  
No promised freedom give me back my peace.

Should these dim walls, these galling fetters bind,  
In endless slav'ry, the reluctant mind? (ll. 45-46, 49-56, 59-61, 63-68)

There is much to unpack in this stanza, particularly in the end. It is clear that she genders the wanderer (the “Var”) male and herself female, and it is also clear in her view that where he has freedom, she does not. She places the wanderer outside in deserts of frost and shipless coasts, a solitary man who appears to have an ambiguous relationship with society, but she contrasts that imagery with the entrapping function of the convent walls in which she dwells—where the wanderer is free to roam, the nun is confined to the convent. Likewise, the wanderer has children—which may act as both property and posterity—where the nun has neither. The wanderer also exists out in the world, a place of many societies, cultures, and ideologies, whereas the nun exists in the convent, a social space reserved for females who have taken vows to a very specific religious ideology. At this point, the discursive mode of the Gothic begins to appear. Not only are there the conventional motifs of the gloomy, terrible, sublime but Bannerman has created a meta-literary discussion in addressing the reader directly and placing metaphorical contrasts in direct view. Indeed when the nun speaks of the wanderer, she is not directing her speech at the wanderer but rather at the reader. Bannerman’s next two lines are a commentary on voices of dissent, situating them paradoxically to the notion that reluctant minds endure slavery: “No! Heaven’s immortal light shall shine on those,/ Whose lips ne’er utter what their hearts oppose;” (ll. 69-70). For the nun, there is no freedom in speech; to speak of what “her heart opposes” is to damn herself and yet to not speak is to exist in “endless slavery.”

The nun continues lamenting her state and the unjust guiltless piety of the silent before calling on her conscience to bring distraction from despair.



To yonder distant wood of shadowy pine;  
When peace, and health, and liberty, were mine,  
Oft have I wander'd, pensive, to behold  
The sun departing tinge the clouds with gold: (ll. 83-86)

The nun returns to a nostalgic memory, whether it is one she actually experienced or an earlier time in history is unclear, but she notes the sense of loss either way. For the moment, she too, can be the wanderer—traversing through a metaphorical location. She then describes how her soul, “unconscious of her earthly frame,” expresses a longing for this “fancy” and watches the sun stoop below the trees: “I see the groves in all their beauty shine; They charm no more,—but, ah! The change is mine” (ll. 89, 97-98). This moment reflects back to a key aspect of the Gothic aesthetic: “Nostalgia is a recognition of difference (the past as irretrievable) married to an insistence on sameness (the past, we hope, what we still really *are*)” (Miles 31). As Bannerman shows here in a subversive way, sometimes the past presents troubling versions of who we are *now*.

The nun leaves the memory and begins a conversation seemingly to and about her sister, for whom she appears to have made this sacrifice.

To save whose peace, I gave my own away,  
And chas'd from life each pleasurable ray!  
Could thy fond eye this midnight cell explore,  
These walls re-echoing to the torrent's roar;  
How wouldst thou mourn, that, yielding to my pray'r,  
Thou gav'st thy sister to eternal care!  
—Methinks I hear thee at my fate rejoice,  
And bless the quiet of my hallow'd choice.  
And be it so!—How can I thus repine,  
While peace, and ease, and liberty, are thine? (ll. 101-110)

Bannerman does not indicate to what extent she digresses from the original text of this story, only that it is “so far changed,” and with the images of the convent the notion of “sisters” becomes, in typical Gothic fashion, ambiguous. Bannerman’s call to the

reader and lengthy discussion on liberties and freedom, suggest there is more to analyze than the woes of a lamenting nun, that there is subversive dialogue in play. With this in mind, there is a sisterhood that can be claimed in a shared ideological view of social equality among women—in recognizing one’s own plight in another’s. With the previous discussion on the slavery of the reluctant mind and the abandonment associated with uttering what one’s heart opposes, there appears to be an emergent discourse engaging with the necessity of support for women among women—of a sisterhood of dissenting voices. What emerges from this last stanza is a sacrifice that goes unrealized, which is detrimental to any movement whose cause is furthered by such an act. The nun carries on, throwing her voice to the reader and warning against the pains of unacknowledged sacrifice:

Thine is this cheek, where grief’s untimely tears  
Have worn the furrow of autumnal years:  
Thine is the ceaseless storm, that rends my soul,  
And drives sick reason to distraction’s goal:  
O! Mid the varied woes, that heap thy shrine,  
May none e’er pay an offering like mine!  
...  
Hard is the purchase, and unwise the choice (ll. 129-134, 136)

There is a sense of responsibility emerging from this stanza, a complicit ownership in the effects of the struggle to which we might contribute, and an uncomfortable, tingling sense that any one of “us” can be made susceptible to the same fate.

And Heav’n’s pure breath perfumes the summer gales.  
On me, they blow in vain: No breath divine  
Can charm the horrors of a fate like mine.  
...  
In this dim sepulchre I hide my head;  
The gloom, but not the quiet of the dead:  
And view, for thousands share *my* lot severe,  
How mad the aims of humankind appear! (ll. 146-148, 151-154)

Bannerman offers a severe critique of mankind in this stanza, and it becomes alarming when the light is projected on the thousands of other suffering individuals who share her same fate—either monastic sisters or a metaphor of female society but either way a suffering community of women who, vocal or voiceless, are thus trapped by their respective situation.

The nun continues on for several stanzas, offering rhetorical questions about religion and the price of good deeds, eventually losing her divine vision and finding herself once again sitting in her cell.

—Here, as I sit and weep, unheard, unknown,  
Save while the echoes give me back my moan,  
My weary spirit seeks another scene,  
No bars no chains can interpose between.

The nun sits, failing to be heard, in an eerie foreshadowing of Bannerman's own career. While being critically acclaimed by some prominent men in her literary circle (including Thomas Percy and Sir Walter Scott), Bannerman never reached commercial success, resorting to a career as a governess and eventually dying in debt (Craciun, n.pag). Bannerman's lack of popular readership, and therefore failure to be well heard, is a very real possibility of the reader-silence addressed in this poem.

It is this point in the poem when Bannerman's imagery turns to the North.

Far o'er the bosom of th' Atlantic waves,  
Where fierce, thro' trackless wilds, the tempest raves,  
Unpolished nature, holds her throne sublime,  
And rears the children of her fav'rite clime;  
...  
Alone the savage stands:—His giant soul,  
Indignant, mocks the shadow of control;  
Each softer glow his bosom scorns to own;  
He rests enjoyment on himself alone.  
To hearts less callous, souls of softer form,  
Within the circle of the Arctic storm,

I turn, to Iceland's melancholy shore,  
And sigh, that liberty is mine no more. (ll. 187-190, 197-204).

Here the nun makes an ancestral turn to the days of yore, idealizing the savage with his "giant soul," who is bound to no one. She laments the loss of her own liberty, which she sees as having once been present in a Norse culture to which she feels she belonged. She continues to romanticize the "savage," recounting his seal-hunting, foe-smiting, and bear-marking before claiming: "Hard and laborious tho' his lot may be,/ Still, still, his heart can tell him—he is free!" (ll. 219-220). The nun creates a picture of a time more simple and yet more just. She turns a scathing eye to her own society and its ideologies.

On Europe's plains I rest my wearied eyes;  
Yes! Light celestial gilds the favour'd skies.  
Each finer feeling of the ennobled mind,  
Each thought, by science and by taste refin'd,  
Each purer enterprise, to virtue dear,  
And all the arts of polish'd life, are here.  
Here too, religion rears the mimic tomb,  
And shrouds the suff'rer in a dungeon's gloom;  
Enwrapt in superstition's iron chains,  
...  
Mistrust and guile, in every frightful cell,  
Usurp the place, where piety should dwell (ll. 221-229, 233-234).

The nun sees no solace in religion and paints a picture of a society that seems to sit paradoxically on the edge of advancement and decay. On the surface, it has the appearance of progress, but the institutionalized philosophies contradict it. Bannerman shifts this discussion back into the realm of women and equality.

The pallid Sisters in affliction meet;  
Trembling they kneel the midnight shrine before,  
While tears, in torrents, from their eye-lids pour.  
Are these sad hearts, by hopeless anguish riv'n,  
The welcome incense of approving Heav'n?  
O Power Eternal! While, thine arm sustains  
This ample world, and yonder starry plains;  
Shall man, with impious hand, thy mercy bind,

And rule at pleasure o'er an equal mind (ll. 240-248)

This is the most overt statement in this poem about women's equality in relation to men. The nun sits with the group of "afflicted" sisters, women afflicted equally by their common binding to a patriarchal power—a commonality for most women in this period—and calls directly to God to question the practice. She receives no response. "Meantime, like some sad wreck, by tempests blown,/ Forlorn and desolate, I stand alone" (ll. 263-264). She stands alone, but unlike the "savage" with the "giant soul," she is not liberated.

In the final stanzas, the nun continues to imagine herself as a sinking ship, awaiting death.

The dream is o'er!—within my troubled breast,  
The grasp of pain unlocks the gates of rest.  
I feel, while nature stems the burning tide,  
Thro' every vein the deadly poison glide.  
O Death! What dark and melancholy muse  
Has hung thine altar with unhallow'd yews? (ll. 269-274)

The nun seeks peace in death, harkening back to the first stanza of the poem when she states, "death shall bring to all my woes—a cure" (l. 10). The final stanza does not end with the nun, but rather shifts to the image of a miner picking at recoiling nature, where tyranny's endless call to labor will force the miner to work a job that will end his life, another uncanny foreshadowing into Bannerman's own career as writer.

## ANN RADCLIFFE'S MYTH AND MINSTRELSY

### I. Introduction

Ann Radcliffe is perhaps the most recognizable Gothic writer, though she is typically associated with the novel. This lengthy poem, published posthumously in 1826, “diverges from Radcliffe’s usual formula by not being explained away” (Rix, *Norse Romanticism*). The poem reads almost like a heroic epic, constructing a national myth through Nordic and Celtic confluences to create a mythical history for Stonehenge, one of the most identifiable sites of British heritage even today. Also of note is that “Radcliffe introduces the reader to Norse mythology, which she had evidently come to see as a serviceable source for terror writing” (ibid). The poem reveals a mythopoetic side to Radcliffe that offers a unique dialogue outside of her Gothic novels.

### II. “Salisbury Plains. Stonehenge”

The poem begins with a series of questions from an unknown narrator inquiring about the origins of the stones: “Whose were the hands, that upheaved these stones/And whose was the mind, that willed them reign,/the wonder of ages, simply sublime?” (ll. 1, 5-6). The narrator continues, “the purpose is lost in the midnight of time;/ And shadowy guessings alone remain” (ll. 8-9). The myth of the origin begins here with the narrator producing stanza after stanza of descriptions of the barren, remote land in which Stonehenge resides near the town of Salisbury.

Would you know why this country so desolate lies?  
Why no sound but the tempest’s is heard, as it flies,  
Or the croak of the raven, or bustard’s cries?

...

All this and much more would you know? And why,  
And how, Salisbury spire was built so high,  
As fairies had meant it to prop the sky?

Then listen and watch, and you soon shall hear  
What never till now hath met mortal ear! (ll. 54-56, 64-67)

The narrator begins to tell the story of a Sorcerer, who riding a wolf from the North with a “bridle of serpents held fast by the mouth,” ruled the area of Stonehenge under the command of Hela and Loke, evil Norse deities (l. 81). The Sorcerer is given a spectre-wand and nine-hundred imps to do his bidding, and he commits a number of atrocities—conjuring up sea storms and leaving the shipwrecked to die, lighting towns on fire with thunder bolts, chasing ghosts into Hela’s halls of the dead, and changing the sun into a ball of ice. All of the descriptions are ensconced in sublime imagery, and Radcliffe uses the landscape to help create the terror. Odin watches from above with disapproval, knowing the Wizard derives his power “from the Witch of Death and the Evil Sprite” (l. 117). He tries to intervene by conjuring up a storm in his own likeness, singing a song of peace. The wizard sends the storm over the forest and makes it explode over the trees, rocking them to and fro, the groans of Hela’s horrible children “Fear” and “Pity” rising from all regions. Odin prepares for battle, and a war of the Gods commences. What is notable so far in this poem is that all of the destruction comes through the beings Hela has delegated to act on her behalf. Hela is the only female entity present, and she is the power source upsetting the ways of the world.

Odin calls upon an old Druid who owns the spells of Minstrelsy and Runic Rhyme. Radcliffe cites Mallet’s *Northern Antiquities* as a source text for this work, and it is from here that the Nordic and Celtic conflation derives in the mixing of the Norse and Druidic cultures. Although it is almost an unintentionally accurate rendering of a British heroic myth since both cultures were present on the island that now makes up the Scottish, Irish, English and Welsh domains. The ancient Druid plays a harp and walks quietly into the

forest to follow the sounds. Radcliffe paints the landscape ambiguously, calling attention to the way things sometimes seem to be that which they are not:

Straight in his bower dim shapes were seen  
By the fitful light, that rose within,  
And reddened the dark boughs above,  
And chequered all the shadowy grove,  
And tinged his robe and his beard of snow,  
And waked in his eyes their early glow!  
While, as alternate rose and sunk the gleam,  
The tree itself a bower or cave would seem! (ll. 218-225)

The shapes entrance the Druid and tell him that Odin is “suffering by the sinful Sorcerer’s spell,” that he must hide by the wizard’s cave to charm him (l. 237). The wizard, now called Warwolf, appears to be animal-like, as the Druid must pull one-hundred and forty fangs from the wizard’s upper and lower jaw, the source of his spells, and bury them nine fathoms deep in the earth. The trance wears off and he begins devising a suitable charm. The power structure in this poem is rather convoluted. Both the shapes in the forest and Odin himself have control over the Druid by various powers, and the wizard has power over Odin, but the Druid is expected to overpower the wizard who is controlled by Hela. Hela is the terrifying goddess of the underworld, seated at the helm of this serpentine system of authority.

The Druid makes his way to Warwolf’s cave, and with harp in hand, “hushed to silence every wizard-foe” (l. 308). His trek to the cave is described with scenes of overwhelming cliffs and jagged rocks, snarled flora, and silver moonlight “such as might gleam on buried dead! / And led, as with a harbinger ray, / The Druid’s steps, where the grim Wizard lay” (l. 334-336). The Druid again plays his harp to send the fiends in the forest into slumber, but he leaves it hanging in a tree so the wind may continue to strum the chords and keep the fiends at bay while he enters the cave. It is the Druid’s art, his



minstrelsy, that allows him to traverse through these spaces, much in the same way that Radcliffe's art, her writing, allows her to make traversals into worlds where she can engage discussion and attempt to create new ideas. Just as the harp maintains a power to influence on its own out of the Druid's presence, Radcliffe's art as a writer also possesses the power to influence beyond her supervision. If this power of art was not apparent enough, Radcliffe makes sure to repeat and make bold the line: "**He owned the spell of Minstrelsey!**" (ll. 169, 280).

The Druid stumbles upon the wizard, and the terrible figure is an abhorrent creature surrounded by the sublime image of decay.

Outstretched and grim on his stony bed,  
All ghastly-pale, like a giant dead,  
With eyes half-closed, the Wizard lay,  
His half-shut mouth his fangs display.  
The skin of a dragon unscaled was his shroud;  
...  
All uncurled were the serpents, that bridled his mouth,  
And the black, clotted stains might yet be seen  
Of his yesterday's prey the teeth between (ll. 413-417, 424-426)

The Druid succeeds in pulling all but one of Warwolf's fangs from his mouth. When he tries the last fang, the arm still clutching the spectre-wand rises and waves. The wizard rises up and calls out Hela's name before sinking back into the spell. A wolf lying at the wizard's feet awakes and growls causing the Druid's lamp to go out, and darkness falls. The Druid hears the last sound of his harp play and a red light approaches: "'Twas Hela's self—the mother of wan Fear!" (l. 623). The Druid tries his final spell. Mists and specters rise up around her revealing themselves to be her offspring—Fear, Pain, and Despair:

Hela, as touched by her cold hand,  
Stood, when she saw these shadows rise

To the false summons of her wand,  
Stood, like a wretch, who guilty dies.  
“Ye come uncalled. Why are ye here?”  
“We wait around vast Warwolf’s bier.”  
“Ye come unwelcomed. Hence, away!”  
But Hela saw, with dire dismay,  
Her children would no more obey” (ll. 675-683).

Hela’s posterity disobeys her authority and she sinks back below the earth. This moment in the poem serves as an allegory for the reading experience—for the power of words to affect the reader. Hela’s offspring are called forward to change by the power of the minstrel, and Radcliffe, who is acting as the omnipotent minstrel-poetess, has the same power to drive change in her readership. The minstrel serves a restorative purpose. Through art and ideas, we may unseat the ways of the past.

A more controversial reading of this moment might suggest that the unseating of Hela signifies an unseating of Mary Wollstonecraft, the so-called mother of advocacy for women’s social issues. Wollstonecraft attacks the Gothic as a facet of the cult of sensibility, claiming that it makes women the “creatures of sensation” she finds so enslaving (Miles 46). Wollstonecraft fails to acknowledge the power of the subversive possibilities of the Gothic, a space dominated by women writers, thereby unintentionally reducing it to a literature of lesser value and quite possibly contributing to the plight of Gothic writers like Anne Bannerman, whose critics claimed to “[grow] frustrated with her Gothic poetry’s cultivation of the ‘palpable obscure’” (Craciun, n.pag). Radcliffe admired Wollstonecraft, but perhaps this is Radcliffe’s way of unseating Mother Mary to create a new infusion of thought. Indeed, Keats’ famous epithet was not “Mother Wollstonecraft” but “Mother Radcliffe” (Keats 25).

With the unseating of Hela, light is restored to the cave.

Then the flame of the Druid's lamp returned,  
And as clear as the morning-light it burned,  
And the harp's triumphant sound  
Lightly danced the cavern round,  
And filled the vaulted roof on high,  
With the loud song of truth and joy (ll. 687-692).

The Druid takes Warwolf's fangs and looks for the sign of the burial place. He comes across the oak tree that signifies the spot, commenting on its scars and weathering.

In the centre it stood—a withered oak;  
It's shadow was gone, and its branches broke;  
It's mighty trunk, knotted all round and round,  
And gnarled roots, o'erspreading the ground,  
Were proofs of summers that on it had shone,  
And honours of old from the tempests won,  
In generations all past and gone (ll. 722-728).

The oak tree symbolizes the way history operates. Humankind's history is the collective of scars born by each generation, marks of weathering—of losses and victories—but history is only useful to us when we can analyze it and assign some sort of significance to it. Radcliffe calls specific attention to the oak tree, lingering on that figure for a full eighteen lines. It marks the place where Warwolf's fangs will be buried and provides the landmark for the moment in time when the minstrel changed the course of history and was regaled a hero. Landmarks are indicators of our history. They recall the past and prompt us to think, much like the Aikins' theory on the imagination of terror. These Gothic ruins have the same effect as the Gothic text in transcending one to a time and/or place that is not here. The Druid begins to bury the fangs in circles under the oak tree, chanting runic spells, and finally retreating.

The narrator then implores us to “**Now listen and watch,**” another set of bolded words, as the Druid returns to find the teeth all turned to stones, “standing like daemons

of the night” (l. 764, 798). Again creating the sense that the ruins of history have a sublime effect on the imagination. The narrator continues:

He paused in the midst, and calmly viewed  
Their strange array and their sullen mood.  
High wonder filled his mind, as this he saw.  
And wonder still and reverential awe,  
From age to age, have filled the gazer’s mind,  
With sweet yet melancholy dread combined.  
Stonehenge is the name of the place this day,  
But what more it means no many may say (ll. 805-812).

The ruins and relics of history continue to occupy a space of both past and present, the same way literature and art can remove us to other realms as Radcliffe makes clear with stones of Stonehenge. Relics and ruins are the voices of the past, and the same voices in art and literature that may not have a chance to be heard or understood are never wholly quieted. This poem was published after Radcliffe’s death, and yet here it is being read and thought about. Subversive females voices in Gothic texts act much like their Gothic counterparts in ruins:

Their effort, yet not yet their power, has ceased,  
For, as the ages of the world increased,  
Still with the charm of wonder they have bound  
Whoever stepped in their enchanted ring,  
And when the learned held the truth was found,  
...  
And thus have two thousand ages rolled,  
But the truth till now was never told!  
Unsuspected it lay,  
Closely hid from the day (ll. 823-827, 831-834).

The poem continues through the years of peace that followed the wizard’s reign and through to the contemporary day where the plains are riddled with superstitions that fiendish sprites rise up in the night. The tales and legends suggest the way that though these ruins and relics have the ability to transcend the age, raising the imagination to

higher ground, they also possess the ability to haunt, and history surely has a way of both pleasing and haunting the mind. The narrator also notes that with the last of the Druids dying off (the ones who possessed the power of minstrelsy), the plains are susceptible to the power of evil again. This serves as an allegorical metaphor for the way the poets and thinkers (the minstrels) keep social systems in balance—supplying a “fresh infusion of dissimilar ideas” (Aikin and Aikin, “On Romances”).

## CONCLUSION

Romanticism's dual fervor for both acquiring a national past and engaging with Burke's theory on the sublime, provides the impetus for a northern movement in literary productions. This movement, and the geographical fixation on the North, constitutes the foundation of "Norse Romanticism," where writers appropriated facets of Old Norse cultural heritage and its natural scenery to produce images of liberty, chivalry, and terror. Despite the number of primary works in this sub-field, scholarship on the subject has been minimal, as outlined in Chapter 1. The present scholarship works mostly in terms of identifying Norse Romanticism, citing the usual male poets of the era and how they respond to the foundational English translations of the Norse legends. Researchers identify only two women writing with Norse themes, and none of the primary works of these women are given close analysis until now.

In an effort to provide a glimpse at under-researched primary texts by Romantic women, and also to provide an example of what can be done in this field, I explore the way Norse themes also work in tandem with the Gothic aesthetic, and in particular, the version conceived of by Robert Miles, who identifies it as a subversive space that allows discourse because of the carnivalesque and dialogic attributes of the form. This aesthetic is illustrated in the three Norse poems by Anna Seward, Anne Bannerman, and Ann Radcliffe in Chapters 3, 4, and 5. Old Norse imagery, particularly in the perceived liberty of Old Norse females, and the development of the Gothic literary space provided an ideal mode of creating conversations on subjects where women might not have had much of a platform to lend their own voice.

Clearly, “Norse Romanticism” offers a multitude of research projects that have yet to be discovered and cannot be comprehensively attended to in this endeavor alone. What appears in the research here is that there is not yet a complete consensus on what makes “Norse Romanticism,” but what also appears is that from Percy’s translations to the publication of Thomas Carlyle’s lectures *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, there is a shift in the way Norse imagery is used. By 1840, Carlyle claims that Thomas Gray misconceived of the heart of Norse lore: “The strong Old Norse heart did not go upon theatrical sublimities; they had not time to tremble” (Carlyle 34). Andrew Wawn’s *The Vikings and the Victorians*, is a rather comprehensive study stemming from the same “Norse Muse” research colloquium as Ross and Lönnroth, of Old Norse vikings in Victorian England. However, the images are generally associated with the monarchy and sometimes with the Queen herself being depicted as having descended from Odin (Wawn 7). The nationalism of the Romantic age and the nationalism of the Victorian age diverge on many points, particularly in aesthetics and politics, and there is ample space for discovery in that transition from folk to crown.

Although Anna Seward, Anne Bannerman, and Ann Radcliffe gain critical attention here, there are still a great many pieces of women’s writing left untouched. Bannerman’s “The Genii,” “The Norwegian,” “The Fisherman of Lapland,” and “The Mermaid,” are additions to consider. Felicia Hemans, a prolific Romantic poet sometimes affiliated with Victorian sentiments, wrote several Norse-themed poems: “The Northern Spring,” “Old Norway,” “The Sicilian Captive,” “The Sword and the Tomb,” “Ulla, or the Adjuration,” and “The Valkyriur Song.” With her hybrid Romantic-Victorian dwelling, Hemans may prove to be a key resource in the navigation of this national shift. And many

of her female characters commit suicide, a unique feature on its own. Catherine Grace Godwin's "The Seal Hunters" and Dorothea Primrose Campbell's "Address to Fancy" are additional works to further consider.

Romantic writer Frank Sayers, who was also one of Anna Letitia Barbauld's first students, published three Norse tragedies in his *Dramatic Sketches of the Ancient Northern Mythology*, one of which is included in Rix's 2012 anthology (Chandler, n.pag). Sayers' dramatic work saw publication in several editions, and it was translated and well received outside of England, particularly in Germany (ibid). Sayers may add interesting perspective to Romantic closet drama.

A great deal could be done with Scandinavian travel literature, particularly with Wollstonecraft and Sir Joseph Banks. Wollstonecraft's Scandinavian travelogue has seen considerable scholarship in comparison to Banks, but it has not been exhaustive. Banks, who did not actually publish a travelogue, but who was in Iceland in 1772, as noted in Chapter 1, shows up in Uno von Troil's *Letters on Iceland*. Von Troil, the Archbishop of Uppsala, accompanied Banks on his trip to Iceland, and Von Troil uses a great many of Banks' notes and sketches in his travel narrative. This particular piece has been thus far absent from any research I have seen in the Nordic revival and could prove extremely relevant to illuminating Anglo-Nordic political discussions and interactions. Additionally, the travel included geological trips and accounts of natural history, where Banks' crew took scientific samples for later use and could thus prove useful for more scientific or anthropological perspectives.



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