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# Joanna Baillie and the Gothic Body: Reading Extremities in *Orra* and *De Monfort*

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I

One of the very few biographical stories we have of Ann Radcliffe concerns her intense anxiety about being thought the author of the first volume of Joanna Baillie's Plays on the Passions, anonymously published in 1798. This rumor was spread in a letter written by Anna Seward, who claimed not only that Radcliffe was the author of the sensational dramas, but that she had confessed to the fact--"owned" up to it--to her friends. Radcliffe was immensely embarrassed by this story, particularly when it was learned that Baillie was the rightful author, but Radcliffe was simply too tightly controlled, too professionally decorous to contact Baillie directly and explain that she had never made such a statement to anyone. Like one of her gothic heroines, Radcliffe suffered in silence and it was her husband's duty to correct the story only after she died. [#1]

At the time of their publication, Baillie's plays were considered to be works of genius in their sustained and powerful--hyperbolic--fixation on one of several possible human passions--for instance, fear, hate, or love. In their very focus on these intense emotions, however, the plays actually reified the dangers inherent in the extremes of human passion. In other words, by fixing her attention on the passions Baillie actually undercut and deconstructed the emotions as motivating forces for human behavior. Her plays reveal that excessive passions can lead human beings not only to the brink of non-humanity, but to unthinking, irrational, obsessive, even bestial conduct.

In choosing to focus on Baillie's Orra and De Monfort, however, I have opted to explore first one of the most neglected of her gothic dramas, a play that purports to examine the fear of death as its actuating principle, in contrast to what is

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arguably, along with Count Basil, one her best-known and most successful dramas. [#2] Orra is a female gothic drama suffused with tropes of female victimization, a melodrama that positions the very good femininity of the heroine Orra against virtually every evil or ineffectual male in the play. In its presentation of a society in the grip of an extremely hyperbolic gendered warfare, however, Orra represents the dead-end of the gothic universe for women, particularly wealthy and titled women who have lands and properties tied to their very being. But the same fate awaits the noble and titled De Monfort, hero of the second drama and as victimized by his manic emotions as is the female Orra. It has been claimed that Baillie's dramatic universe is much different for women--much darker--than it is for her male characters. [#3] Such, I think, is not the case. Baillie's agenda appears instead to caution both men and women against the dangerous folly of indulging their emotions to excess. As a participant in what Anne Mellor calls the "counter-public female discourse system," Baillie is almost Augustan in her admonitions to her viewers (or, more likely, her closet readers). [#4] What has not been noticed about her work, however, is its fixation on the abjected human body, both female and male. Baillie stares almost obsessively on dead male bodies in De Monfort, while she fixates on the amputated male arm in Basil. The bodily extremities draw her obsessive gaze, while Orra concludes with the female body in hysterics and postures of exaggerated abjection.

Although it has long been commonplace to claim that women's bodies--particularly maternal bodies--are most often presented as the abject overload haunting gothic texts, it is obvious from an examination of just a few of Baillie's plays that she is dealing also with the male body as abject. In fact, uncanny dead/undead male bodies hover over the action and conclusion of De Monfort in a truly bizarre manner. It is not simply phallic mayhem and violence that erupts in her dramas, but also an intense fear of the male body, its inability to be exterminated, its persistence even beyond torture and maiming. Surely the old soldier Geoffrey in Basil does not need to have his wounded, battle-scarred, and armless body described over and over again. And surely the final scenes of De Monfort must impress us as perverse in their fixation on what De Monfort thinks is

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the still moving dead male body of his victim. In short, Baillie presents in her dramas a vision of the indestructible patriarchy, a phallic power that cannot, indeed will not die, that persistently resurrects, that feeds on itself and the legends that it has constructed to prop itself into an endlessly erect posture. Without dwelling any longer than is necessary on that upright member, let me point out that Baillie forces her viewer into an obsessive gaze on the phallus that will not die, while the heroine of each play is forced perpetually to stand witness to the persistent power of the abjected masculine.

First, however, let me summarize some of the most influential theoretical statements on the intersection of abjection with subjectivity made by Julia Kristeva, and adapted by any number of critics on the gothic. Kristeva defines literary abjection by noting:

In a world in which the Other has collapsed, the aesthetic task--a descent into the foundations of the symbolic construct--amounts to retracing the fragile limits of the speaking being, closest to its dawn, to the bottomless 'primacy' constituted by primal repression. Through that experience, which is nevertheless managed by the Other, 'subject' and 'object' push each other away, confront each other, collapse, and start again--inseparable, contaminated, condemned, at the boundary of what is assimilable, thinkable: abject.

[#5]

In Baillie's dramas the "subjects" and "objects" that are pushing against each other and ultimately pushing each other away are men and women. But whereas one might conclude that Baillie would present simply the female as abject, she consistently presents the male as equally if not more abject, almost as if he too has been victimized and destroyed by the patriarchal culture that he himself created. The bodies of women in Baillie's plays are dazzling facades concealing the blankness of their voids, their lack of power, their essential non-existence in the eyes of the patriarchy. Alternately, the bodies of her male characters are attacked, wounded, and finally murdered by a violence originally directed towards others, but which instead veers off and

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attacks the male subject himself.

What are we to make of this persistent pattern? What does it say about Baillie's dramas as part of a discourse system written during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries? The standard response has been to talk about the swirl of violence set off by the French Revolution, and the very extreme cultural anxiety that the Jacobins set off in an England that would have--over the next one hundred years--a bloodless revolution rather than a violent one. Clearly Baillie sensed the dangerous forces within her culture, and her dramas to some extent function as warnings to the populace to avoid excessive--and emotional--reactions to class struggle. But apart from the historical and social issues, there is the personal, and there we can only speculate. Baillie was the sister of a famed medical doctor, a woman who would have been familiar with the workings of actual disease and death. And yet she lingers in her dramas over wounded and dead male bodies, almost as if she were gloating that, yes, they too are mortal. Are we meant to read the dramas as wish-fulfillments, dreams about the gruesome and fantasized destruction of the patriarchy? Or are they something else altogether?

## II

In beginning with the later drama, Orra, I have chosen to focus first on the traditionally feminine abject before moving to what is I think the more interesting development, the presentation of the masculine body as abject, excessive, the residue that cannot be absorbed and yet lingers on the sheets to haunt not only the dramatic personae, but also the viewers of the play.

Let us begin, however, by analyzing the person of Orra--whose name combines the words "aura" and the Spanish word for gold, "oro"--we are presented with the woman as ultimate fetish used and valued solely as an exchange object between

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powerful men. [#6] As an "aura" of femininity, however, she also embodies the ambivalent female body in the gothic universe, while as "ora"--lucre, money--she is the virtual embodiment of the cash/sex nexus by which the patriarchy passes on property and ensures the continuance of its hegemony into the next generation.

Orra begins amidst that most gothic of settings, a castle in Switzerland on the "Borders of the Black Forest in Suabia towards the end of the 14th century." This castle is the unhappy abode of one Hughobert, Count of Aldenberg and father of Glottenbal, one of the most persistently frustrated of Orra's many suitors. Orra, the besieged gothic heroine, is not simply an orphan and the ward of Hughobert; she is in her own right an heiress to numerous land holdings through her dead Aldenburg father. The men who swirl around Orra are all frustrated--rejected, and vaguely incestuous--suitors for her hand: Glottenbal; Theobald of Falkenstein, "a Nobleman of reduced Fortune"; Rudigere, "a Bastard of a Branch of the Family of Aldenberg," and Hartman, Theobald's ally. But orchestrating the melodrama here is the patriarch, Hughobert, who is doubled by an outlaw chief named Franko. These two communities--the castle and the outlaw cave--mirror each other in their attempted appropriation of women as exchange objects. The fact that Orra is unable to be assimilated into either community, however, stands as Baillie's ironic comment on the objectification and dehumanization of women in the gothic universe. Women are literally the abject, the excess, the embodiments of the residual and left over, that which cannot be assimilated into the various worlds that men have created for themselves.

The drama's action begins, however, when Hughobert decides to exile Orra to an even more deserted castle until she agrees to marry his son Glottenbal. Her refusal to accept this forced marriage precipitates the various crises that occur as she attempts to flee the designs of her keeper, the odious Rudigere, who thinks that rape will either force the lady's hand or win the lady's heart where reason and his own personal charms have failed. Surrounded by extreme embodiments of "protective" masculinity run amock, Orra is also protected by a series of women who are supposedly "attending" to her, but are actually

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betraying her into the sweaty hands of Rudigere. In this atmosphere of lateral gender treachery, as well as manic and hyperbolic emotions wrought to a veritable fever-pitch, Orra hears the family beating narrative of the gothic hunter-knight. According to this legend, Orra's ancestor Count Hugo murdered a hunter of the Black Forest, also a noble knight, whose ghost haunts the castle every year on St. Michael's eve. Like a repetition-compulsion, the knight appears to call upon his murderer or the descendents of the murderer to free his soul from its torment and bury him in hallowed ground. Of course, we as well as Baillie's contemporary viewers would have heard echoes of both Walpole's Castle of Otranto, and Lewis's adaptation Castle Spectre, as well as his novel The Monk.

In Baillie's drama the murderer's descendent, Orra, hears the hunter's muffled voice and identifies herself as a woman and co-equal victim with him and his violent destiny. [#7] As she is shut up in her prison-castle--unhallowed ground so to speak--she muses on her connection with the hunter-knight:

Methinks I hear the sound of time long past

Still murm'ring o'er us in the lofty void

Of those dark arches, like the ling'ring voices

Of those who long within their graves have slept.

It was their gloomy home; now it is mine. (III.ii.47)

The gender dynamics here have transformed a male victim into a female one, but the motivations for the murder or the abduction are the same: the seizure of property by the ruthless patriarch feeding on the defenseless in order to increase his own wealth and status. Baillie's drama may read now as a virtual parody of the gothic novel, complete with letters delivered by secret messenger, an outlaw band living in a cave beneath the castle, and this creaking family legend of murder and betrayal. But more importantly for the tradition of the female gothic, Baillie's drama attempted to transpose the gothic universe of female

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victimization onto the stage or at least into the "mental theatre," the closet dramas, that were so prevalent and popular during this period. Class dissolution and family disintegration are the key components of the hunter-knight legend, but those very same issues emerge generations later in the forced captivity of Orra, the descendent of a murderer who has herself become a victim of the continuing dynamics of the dysfunctional family we call the patriarchy.

Properly positioning, disciplining, and controlling women stands as the central component in the gothic family's power dynamic, and no one understands this better than Orra herself. When Hartman, Theobald's friend, attempts to persuade Orra to marry Theobald by arguing that they would be "equal" partners, Orra rejects the proposition by pointing out that there is no equality between men and women:

'Well I know,/In such a partnership, the share of power/Allotted to the wife':

And so, since fate has made me, woe the day!

That poor and good-for-nothing, helpless being,

Woman yclept, I must consign myself

With all my lands and rights into the hands

Of some proud man, and say, 'Take all, I pray,'

And do me in return the grace and favour

To be my master.' (II.i.22)

Orra cannot accept a "master" among the four men who present themselves to her for that honor. But the longer she delays, the more of her inherited wealth and properties are stolen from her. The drama makes it clear that Orra has lost a third of her inherited lands through war or compact since the death of her father. In a very real sense, a husband would be a "cover," a form of protection for a woman, and yet Orra continues paralyzed, unable to choose and unable to accept any man as "master"



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of her increasingly shrinking estate. And so while Orra's value decreases because of her unmarried and defenseless status, Hughobert has doubled his lands. Because of these factors, Glottenbal, like his father, cannot understand why Orra would fail to marry him and thereby safeguard her own estates in the act:

I say there's many a maiden would right gladly

Accept the terms we offer, and remain.

The daughter of a King hath match'd ere now

With mine inferior. We are link'd together

As 'twere by right and natural property.

And as I've said before I say again,

I love thee too: What more could'st thou desire? (II.ii.39)

The "rights" that the gothic son and heir possesses are, as he himself admits, bound up with "natural property," that is, landed wealth and the bodies of women that appear to be almost attached to and contiguous with that land. Love is an afterthought in the scheme of things here, and Orra knows as much.

But in addition to suggesting that women are the natural embodiments of land and property, the drama also implies that the gothic struggle ultimately concerns control of the forest, the rural world that was being supplanted by the growing power of the patriarch to urbanize the natural landscape. When the quasi-hero Theobald enters the scene he wears most prominently a "green sprig" in his helmet, a "favour" given to him by the Lady Orra. Glottenbal confronts him with the fact that his status does not merit such a favor given by "a Dame too high for thee" (I.i.6). Stealing the favor, Glottenbal insists that he has a right to "humble" Theobald whose very courtship of Orra is an act of "envious spite, [against]/The great and noble houses of the land" (I.i.6). Theobald, in short, is coded as the embodiment of an earlier rural/green world, the same world

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represented by the murdered and dispossessed hunter-knight, while both of them stand in opposition to the growing mercantile world of Glottenbal and his father, the capitalist who frighten Orra into marrying him, the bastard son disinherited by the legitimate Glottenbal. In Rudigere's eyes, winning the prize of woman would be the only just recompense for his own slighted status. But Glottenbal and Hughobert also want to win the prize of woman, and they have considerably more power behind their claims than does Rudigere, whose entire plan would seem to consist of scaring Orra into submission. When Hughobert confronts Orra with the ultimatum of marriage to Glottenbal, he presents the contract in highly codified gender terms. Put crudely, he states that if she would only behave like a properly feminine woman then she would willingly consent to the marriage. And even the local priest advises Orra to "feign at least, but for a little time,/A disposition to obey his wishes" (II.i.32). When priest asks a woman to "feign" we know that we are once again within the terrain of professional femininity.

[#8]

Olivia, the mother in The Italian, instructs her daughter in the art of lying, and surely we are meant to place such maternal and fraternal tutelage in its larger social and cultural contexts, that is, the polemical writings of Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays, Maria Edgeworth, Clara Reeves, and Hannah More. Wollstonecraft had earlier condemned the official mistress system in her Vindication by renouncing it as a corrupt residue of the aristocracy, a form of covert influence, manipulation and cunning that women could only practice behind the scenes, never openly in their own names or within their own rights: "Women . . . sometimes boast of their weakness, cunningly obtaining power by playing on the weakness of men; and they may well glory in their illicit sway, for, like Turkish bashaws, they have more real power than their master" (V 40). Similarly, Mary Hays condemns an educational system that encourages women to please their husbands as if such behavior were based on some recognized form of morality rather than expediency. Such a notion, Hays observes, "is perhaps as unfortunate a system of politics in morals, as ever was introduced for degrading the human species" (Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of

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Women, 56):

And if indeed, women do avail themselves of the only weapons they are permitted to wield, can they be blamed? Undoubtedly not; since they are compelled to it by the injustice and impolicy of men. Petty treacheries--mean subterfuge--whining and flattery--feigned submission--and all the dirty little attendants, which compose the endless train of low cunning; if not commendable, cannot with justice be very severely censured, when practiced by women. Since alas!--The weak have no other arms against the strong!

Since alas!--Necessity acknowledges no law, but her own! (Appeal 91)

Hays would encourage Orra to "feign submission" just like Ralph Ellison years later would encourage his compatriots to "grin em to death." Reeve, Edgeworth and More, generally considered to be conservative during the feminist debates of the 1790s, all condemned the "veil" of ignorance and prejudice that kept women from seeing clearly the conditions of their lives.

But when the priest's gentle persuasions fail to move Orra to a posture of compliance, Hughobert resorts to more overt and threatening appeals. Condemning her, like all women, for being "Stubborn and headstrong," he then repudiates the emotionalism implicit in her display of hyperbolic femininity: "Thou seem'st beside thyself with such wild gestures/And strangely-flashing eyes. Repress these fancies,/And to plain reason listen" (II.iii.37-8). Later he advises Orra to "Learn to respect my will/In silence, as becomes a youthful Dame" (II.iii.39). Again we are in the realm of the patriarchy's construction of woman, advised that it is in her own best interests to be silenced and domiciled in what Orra refers to as the "nailed coffin" of her life (II.iii.37).

In the midst of Orra's captivity in the castle perilous, another script is being written just outside the doors. Here Theobald has repaired and attempted to raise an outlaw band with the purpose of assaulting the castle and rescuing the damsel in distress. But before he is accepted by the outlaws, Theobald is attacked by Franko, chief of the band, who falls on him and

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wounds him "deeply" with "mine arrow" (III.iii.63). From this one act we know that Theobald is intended to be the feminized and wounded gothic hero of the drama, the rightful suitor to the hand of Orra. But Orra is not able to be obtained in the same way that Radcliffe's heroines were ultimately saved from underground caverns or musty convents by wounded warriors. Orra, quite simply, goes mad during the very gothic rescue that Theobald stages for her benefit on St. Michael's Eve.

Thinking that he will use the legend of the murdered hunter-knight as just so much smoke and puffery, Theobald fails to reckon with the fact that Orra herself quite literally believes in the tale. And whereas Theobald thinks that staging the resurrection of the hunter-knight will prove an effective diversion, he does not understand that Orra will be unable to read the gothic as dead metaphor. He has sent a letter to her explaining his plot, but she is unable to read it when she is interrupted by Rudigere. Orra does not understand her situation as anything other than desperate; and therefore, she is unable to view it as a script, a masquerade that she can control in any way. She, on the contrary, lives the gothic nightmare as a reality and to have it conjured up for her by Theobald in such literal detail serves only to send her over the edge into complete madness. In Theobald's construction of a gothic scenario as the site of seduction and abduction on St. Mark's Eve, however, we are reminded forcefully of Keats's Eve of St. Agnes, and surely Baillie's influence on Keats has to be acknowledged here. But whereas Keats was able to resolve that poem with a "solution sweet," there is no happy ending in Orra.

It is Cathrina, the sadistic lady in waiting and accomplice of Rudigere, who assists all too effectively in further terrorizing Orra when she reports that she has seen the return of the hunter-knight that very night: "An upright form, wound in a clotted shroud--/Clotted and stiff, like one swaith'd up in haste/After a bloody death" (IV.iii.74). This image of bloody and erect phallic power so horrifies Orra that she lapses into her first "mad" speech:

A horrid sympathy jarr'd on my heart,

And forced into mine eyes these icy tears.

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A fearful kindredship there is between

The living and the dead: an awful bond:

Wo's me! that we do shudder at ourselves--

At that which we must be!--A dismal thought! (IV.iii.74)

Although Theobald is able to rescue Orra from the castle dressed as the plumed hunter-knight himself, she never regains complete possession of her faculties, and instead slips further and further into the morbid and melancholic world of her own very gothic imaginings. When the full plot is uncovered and Hughobert descends to wreak vengeance, Rudigere stabs himself and as he lies dying he strikes Glottenbal in the jugular with a poisoned dagger. Both branches of the family, bastard and legitimate, are thereby destroyed in the futile attempt to tame the excessive femininity of the lady Orra, while Orra herself is lead around mumbling like a latter-day Ophelia:

Take it away! It was the swathed dead:

I know its clammy, chill, and bony touch.

Come not again; I'm strong and terrible now:

Mine eyes have look'd upon all dreadful things;

And when the earth yawns, and the hell-blast sounds,

I'll bide the trooping of unearthly steps

With stiff-clench'd terrible strength. (V.ii.94)

The "bony touch" that Orra fears resides in her hysterical reaction to what she perceives as the phallic, uncanny power of the dead male ancestor, unable to die and forever poised in a posture of assault, like some sort of "clammy, chill" erection. I would argue that a terrific fear of the male body suffuses this text, and for that reason the drama is distinctly different than

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other female gothics. It actually bears a striking similarity to Coleridge's Christabel in its presentation of the haunting of a beleaguered virgin. And when Orra addresses Hartman we hear an even more uncanny echo:

Take off from me they strangely-fastened eye:

I may not look upon thee, yet I must.

Unfix thy baleful glance: Art thou a snake?

Something of horrid power within thee dwells.

Still, still that powerful eye doth suck me in

Like a dark eddy to its wheeling core.

Spare me! O spare me, Being of strange power,

And at thy feet my subject head I'll lay. (V.ii.94-95)

Mesmerized by the masculine gaze, in the grip of the phallic power of the eye to dissect and scrutinize, Orra has slipped into her own hystericized and self-created gothic world. The family legend of the hunter-knight has served finally to haunt her and immerse her instead in a whirlpool, a chaotic swirl of hyperbolic emotions wrought to a veritable frenzy.

Orra's final speech in the drama reads almost as a parody of the excessive emotions in evidence at the conclusion of Hamlet. While supposedly comforting Hughobert on the murder of his son by Rudigere, she sounds as if she is actually gloating over the demise of the patriarch's best and brightest hope:

Ha! dost thou groan, old man? Art thou in trouble?

Out on it! tho' they lay him in the mould,

He's near thee still.--I'll tell thee how it is:

A hideous burst hath been: the damn'd and holy,

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The living and the dead, together are  
In horrid neighbourship.--'Tis but thin vapour  
Floating around thee, makes the wav'ring bound.  
Poh! blow it off, and see th'uncertain'd reach. (V.ii.99)

The "Poh" given to the patriarchy here was delivered as the one tactic woman could employ in her assault on the bastion of masculine privilege--the power of saying no, the staging of defiance and madness, the negative stance that puts the lie to all the compromised postures women are forced to assume in this system of barter and exchange. Once she refused to marry, Orra set off the feeding frenzy that consumed the patriarch, his sons, and finally herself.

Orra is not an optimistic female gothic. It concludes as a gender and class struggle tragedy, with a society in shambles and a young nubile woman staring blankly into the stinking tomb of life. But clearly the gothic legend that haunted and destroyed Orra's sanity was the parodic residue of a potent discourse system, paradoxically an enabling and paralyzing chain of significations that place woman ultimately outside of meaning. Struggling to seize the gothic heritage for herself, Orra is defeated by its phallic resonances, its clotted blood and its very erect and threatening power. Baillie envisioned a very different gothic heritage than Radcliffe did, and that, I suspect, is what upset Radcliffe so intensely. In Baillie's gothic universe the father cannot be replaced by the weak and wounded son, while Radcliffe persistently holds out to her readers the claim that the patriarch can indeed be overthrown. Radcliffe would not, nay could not, have written a piece as starkly bleak and angry as Orra, a work that finally reads as a parody of Radcliffe's naive optimism.

III

De Monfort was first staged in 1800 by that most famous brother and sister act, John Kemble and Sarah Siddons,

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performing as De Monfort and his sainted sister Jane. The play was a success for Baillie, and performed during her lifetime more than any of her other dramas. It is difficult for a modern reader to ponder the work, however, without noting the extreme homosocial and homophobic

subtexts, matched only in awkwardness by the incestuous undertones in the relationship of the siblings. Jane opens her arms wide for her erring brother many times in the drama, reminding us that she is more a mother to him than a sister. And if this were not enough to make us squirm, she goes down on her knees to him at least three different times, as he also drops to his knees before her more than

once. In perpetual postures of begging, these two siblings are in the grip of an incestuous compulsion that attempts to displace itself onto the unfortunate body of Rezenvelt, a handsome dandy and boyhood friend of both De Monforts who seems almost to have stumbled into this menage by accident. [#9]

De Monfort has received considerably more critical attention than has Orra, so its general plot perhaps needs less detailed summary. Set in Germany during a vaguely earlier past, the play focuses tightly on the hero's increasingly murderous and maniacal hatred for his former friend, Rezenvelt. De Monfort's hatred is, in fact, so intense that he has fled his home in order to escape being in the loathed presence of Rezenvelt, and yet who should appear and accost him publicly but this very same doppelganger, this very same embodiment of the abject that De Monfort thought he had escaped. Very early in the play we learn about De Monfort's character from his servant Manuel, who informs us that De Monfort is a "difficult, capricious, and distrustful" person, that he has changed a great deal and recently has become irrational: "there is no living with him now." [#10] Jerome, another servant, attempts to explain the sudden change in De Monfort by suggesting that "something disturbs his mind--/Belike he is in love," and although Manuel is quick to deny such a theory, we as viewers have



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been clued into the secret worm at the heart of De Monfort (I, i, 237). The only question that now remains is who is the object of this resentful love?

The first clue in fact is presented to us fairly quickly, for the Count and Countess Freberg inquire about the health of his sister, the "noble Jane de Monfort," and Count Freberg delivers the first of many grandiose descriptions of Jane. She is not simply "noble," she is "so exalted" that the titles of "Princess, Empress, Queen" could not even begin to describe her (I, i, 240). Jane is, in fact, the tabooed object of De Monfort's "love," but that repressed incestuous passion has veered and displaced itself instead on the Marquis Rezenvelt, whom De Monfort speaks mysteriously of when he talks about "an abhorred serpent" who has "st[u]ng the soul--Ay, till its healthful frame/Is chang'd to secret, fest'ring, sore disease,/So deadly is the wound" (I, i, 242). Like a wish-fulfillment, who should appear at this exact same moment but the supposedly hated Rezenvelt, sending De Monfort into a parody of a lover's tizzy: "He haunts me--stings me--like a devil haunts--/He'll make a raving maniac of me--Villain!" Dismissing Rezenvelt as a "cursed reptile," he denies that he is hiding any "secret" from his host, when it is only too evident that he is. In fact, De Monfort goes so far as to lecture Freberg on the fact that all of us are ultimately unknowable to each other: "'That man was never born whose secret soul/ With all its motley treasure of dark thoughts,/Foul fantasies, vain musings, and wild dreams,/Was ever open'd to another's scan" (I, i, 244-45). But the sad fact is that it is De Monfort who does not want to look into his own "foul fantasies," the chief of which is incestuous passion for his sister/quasi-mother Jane. And who should appear, almost in tandem with Rezenvelt, but Jane herself.

Introduced to the viewer by Freberg as the embodiment of "artless and majestick elegance," Lady Jane knows who she is and who she is not. She tells her hosts that she is "no doting mistress,/No fond distracted wife, who must forthwith/Rush to [De Monfort's] arms and weep. I am his sister:/The eldest daughter of his father's house:/Calm and wearied is my love for him" (II, i, 252). Why would she, however, even compare herself to a mistress or wife? Why would she feel the need to

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insist on her identity as a sister, if not to impose the taboo that exists between them in an explicitly public manner? And why would she agree to appear at the ball that very night in a "thick black veil" so as to conceal her identity? The veiled woman has long been a trope for the dead mother, and Jane's assumption of this identity in order to "test" her brother is more than a bit revealing. In their conversation at the ball she describes her relationship with her brother, who of course does not know her identity, by saying that her brother had been "the companion of my early days,/ My cradle's mate, mine infant play-fellow." Not knowing that he is speaking to his sister, De Monfort describes his earliest memories of his sister as "[t]he virgin mother of an orphan race" and "like a Roman matron, proudly sit,/ Despising all the blandishments of love" (II,i, 256-57). This is the statement of a jealous son, adoring his fantasy of the virginal mother, the mother who has no need for any love apart from his. It is such a potent fantasy that one is tempted to observe that it has been the basis of more than one religion.

The scene that then ensues is the first of many quasi-incestuous incidents between the siblings. When De Monfort finally recognizes Jane's voice, he begs her to unveil herself to him so that he can "fall and worship thee." From out of nowhere Rezenvelt appears and positions himself between the two, denying De Monfort access to his sister. When Jane does remove her veil, much repressed emotion is evident, and finally she "extends her arms, and he [De Monfort], rushing into them, bursts into tears" (II,i, 256-57). This pathetic reconciliation scene is quickly followed by the first explanation given by De Monfort for his pathological hatred of Rezenvelt. According to this first version, Rezenvelt defeated De Monfort in a duel and then had the audacity to spare his life, publicly shaming him, dishonoring him as a man of rank. Later, however, De Monfort offers another explanation, that Rezenvelt, from childhood, had "with rude malevolence,/ Withheld the fair respect all paid beside, / Turning my very praise into derision" (II, iii, 268). But the viewer is forced to suspect that De Monfort is not presenting the real Rezenvelt, but a fictitious construction, a screen-memory that he has placed between himself and his earliest and tabooed childhood love for his sister. The viewer also sees that Rezenvelt is depicted as generous, refusing an estate in

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favor of a needier and younger relative. In their final attempt to reconcile, the two men are brought together by Jane to publicly announce their rapprochement, but De Monfort demurs when Rezenvelt insists that they embrace rather than merely shake hands.

This already tense situation can only become explosive when De Monfort hears from the visiting Grimbald that Rezenvelt is soon to marry Jane, a baseless rumor promulgated by the jealous and spiteful Lady Freberg. Suffice it to say that De Monfort does not take this news well, immediately remembering their most recent knee-bending session in which Jane had gone down on her knees to him, "Alas! I wept, and thought of sister's love,/No damned love like this" (III,iii, 284). Even more of a confession of incestuous obsession can be found in De Monfort's statement, "Oh! I did love her with such pride of soul! /When other men, in gayest pursuit of love,/Each beauty follow'd, by her side I stay'd;/Far prouder of a brother's station there,/Than all the favours favour'd lovers boast" (III,iii, 286). Clearly, De Monfort is in the grip of a tabooed love for his sister, and somehow that love has veered off and settled in a perverted, displaced, hysterical manner on Rezenvelt. For De Monfort there appears to be no way out of the morass into which he has plunged himself. He is compelled to murder Rezenvelt in a futile attempt to exorcise himself of his repressed, tabooed and incestuous passion.

The murder of Rezenvelt initiates the first of two amazing scenes of male hysteria and abjection. Stabbed in the back, Rezenvelt's body is brought into a convent as De Monfort is quickly apprehended with blood still on his hands. Forced to identify the body of his victim, De Monfort suffers a hallucinatory and uncanny vision of the dead/undead male body: "O! throw thy cloak upon this grizly form!/The unclos'd eyes do stare upon me still." Remembering the murder, he would appear to be describing a sexual encounter as he tells us "[h]ow with convulsive life he heav'd beneath me,/E'en with the death's wound gor'd. O horrid, horrid!/ Methinks I feel him still." In order to assure himself that Rezenvelt is indeed dead, he stares obsessively on the sheet-covered corpse, and suddenly blurts out, "It moves! it moves! the cloth doth heave and swell./It

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moves 'again.'" This uncannily moving sheet, heaving and swelling, reminds us of the clammy, chill erection that concluded Orra, the vision of the eternal phallus poised and ready to strike new victims. But here the gazer is male, and once again Baillie uses oracular imagery to fix her hero in the gaze of phallic power. In the second instance of abjected dread, De Monfort removes the sheet to examine the dead body and he screams out, "Oh! those glazed eyes!/They look me still./ Come, madness! come unto me senseless death!" (IV,iii, 298-99). The dead and staring eyes remind us of something very similar that will occur in Orra. De Monfort reveals to his viewers the sense of his own continuing paranoia, the sense of being the site of tabooed emotions that he cannot express, let alone eradicate.

De Monfort, like Orra, quickly sinks into self-induced madness, and by the time his sister arrives at the convent, he is already claiming that he has "no name--/I am nothing" (V,ii, 303). Although forgiven by Jane, De Monfort dies and his body is laid out next to Rezenvelt, both of them covered now with a black veil, much like the one that Jane wore as a disguise to the ball. Now the two dead men are the site of a public spectacle as Freberg, Bernard, and all the clergy view their bodies and make commentary on the meaning and awful consequences of "direful hate!" (V,iv, 309).

The Epilogue that concludes the play expresses, however, the drama's purpose and makes explicit the ideological agenda of Baillie's (as well as the majority of gothic) dramas. Spoken by Mrs. Siddons, in the character of Jane, the audience is informed that the "dire" passions that they have just seen enacted are "foreign to each heart of British Mould/For Briton's sons their generous code maintain/Prompt to defend & slow in giving pain" (313-14). In other words, Baillie's plays are set on the European continent in order to reveal the evils of a feudalistic, Catholic, aristocratic society in contrast to a vastly superior--less passionate, less feudal, and certainly not Catholic--British nation. The not so subtly suggested purpose of Baillie's work is to advocate British isolationism, both with regard to political nation-states and with regard to the endogamous family. If all literary works have both manifest and latent contents--political and psychological meanings--then rabid xenophobia and

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vaguely incestuous longings that cannot be acted on from the external framework and internal underside of her plays. But what are we to make of the persistence of abjection, of male bodies posed in dead/undead, uncanny postures? As Kristeva tells us, the abject expresses "the violence of mourning for an 'object' that has always already been lost" (Powers 15). Traditionally, this object has been seen as the mother, but for a woman writer might the abject not take the form of a dream of phallic power? The patriarchy is dealt a blow in each of these dramas, but Baillie suggests that it can never be totally defeated, and that women certainly can never become powerful patriarchs in their own rights. Baillie's "feminist" agenda is not what one would call radical or even liberal for its time. It would seem to me that she valorizes women's domestic roles, suggesting that a tight family structure is the best means of protection for women in a hostile and threatening society. When a woman is an orphan, like Orra, then Baillie suggests that her life will become gradually untenable, that she will be subjected to theft, abduction, and worse without a male protector-husband. The protected family led by a strong and generous male provider, however, stands in her works as a microcosm for an idealized British nation-state. Without a sane ruler and careful leadership, she cautions, Britain is headed for the disaster of revolution, much like France. The uncanny and abjected phallus that haunts Baillie's dramas finally expresses both her worst political and personal nightmares--revolution and the failure of the pater familias to protect his dependents, all of those who lack what he potentially possesses.

NOTES

[#1] See, for instance, Robert Miles, Ann Radcliffe (Manchester: Manchester U P, 1995), 26. Another recent Radcliffe biography by Rictor Norton, Mistress of Udolpho: The Life of Ann Radcliffe (London: Cassell, 1999), discusses Radcliffe's increasingly neurotic paranoia and hypersensitivity, and also dwells on her anxiety about being thought the author of Baillie's plays.

[#2] Jeffrey Cox provides a useful overview of Baillie's career and the relative success of her dramas in the Introduction to his Seven Gothic Dramas 1789-1825 (Athens: Ohio U P, 1992), 50-57. I have used the text of Orra in A Series of Plays, (1812; vol. 3), ed. and rpt. by Donald H. Reiman (New York: Garland, 1977). All quotations from Orra will be from this edition of the play, with act, scene, and page numbers in parentheses in the text.

[#3] Cox has claimed that gothic dramas like Baillie's demanded just two postures from women: "women were either terrorized and mad or stoic and indomitable, but they were always passive" (Seven Gothic Dramas, 53). In contrast, Anne Mellor writes, "it is the male characters who are prey to unregulated passions, while the female characters are the voices of rational moderation. She thus denies the traditional gender definition of the female sex as irrational, impulsive, and uncontrollable. At the same time she insists that there is no significant psychological or mental sex-difference between males and females."

[#4] The major "closet drama" theorists of the time included Coleridge, Lamb, Hazlitt, and Hunt who argued that the experience of reading dramas, especially tragedy, was actually more satisfying and more imaginatively involving than seeing a production on stage. Because the act of reading is a creative process not subject to the distortions of sensory appeal that the staging of a play present, the drama is most effectively "staged" in the reader's mind rather than in an auditorium. Recent critics like William Galperin, Julie Carlson, and Steven Bruhm all focus on how male romantic writers chafed against the

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theater's elevation of the corporeal, relying on Charles Lamb's observation, "What we see upon a stage is body and bodily action; what we are conscious of in reading is almost exclusively the mind, and its movements." Burroughs sums up this controversy by noting, "rather than reinforcing the idea that closet spaces are incompatible with theatricality, Baillie's theater theory suggests that they are sources of passionate, valuable, and instructive drama--the literal site where one can trace the progress of the soul as it etches its passions on the countenances of men and women during their most private moments." All of these critical positions are outlined in her Claret Stages: Joanna Baillie and the Theater Theory of British Romantic Women Writers (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1997), passim.

[#5] Julia Kristeva, Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia U P, 1982), 18.

[#6] I am indebted in my discussion of Orra to the work of Marjean Purinton, who kindly provided me with a copy of her unpublished essay "Recasting the Gothic Legacy: Northanger Abbey and Orra." Also see her extended discussion of Baillie in Romantic Ideology Unmasked (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1994).

[#7] Other crucial theoretical studies on Baillie's gothic drama include Jeffrey Cox, In the Shadows of Romance: Romantic Tragic Drama in Germany, England, and France (Athens: Ohio UP, 1987); and Daniel Watkins, A Materialist Critique of English Romantic Drama (Gainesville: UP of Florida, 1993).

[#8] I have discussed the development of what I call the ideology of "professional femininity" in my Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontes (University Park: Penn State Press, 1998).

[#9] Eve Sedgwick has noted that in any erotic triangle "the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved." Burroughs applies this notion to De Monfort: "If, as Sedgwick argues, the gothic novel is the first novelistic form in England to have close, relatively visible links to male homosexuality, the same may be said for gothic drama."

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[#9] Secondary criticism is much more readily available on De Monfort. See, for instance, Bertrand Evans, Gothic Drama from Walpole to Shelley (Berkeley: U of California P, 1947); and Marlon B. Ross, Contours of Masculine Desire (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989).

[#10] De Monfort, in Seven Gothic Dramas 1789-1825, ed. Jeffrey Cox (Athens: Ohio UP, 1992), l.i., 235. All quotations from the play will be from this edition, with act, scene, and page number in parentheses in the text.



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