

CHAPTER I

Gothic Double Binds, Or, Irish Terrorists Confront an Unholy Union

Real partisanship, which is the virtue of artworks no less than of men and women, resides in the depths, where social antinomies become the dialectics of form: By leading them to language through the synthesis of the work, artists do their part socially.

—Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*

IRELAND'S POLARIZED NATIONAL IMAGINARY

When Oscar Wilde checked in to the Hôtel de la Plage in Berneval, France, on 26 May 1897 under the name Sebastian Melmoth, he continued his ongoing work of converting himself into an *objet d'art*. As St. Sebastian, Wilde represents the terrorized, effeminate, young martyr who, though trapped and penetrated, survives. The famous painting of St. Sebastian by Guido Reni, which depicts a feminized, nearly nude saint penetrated with arrows and writhing in religious ecstasy, was one of Wilde's favorite works of art.¹ As Melmoth, Wilde stands in for the terrorizing, damned, occult nomad, the exile of his great uncle Charles Robert Maturin's Gothic novel, *Melmoth the Wanderer*. It seems tempting to interpret Wilde's *nom de voyage* as only an embodiment of his personal and authorial bipolarity. After all, his persona appears as a violent juxtaposition, an unholy marriage of the feminized victim and the manipulative victimizer. And Wilde certainly appears to us now both as a man who was martyred and destroyed by prejudice and as a decadent writer whose prose nearly always seemed dangerous and paradoxical.

From the perspective of Irish literary and cultural history, however, we should also note that Wilde's Sebastian Melmoth persona invokes the double binds that had come to dominate a great deal of Irish writing since the failure of the 1798 rebellion and subsequent rise of the Acts of Union in 1800.

In 1820, Wilde's Anglo-Irish uncle, C. R. Maturin, published *Melmoth the Wanderer*, which holds the paradoxical distinction of being called both the greatest of all Gothic novels and the swan song of the genre.² A deeply hallucinatory work built upon a notoriously byzantine stories-within-stories structure, *Melmoth* was written during the era of the Acts of Union that claimed Ireland as part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain. In the midst of the novel's manic instability, we witness a profoundly unholy marriage. The "Tale of the Indians," which constitutes the most protracted of the novel's vaguely interrelated stories, reaches its climax as the innocent former island girl, Immalee, moves to take the hand of the satanic wanderer, John Melmoth, in marriage. Throughout the tale, Immalee provides a powerful avatar of natural religion, à la Jean-Jacques Rousseau, but here we see her "enfeebled by terror beyond the power of resistance," as she begins to take her wedding vows in a Spanish graveyard (393). The lovers are married by the reanimated corpse of a Spanish priest, as the tale moves toward resolution, and Immalee joins hands with Melmoth.

Besides its obvious supernatural sensationalism, one of the odder things about this unholy marital alliance subsists in the fact that during nearly half of the "Tale of the Indians" the narrative actively desires this union. By manipulating the archetypal generic structure of the female Gothic romance—where a woman must be rescued from some confinement, find true love, and produce a male heir—Maturin has allowed us to imagine Immalee's apparent enslavement within the confines of the Spanish-Catholic Aliaga family household as somehow worse than a marriage to the demonic Melmoth. Melmoth himself becomes a rather paradoxical and unstable figure at this point in the novel. As a satanic Anglo-Irish landowner whose history dates back to Oliver Cromwell's 1648 invasion of Ireland, Melmoth constitutes the motivation for the storyline, the arch-villain who aims to trap the innocent female in an unnatural, but legally binding alliance, an unholy union. By becoming Immalee's heroic rescuer, however, Melmoth also transforms into her potential liberator and savior. Maturin imagines in the character of Melmoth, then, someone who appears constitutively doubled. Although the narrative is set against the satanic Melmoth, the social forces depicted in the novel also create a heroic Melmoth. Strangely enough, in Maturin's excessive novel, Melmoth is both the terrorizer and potential savior.

Like the Melmoth of Maturin's novel, Wilde appears constitutively doubled, but Wilde's version of this bipolarity clearly takes the problem

much further. In Maturin's novel, Melmoth had become both the terrorizer and the heroic protector. Sebastian Melmoth signifies a subject position marked as both terrorizer and terrorized. Sebastian Melmoth actually comes to embody both a threatened, feminized innocence and the very demonic, masculine force that threatens it. Fleeing Pentonville Prison, the British Isles, and his scandalous trial under the guise of both martyred saint and satanic wanderer, Wilde represents the various Gothic antinomies of Ireland's unhappy union with England. The similarities and differences between John Melmoth and Sebastian Melmoth are significant ones. While the wanderer certainly embodies a contradiction, Wilde's persona internalizes, ironizes, and reflects on a contradiction. This study will concern itself with the similarities and differences between an Irish Gothic tradition that draws on a gendered and polarized conception of terror that we also find in one form or another in much of the prose fiction of the Irish modernist period. Leaving off for the moment the fact that Wilde's luggage had the suspicious initials "S" and "M" emblazoned on them, then, we might instead trace the relationship between the double binds that his suggestively aporetic pseudonym invokes and their historical inscription in and by a tradition of Irish Gothic fiction that stretches from the novels of Maturin through to the writings of Samuel Beckett.

I call the union itself an unhappy one because the 1800 Acts of Union were themselves figured in the newspapers, speeches, pamphlets, and political ephemera that followed the 1798 rebellion as a kind of marriage in which Ireland, a vulnerable "sister kingdom" threatened by the destabilizing violence of the French Revolution, would, as Britain's lord lieutenant claimed in a speech that preceded the first Union vote in Parliament, be joined to England in the "sentiment of mutual affection and common interest." The Union, he continued, would consolidate "as far as possible, into one firm and lasting fabric, the strength, the power, and the resources of the British Empire."³ Speaking on behalf of the king, then, the British viceroy characterized the Union as a potentially happy marriage, devoutly to be wished. The fact that many of Maturin's own novels and plays, written directly after the ratification of the Acts of Union, continually represent both the terrors of unhappy marriages and the fractured, impossible social worlds engendered by failed domestic unions seems like more than a mere coincidence, then.

Even as far back as Edmund Spenser's 1596 "A View of the Present State of Ireland," the Irish appear characterized as a savage but strangely feminine race (175). Ireland's polarized national identity was not caused by the Union. Ireland had been referred to as a sister kingdom to England at least since Jonathan Swift, and the term *an t-athardha* (or *athardha*), used through the seventeenth century in Irish-language poetry to denote Ireland as a clannish (*clachán*) "Fatherland," had already disappeared, as eighteenth-century Ireland was continually referred to—in English—as a

mythic and ideal “Motherland.”²⁴ In light of this transformation, an Irish masculinity coded by the Western male/female binary as masculine also fell into the category of an overarching Irish identity coded as feminine.

After the era of the Union and the failure of the late nineteenth-century Irish home rule movement, however, Wilde refigured and writ large as the historical *Tableau Vivant* Sebastian Melmoth seems to summarize the confusion that followed the dichotomous logic of Ireland’s unhappy domestic union with England quite well. That is to say that as an art object, Wilde comes to embody not only his own doubleness as de facto saint and supposed sinner but also what Theodor Adorno calls the social and historical antinomies that reside in the depths of the work of art.⁵ Sebastian Melmoth becomes a figure not only for a feminized saintliness that remains confined, threatened, and finally penetrated, but also for a correlating masculinity so demonic in its desire and so unspeakable in its apparent savagery that it must be exiled from society. In the context of the colonized Ireland of the early nineteenth century or the decolonizing Ireland of the early twentieth century, the masculine stands as confined and exiled, terrorized and terrorist. It comes to embody both vulnerability and the threat to all things vulnerable. This is all to say that an Oscar Wilde reimagined in sheer literary terms as Sebastian Melmoth could fill both the roles of heroine and villain in a late eighteenth-century Gothic novel.

II. THE GOTHIC GENRE AND IRISH LITERARY HISTORY

This study, which offers a postcolonial reading of the Irish Gothic tradition, constitutes a work of literary history concerned with Ireland’s national imaginary after the Acts of Union. Throughout, I will argue that the masculine gender anxiety that characterizes the fiction of Oscar Wilde, James Joyce, and Samuel Beckett grows out of and responds to the nineteenth-century Anglo-Irish Gothic’s confrontation with Britain’s colonial politics. Hence, I will explore more than a century of literary production, ranging from Edmund Burke’s 1790 *Reflections on the Revolution in France* and the early Irish Gothic novels of Charles Robert Maturin up through Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Joyce’s *Ulysses*, and Beckett’s *Trilogy*.

After the 1798 rebellion in Ireland led by Theobald Wolf Tone and the United Irishmen, a great deal of political, social, and military anxiety revolved around what the British came to refer to as “the Irish Question.” At the governmental level, the English Parliament worked to resolve this anxiety through the Acts of Union. Under the auspices of the Acts, Ireland would no longer be considered a nation separate from England. Instead, it would become part of the unified trade area known

as the United Kingdom of Great Britain. At the cultural level, both the intellectuals and the popular press of the era began to represent the Acts of Union as a marriage between a protective England and a feminized Ireland. This marital union proved to be an unhappy one, particularly for the Irish, who usually responded to British rule with ambivalence or outright rebellion.⁶ In the shadow of the Acts of Union, the Anglo-Irish novelist Maria Edgeworth, author of *Castle Rackrent* (1800), along with her near contemporary Charles Robert Maturin, began to appropriate and revise the basic generic tactics of the most popular novelistic form of the previous decade: the female Gothic. Edgeworth and Maturin found in the rudimentary confinement and rape narrative of the female Gothic—the genre popularized in England by Anne Radcliffe’s widely read *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794)—a formal method for allegorizing the breakdown of the marriage between England and Ireland. Later in the century, Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu picks up on and revises this basic formal maneuver. Finally, the “Unionist Gothic” that these novelists helped to develop situates masculine agents in social and cultural spaces that the more familiar English Gothic novel had reserved only for its embattled yet passive female heroines. By Unionist Gothic, then, I mean to signify not only the era covered by the Acts of Union, but also the unhappy union-as-marriage metaphor and, as we will see, the symptomatic union of male anxiety and female-Gothic form that the Irish Gothic will come to embody in this study. The Unionist Gothic links colonialist politics to the destabilization of gender by translating the English female Gothic’s generic confinement and rape story into a metaphor for colonial invasion that represents the entire Irish population—male and female—as vulnerable, feminine, and other.

During its heyday at the close of the eighteenth century, the female-Gothic novel was referred to by a reviewer for the 1797 volume of *Spirit of Public Journals* as “the Terrorist Genre” because, as the critic went on to claim, “it makes us fall in love with what we fear to look on” (323). So, in addition to the problems it presents for gender, the female Gothic’s generic confinement story also manipulates the notion of terror at the precise moment in history when this concept discovers a political avatar in the Reign of Terror following the French Revolution. The “Terrorist” fiction written by Gothic novelists aggressively manipulates the reader’s identification with fictive characters, but the narrative desire for conflict that animates these fictions also creates a divided reader who must rely on identification with both the terrorized and the terrorist in order to participate in the excitement and suspense provided by the genre. To this end, the very popular novels of Maturin, Edgeworth, and Le Fanu count on their reader’s unacknowledged sadistic identification with the masculine terrorizer as much as they rely on a more overtly narcissistic and masochistic identification with the feminine victim.

In observing how this complex, double structure of identification continues to be deployed by subsequent writers in the Irish tradition, I want to engage with the ongoing problem of political terror and with how terror gets allegorized by the generic tropes of the Irish Gothic. As revisions of the female-Gothic form, the novels of the Irish Gothic tradition inveigh against colonial ideology only as they also betray a deep-seated fear of femininity. In fact, because of its melding of female-Gothic tropes and masculine gender anxiety, the Irish Gothic tradition sentimentalizes the feminine while representing any identification with femininity as the foundation of all terror. Its male protagonists, caught between an embattled, isolated femininity and the fearsome masculine anxiety it provokes, come to embody precisely the incapacitating contradictions of modern Irish masculinity. Terror comes from the feminine, and the male characters in the Irish Gothic tradition display great anxiety—and often, great violence—whenever they are identified with the feminine, the weak, or the maternal. Male characters like Maturin's Annibal Montorio or Bram Stoker's Jonathon Harker appear inescapably doubled because they remain as confined by their feminine identities and histories as they are terribly anxious to reject the feminine and its history entirely.

Building on the gender doubleness of the Unionist Gothic, I want to propose a dramatically new interpretation of Irish modernism: we must read the novels of Wilde, Joyce, and Beckett in relation to the fraught political dynamic of the Irish Gothic tradition. Each of these writers yokes together the unlikely combination of masculinity and domesticity, and each portrays this combination as not only isolating and dehumanizing but also as the social and structural cause for terror and violence. The Unionist Gothic allegorized male gender disorientation, the anxious state of at once being and not being a masculine subject. In the twentieth century, Irish modernism's continued obsession with male confinement constitutes a varied, often competing, series of epilogues to the Unionist Gothic's fusion of gender disorientation and colonial politics. Hence, in my reading gender disorientation, along with the political terror that follows from it, becomes something like the foundational condition of modern Irish political and cultural identity. In what follows we will come to see how the dialectics of gender confusion and domestic confinement begged by the Unionist Gothic persist and evolve into the fascination with personal, political, and aesthetic autonomy that haunts the fiction of Ireland's major modernist fiction writers, Wilde, Joyce, and Beckett. Rather than reading Irish modernist fiction as developing merely in response to European symbolist writing and to the late nineteenth-century home rule crisis, then, I read the modernist figures as building upon a series of tropes that had characterized Irish writing for over a century.

Situating Wilde, Joyce, and Beckett in relation to the Irish Gothic tradition allows us to perform two coextensive critical tasks at once. First, it provides us with a way to examine how literary genres, even ones that merely seem to respond to or allegorize a set of specific historical conditions, persist as nearly forgotten sign systems, formal operations, and modes of alienation in subsequent genres. In so doing, it also allows us to see how certain sociopolitical and sociocultural problems persist and develop in the face of historical, material, and stylistic change. We will observe, then, that even though Burke and Beckett were responding to differing contextual, material, and cultural pressures, features from Burke's analysis of political terrorism reassert themselves in powerful and relentless ways in Beckett's use of the Gothic. Even though the colonizing world occupied by the Anglo-Irish Maturin seems profoundly different from the decolonizing one inhabited by the Gaelo-Catholic Joyce, certain tropes from Maturin's Gothic continue to haunt Joyce's dynamically innovative prose experiments. Of course, Joyce and Beckett are not Gothic novelists in precisely the same way as Maturin, Le Fanu, Stoker, and even Wilde. Rather, I will argue throughout that Joyce and Beckett respond to an Irish political and literary unconscious characterized and saturated by the tropes of the Irish Gothic novel. As we will come to see, Joyce and Beckett each provide us with a different coda to the Irish Gothic generic tradition and to the sociopolitical regimes in which that tradition developed and flourished.

In the simplest terms, the critic and theorist Mikhail Bakhtin explains that genres provide us with something like a horizon of expectations for a given set of texts (288). Certain approaches, tropes, contextual concerns, and points of view "knit together" to constitute a genre, and we read that genre fully expecting to encounter precisely these elements. In fact, the English Gothic novel, with its fleets of unquiet ghosts, overly-sensitive confined women, usurping Catholic counts, and ineffectual suitors, provides what might well be the most lucid and flagrant set of generic tropes, approaches, and concerns in the history of modern English literature. The argument that I am making here, however, indicates that genres also participate in and signal the movement of historical dialectics. Literary genres participate in confronting and negating certain sociohistorical problems and, to some degree, in preserving those very problems in and for subsequent contexts. Novelistic genres persist dialectically. They accumulate in the structures of new forms of fiction. In *The Political Unconscious*, Fredric Jameson puts it another way. He claims that "the analysis of the ideology of form, properly completed, should reveal the formal persistence of such archaic structures of alienation—and the sign systems specific to them—beneath the overlay of all the more recent and historically original types of alienation" (100). Hence, form and history become dialectically intertwined in works of fiction, which

often serve to reveal how fragments of the past are preserved, almost like ruins, in the landscape of the present.⁷ In the sections that follow, we will come to see how the particular concerns about gender confusion, personal and political terror, and colonization peculiar to the Irish Gothic tradition endure as resonant—and sometimes as ironic—anxieties in novels generally interpreted as avatars of either a late-Victorian aesthetic decadence or of a fully realized aesthetic modernism.

III. POSTCOLONIAL IRELAND AND THE GOTHIC

Following the 1990 publication of Stephen D. Arata's "The Occidental Tourist," with its forceful account of the postcolonial dynamics at play in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, we have witnessed a spate of academic criticism that finds in Gothic fiction analogues for the political and cultural complexities of a colonized Ireland. In his 1997 *Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing Since 1790*, Seamus Deane connects the Gothic's characteristics in Irish literature to the Yeatsian Literary Revival's nationalism and to its coextensive antiempiricist focus on the occult and the mythic as "saving forms of irrationalism" (110). Armed with a vocabulary that is part postcolonial theory and part negative dialectics, Deane's book, especially when set alongside his 1984 *Celtic Revivals* and his editorial contributions to the *Field Day Anthology*, helped to provide a sort of *elan vitale* for subsequent readings of the Irish Gothic that would find in figures like Maturin, Le Fanu, and even in Joyce the presence of a phantom discourse on nationalism buried in the Irish cultural imaginary.⁸ Following this lead, Luke Gibbons has consistently argued that the historical references in Joyce's "The Dead" actually suggest a kind of Gothic vision of colonial history wherein the ghosts of a suppressed and repressed Irish Catholic past haunt the present day of Joyce's hemoplegic Dublin.⁹ In fact, following Deane's *Celtic Revivals* has been a whole slew of postcolonial approaches to Irish literature, many of which observe how the ever-present "Irish Question" of the imperial age frames the convoluted history of modern Irish literature. Terry Eagleton's *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* (1995) aided in this critical endeavor, particularly by revising Antonio Gramsci's conception of hegemony in order to nuance discussions concerning the cultural divide between a dominant Anglo-Protestant ascendancy class and a disenfranchised and disinherited Gaelo-Catholic peasantry.¹⁰

In the most basic terms, these approaches confront the structural dispossession—the active, historical disinheritance and disenfranchisement of political subjects by cultural, linguistic, juridical, and economic systems—experienced by colonized people. The postcolonial turn in Irish literary criticism often argues for the validity of an authentically Irish or nationalist perspective on the psychic and social difficulties

faced by a dispossessed people. In essence, this criticism asks: How does a dispossessed populace deal with its own traumatic sense of lost identity? Do they imagine wrathful spirits who return to set things right, or do they instead imagine narratives in which the dispossessed are finally allowed a fair share of the spoils? Underlying many of these groundbreaking, markedly convincing, and politically savvy postcolonial readings of Ireland, and more recently, of Ireland's Gothicism, is what critic Walter Benjamin would doubtless see as an attempt to counter those histories, both literary and otherwise, written as tools of the imperialist and capitalist "ruling class" (1:255). For Benjamin, the history constructed by the ruling class always appears linear and progressive, and it always conceals its various injustices, inequities, and moral failings. Ruling-class history always simplifies and eliminates that which does not fit within its schema. But Benjamin also warns against counterapproaches that forsake consciously dialectical thinking and that simply attempt to appropriate and redirect the narrow, linear methodology of "ruling class" histories. He warns against histories that merely work to replace one master narrative with another master narrative. Recent Irish postcolonial criticism has occasionally fallen into this trap by following Daniel Corkery's aging thesis in positing a "hidden" and Gaelo-Catholic Ireland as something that seems to resemble the Lacanian Real of the nation while an opposing Anglo-Ireland becomes both its literal and symbolic *Lex Patris*.¹¹

In the criticism, then, we often find a nostalgic longing for a kind of patriarchal Irishness untouched by British hands. In fact, some of the criticism, in following an inverted nationalist logic, has attempted to simplify characters as subtle, complex, and bifurcated as Joyce's Stephen Dedalus and redeem characters as unsavory and as violent as the Cyclops-Citizen of *Ulysses*.¹² This critical approach often imagines Anglo-Ireland as the lone name for colonial false consciousness, rather than as one hybridized component of a more complicated cultural and socio-political matrix that includes Catholics of the bourgeois, proletarian, and agrarian variety, a divided, declining Anglo-Protestant ascendancy, and an oft-overlooked Anglo-Protestant middle class. Furthermore, we must not forget that England's various ideological and political complexes had, at least since Prime Minister's William Gladstone's first Liberal Party Parliament in 1868, added to this already convoluted matrix by deflecting much of the criticism it received about the Irish situation onto the ascendancy class. Thus, while overlooking many of the disorienting ambivalences associated with and provoked by the complicated gender dynamics of Ireland's unionist marriage with England, a good deal of the Irish nationalist criticism published in the 1990s fails to read the modern Irish literary imagination as intractably hybridized and, in fact, produced by the double binds that this book will enumerate and

explore. In focusing almost exclusively on the various problematics arising from an ascendancy hegemony, much of the postcolonial criticism concerning Ireland actually accedes to the terms imagined by an evolving and liberalizing British imperialism in the first place. Rather than arresting and disrupting a linear and “continuum” theory of history through dialectics, as Walter Benjamin and many of his cohorts in the Frankfurt School had hoped to do, these readings often tend to construct another singular and monolithic history that shares as it inverts the structuring logic of the histories written by the imperialist ruling class.

Deane’s own criticism proves subtle, rigorous, and dialectical enough to resist the urge to characterize the Irish situation as a simple dichotomy. He is a careful enough reader of not only writers like Yeats and Joyce but also of critics like Theodor Adorno to see the negative formations dialectically enfolded into the overtly nationalist position and into what he has called the nascent, modernist “aesthetic of privacy” that began to constitute nationalism’s other at the dawn of the twentieth century (*Celtic Revivals*, 15). But a mounting body of Irish nationalist-inflected scholarship tends to read the ideological divide and the subsequent terminology set up under the auspices of colonialism as colonialism-*an-sich* in Ireland.¹³ By focusing on the racial and nationalist identities set up and, to a great extent, imagined by British colonial nationalism, these critics often end up accepting the simple, racialized, exclusive logic of nationalism constructed by imperial ideology. This is not to say, however, that the Anglo-Irish and the Gaelo-Catholics should be collapsed into or read as a single group. As L. P. Curtis’s *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature* makes abundantly clear, a journalistic and pseudoscientific discourse that posited discrete and separate anthropological Irish racial entities certainly existed throughout post-Darwinian Great Britain. In teasing out the ideology constructed by the twin discourses of race and sectarianism, however, the scholarship often accepts the interpellated identities and the terms of difference as, in some sense, absolute. Consequently we find many critical approaches that simply replay as they redescribe the static political identities of the Victorian and Edwardian periods. The result is that some of the critical literature about Irish decolonization unwillingly—but by force of logic, necessarily—accepts the vocabulary of identity first put into play by imperialism, and, thusly, the language of imperial Britain and of the unhappy union always seems to carry the day. In this way, the criticism is liable to reproduce precisely the political stasis against which it inveighs.

Two notable exceptions to this trend are Joseph Valente’s 2002 *Dracula’s Crypt: Bram Stoker, Irishness, and the Question of Blood* and Margot Gayle Backus’s 1999 *The Gothic Family Romance: Heterosexuality, Child Sacrifice, and the Anglo-Irish Colonial Order*.¹⁴ Valente’s narrowly focused book dissects the logic of latter-day Irish

literary nationalism and its effect on the cottage “Stoker-as-Ascendancy” industry that developed in the 1990s. In problematizing Stoker’s own convoluted ethnic heritage, foregrounding *Dracula’s* persistent and unconventional use of the doppelgänger, and interrogating the novel’s concepts of gender and heroism, Valente begins by thumbing his nose at the accepted political wisdom about the novel and ends by offering a reading of Stoker that acknowledges the very real complexities of rethinking hybridity and cultural nationalism. Backus’s study, which operates on a much grander scale, draws attention to those Anglo-Irish Big House writers such as Maturin, Le Fanu, and Stoker who attempt to allegorize the self-consuming isolation of the ascendancy class and to what she calls the “fundamental confusion between the public and the private spheres that the bourgeois family served to establish” (4). In her account, the insular questions begged by ascendancy hegemony lead outward to philosophical and Marxian questions concerning the heteronormative family values that support notions of Irish cultural difference. By bringing together the political concerns of the nationalists with questions provoked by what we might call the Irish Unionist gender troubles, *Terror and Irish Modernism* hopes to provide a dialectical analysis that observes how the dichotomous logic of colonial consciousness in Ireland actually produced Irish cultural identities that were structurally bipolar and, as a result, very often politically static. To my mind, the methodology best suited to provide this type of analysis is the allegorical and negative dialectical model provided by the Frankfurt School critics that I’ve mentioned several times already, Benjamin and Adorno. Because Adorno’s dialectical thinking in particular allows the critic to observe both the revolutionary and the reactionary elements present in a work of art, it also provides us with a productive way to read the irreducible doubleness of Irish cultural and literary consciousness during the ages of empire, terror, and modernism.¹⁵

Of course, critical discussions of the Gothic “dark double,” the second self of a novel’s protagonist, have become pretty familiar terrain for readers who find in the Edward Hydes and Bertha Masons of the Gothic barely repressed truths about a text’s main character. But by appending to it the term “double bind” in order to create the term “Gothic double bind,” I mean to connect the genre’s penchant for doppelgängers to instances in Irish cultural logic where the normative and ideological conditions for the construction of an identity like “masculine” or a concept like “terrorism” are materially, psychologically, and structurally doubled and, subsequently, produce social contexts in which definitions are constituted by their own disjunction. So we end up with a modern Irish literature that reflects a Gothic double bind in which a gender identity—either a fearsome masculinity or a vulnerable femininity—is always already its own dark double. In order to

avoid constructing yet another alternate, but nonetheless singular and monolithic, literary history of modern Ireland, I will read the literature produced during the Irish colonial period as cultural products that respond to and were triggered by a interrelated series of these gendered double binds.

If, like Sebastian Melmoth, the Irish male is characterized by the logic of the “union-as marriage” metaphor as both the masculine terrorist and the feminine terrorized, then the discourse of gender and domesticity that we find in the novels of the day reflects this ambivalent and impossible identity position. The Irish male depicted in this fiction experiences the internal incommensurability that follows from this apparently impossible dualism. Like the women of the female Gothic, he finds himself confined in Gothic houses, but if he attempts to escape, he is immediately coded as excessive, violent, and irresponsible. Irish masculinity finds itself in a Gothic double bind and, subsequently, incapable of wholly embodying either the masculine authority or the feminine passivity demanded by a dualistic and misogynistic Western culture. From one perspective, then, almost any action taken by the male protagonist in an Irish Gothic novel seems incoherent. Despite Maturin’s overt religious moralism, for instance, his novels can never imagine a morally correct course of action for their various male protagonists because any action taken seems either excessively violent or excessively weak. In attending to the Gothic double binds instigated by the unhappy Union, I want to go beyond Valente’s provocative analysis of Irishness and Backus’s far-ranging critique of hetero-normativity and establish the dynamics of an Irish literary tradition that nearly always renders masculine anxiety in what would have been considered feminine terms. This volume, then, maps out the formation of an ideology of “domestic union” that was reimagined and represented in Irish Gothic fiction as a profoundly isolating and feminizing form of confinement.

IV. THE UNION AND THE TERROR

The dynamic rhetorical force of the language of the “domestic union,” deployed in the first union debates by the British Viceroy in order to convert the political and economic assimilation of Ireland into the operative metaphor of marriage, extends as it borrows from a more complex argument for “domestic affection” initiated by Edmund Burke, Anglo-Ireland’s most potent and convincing eighteenth-century political voice. In his 1790 anti-Jacobin opus, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Burke begins by staking out his own operative metaphors. Central to his argument is the English notion of patrilineal inheritance, which, he argues, establishes a tradition of liberty wherein any truly benevolent citizen looks backward to ancestry in order to look forward to posterity

(29). By forsaking the past, French revolutionaries unleashed a terror that would, subsequently, devour France's future. Conversely the British, Burke claims, in choosing inheritance as a standard, "have given to our frame of polity the image of a relation of blood, binding up the constitution of our country with our dearest domestic ties, adopting all our fundamental laws into the bosom of our family affection" (30). He goes on to argue that by always "acting as if in the presence of canonized forefathers, the spirit of freedom, leading itself to misrule and excess, is tempered with an awful gravity" (30). Simply put, good rule must come from benevolent rulers, from good fathers who inspire an affection in balance with the gravity of an inherited tradition that they must strive to represent and to embody.¹⁶ In following this course of thought, Burke imagines a social and political world structured by the logic of the single, patriarchal family unit. With the burgeoning of the bourgeois public sphere in the eighteenth century, the family had become the ahistorical cynosure of English national identity. The bourgeois family, overseen by a benevolent and fully autonomous patriarch, came to represent both the symbol of England's cultural identity as it entered into the age of its greatest imperialist expansion and the apotheosis of the private individual's social identity and freedom. Moreover, by imagining the social world via the metaphor of domestic affection, Burke conflates the affective language of the intimate and domestic spheres with the practical and political language of the public sphere.

Of particular interest is the way that the domestic affection metaphor allows Burke to deploy the concept of terror itself. He depicts the terror in France as the inevitable result of barbarous ideologues-cum-"sophisters" who desire liberty over the affectionate and "chivalrous" familial system (66). In one of the most famous passages in the book, he characterizes terrorists as those who violate the hierarchy of affection so that "a King is but a man, a queen is but a woman; a woman but an animal, and an animal not of the highest order" (67). The patriarchal family hierarchy becomes the first and last victim of terror. Burke's arguments appear animated by the deep-seated fear that "private interests" will become the sole arbiters of "the Law" and that the solid, foundational affection for that larger family constituted by the nation will simply melt into air (68). Of course, this is a two-way street for the extraordinarily canny Burke, and as he had already claimed in his 1765 "Tract on the Popery Laws," and in his many letters opposing the Penal Laws in Ireland, bad governors invariably leave their citizen-families "justly discontented" (226). Burke recognizes the potential feeling of dispossession that comes with the patriarchal metaphor. He seeks to mitigate this feeling with a narrative of domestic affection that balances sublime masculine authority—the awesome responsibility and tradition of the patriarch—with the sincere feminine beauty imagined by the marriage

metaphor. “To make us love our country,” he goes on to explain, “our country ought to be lovely” (68).

Interestingly enough, in his 1807 *Memoirs*, the exiled United Irishman William Sampson offers a text, remarkably Gothic in its own right, that deploys the concept of terror in a manner that, at first glance, seems directly opposed to Burke’s. For Sampson, those who seek liberty are certainly not terrorists. Rather, it is the English tyrants who not only resemble the terrorists of France, but actually out-Herod the French by executing the clergy and making the violation of “female chastity” a technique for controlling the rebellious population (162–3). Martin Burke claims that Sampson was among the first of the United Irishmen to imagine the rhetorical power that came from associating with “the vanquished, not the victors” (305). By comparing the 1793–1794 excesses of the French revolutionaries to the excesses perpetrated by the British government in Ireland in 1797 and 1798, Sampson deploys the rhetoric of the victimized in order to make a larger point about justice and equity.¹⁷ As Sampson explains, when the British crushed the Rebellion and then policed the countryside with the Committee for Public Safety, the clergy were summarily put to death and women were regularly violated. In such a narrative, as Sampson seems to suggest, the Irish appear as a people for whom the ancient proverb “we are born to suffer” was written (162). Where Burke had opposed the concept of familial affection to terror in order to help craft and sustain the English system, Sampson evokes affection for the victimized in order to inveigh against an English system that is itself a form of terror. Although Burke remains more subtle in his approach, both men enact the binary of victim versus victimizer, and each characterizes his own side as the victim in need of justice. For Burke, the site of the greatest terror is the violation of Marie Antoinette. As Burke sets the scene, the queen is awakened from her bed by “a sentinel at the door, who cried out to save herself by flight” (62). As she flees, Burke tells us that “a band of ruffians and assassins, reeking with blood, rushed into the chamber of the queen pierced with a hundred strokes of bayonets and poniards the bed, from whence this persecuted woman had but just time to fly almost naked” (62). Without the shelter of a devoted and powerful patriarchal authority, the queen succumbs to the anarchic masses.

For Sampson, the great terror is the anonymous, government-sanctioned violation of female chastity. “I could never hear,” Sampson explains, “that the most brutal of all ferocity, the forcible violation of female chastity, had made part of the system of terror in France; that it did in Ireland is too deplorably true” (163). In terms that almost seemed derived from the language, plot, and logic of an eighteenth-century Gothic romance, each side defines the binary in terms of lustful masculine aggression against virtuous feminine vulnerability. Both Burke and

Sampson finally depend on the idea that a benevolent patriarchal order would protect women and uphold justice. In articulating this gendered political logic, however, both men unwittingly underscore the dichotomous structure of post-1789 political terror as well. We have Burke's terror driven by the desiring masses confronting Sampson's terror driven by the desiring conqueror. Terror from below collides with terror from above. In each case, however, the feminized and victimized side also claims to be the more just. From a historical perspective the identity "terrorizer" or, if you will "terrorist," seems evacuated of any substantial meaning almost from the moment of its first invocation. By acting as the eternal other of one's own political cause, "terror" plays the simple and equivocal role of label in the modern political and social rhetoric of legitimation. In terms of British social doctrine, anyone called terrorist is always already an illegitimate political entity. More importantly, both political legitimacy and authentic fear reside with the position identified as feminine and threatened.

A confused and troubled dichotomy of terrorizer and terrorized, underwritten by a dialectical structure of desire, will appear again and again in the political disputes and cultural products of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Ireland. As the legal fallout from the Coercion Bills enacted by Parliament between 1795 and 1798 makes abundantly clear, the courts themselves were preoccupied with the idea of political terror, as nearly one-seventh of all prosecutions in Ireland were for political crimes such as conspiracy, oath taking, or assassination.¹⁸ Throughout the nineteenth century, the disenfranchised Gaelo-Catholics will see themselves as the victims of the usurping, tyrannical Anglo-Irish, and the Anglo-Irish will see themselves as victims of barbaric Gaelo-Catholic agrarian violence and terrorism. Continually reconstructed versions of Defenderism and Whiteboyism will confront recalcitrant Orangemen while each side claims to be the victim in search of justice and social order. Both the Gaelo-Catholic and the Anglo-Irish become accused of and caught up in the double bind provoked by terrorism. The dynamic seems driven by what we might call the logic of the justified victim. Each side identifies itself always and only as terrorized in order to justify its own occasional terrorism

In his 1887 work *Zur Genealogie der Moral* [*On the Genealogy of Morality*], Friedrich Nietzsche provides us with a term that might help to elaborate on this logic. Nietzsche suggests that those seeking to discover how the contemporary logic of moral justice works might look into the concept of resentment. In the "Second Treatise" of his *Genealogy*, he goes on to define resentment as the hallowing of "revenge under the name of justice—as if justice were basically only a further development of the feeling of being wounded—and retroactively to raise to honor along with revenge the *reactive* affects in general and without

exception" (48). For Nietzsche, resentment comes from the spirit of *reactive* consciousness, or, that is, from a consciousness incapable of acting on its own and defining itself, a consciousness predicated on its own fear, resentment, and envy of the other. From the foundation of resentment grows a whole societal structure based on the repression of difference, the principle that Nietzsche sees as "*hostile to life*, a destroyer and dissolver" (50). The cycle triggered by resentment can be endless and destructive. Nietzsche's ingeniously counterintuitive solution to this problem does not seek to do away with violent or bellicose action itself but, rather, to do away with the resentful weakness—the logic of the justified victim—that triggers it, for this logic is the real enemy of peace and justice. In the Irish context in particular, the apparently endless cycle of resentment, of reconstructed Defenderism and recalcitrant Orangemen, exposes as it replays the terrorist/terrorized binary that has remained central to the development and logic of the imperialist and neo-imperialist nation-state in modernity.

Following Burke's death in 1797 and the Rebellion led by the United Irishmen in 1798, the language of "domestic affection" and its subsequent marriage metaphor come to dominate the discourse of union in both Ireland and England. The opposing sides deploy the same language to differing ends. Hence, as the British viceroy's speech attests, the union figured as kind of a heterosexual marriage in which an English patriarch would and could care for its feminine sister kingdom. In collecting and describing many of the journalistic references to the union-as-marriage, Jane Elizabeth Dougherty indicates that the marriage metaphor was unequivocally a heterosexual one because it predicated itself upon fundamental gender distinctions that "denied and reified difference" as it promised the Irish "protection and legitimacy" (203). For scholars working in the academy today, particularly after the advent of Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, and postcolonial criticism, the feminization of a colonized people appears to be a standard component of imperial and capitalist assimilation strategy. But in the case of Ireland, as this phantasmatic ideology became a constitutive part of the political and social landscape and the proposed Union continued to be depicted as a marriage by both supporters and detractors, Irish intellectuals in each camp assented to and worked within the boundaries of this gendered logic in order to legitimate their respective causes. Both sides deployed the gendered marriage metaphor in order to justify the idea of civil union over and against the concept of inherent difference that marked much of the British and French rhetoric of colonization in places like India and Africa. The theory of alterity that underwrites the Irish colonial experience, then, relies more often on a Burkean notion of natural, domestic affection than it does on the assimilative discourse of civilization. As with Burke's notion of domestic affection, the marriage

metaphor works to mitigate the sense of structural dispossession experienced by the colonized people.

During the Union debates in Parliament, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, himself a staunch antiunionist and a member of the Anglo-Irish Protestant ascendancy, decried the idea of dissolving Ireland's parliament and remonstrated that any "union" of the two kingdoms

must not resemble those Irish Marriages which commence in fraud, and are consummated by force. Let us not commit a brutal rape on the independence of Ireland, when by tenderness of behavior we may have her the willing partner of our fate. The state of Ireland does not admit such a marriage; her bans ought not to be published to the sound of the trumpet, with an army of 40,000 men.¹⁹

Likewise, among the many political caricatures of the Union, one entitled "Carrying the Union," published in March 1800 by W. Holland, depicts William Pitt and Clare astride British lions as they carry off an unwilling, fainting Lady Erin while St. Patrick, John Foster, and Henry Grattan pursue them on Irish bulls.²⁰ Other pamphlets and political cartoons, published primarily in the Dublin papers and pamphlets of the time, depict the marriage as a rape or a murder or both.²¹ The point of all of this, then, is not simply to restate the fact that representations of Ireland encoded the nation as the feminine sister kingdom and sometime wife to the British imperial husband, but rather that in the popular consciousness and in the literary imagination of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Union took on the character of a Gothic marriage. Ireland was continually characterized as the confined, threatened, terrorized female and England became—sometimes only potentially—her terrorizing, avaricious, and lustful captor-suitor. Encoded in these rather Gothic representations of the Union, we find the unconcealed fears and anxieties of a people whom Burke would doubtless see as "justly discontented" not only because their lands had been colonized by a British patriarch, but more precisely because they were imprisoned within the bonds of an unhappy domestic union with a failed, undeserving, and unwanted patriarch. From the perspective of an Irish political unconscious, the Gothic is born where the domestic-affection metaphor miscarries.

V. THE FEMALE GOTHIC, ALLEGORY, AND STRUCTURAL DISPOSSESSION

As I have already explained, the central claim of this book is that the generic boundaries of Irish Gothic fiction, and subsequently the entire genealogy of the canonical Irish modernist novel, should be redrawn

around the central trope of the Gothic marriage. This new genealogy allows us to read the novels of Maturin, Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, Oscar Wilde, Bram Stoker, James Joyce, and Samuel Beckett as working within, responding to, or extending Ireland's tradition of Gothic fiction. The most overt objection to this argument seems fairly clear. These writers are all male, and the literary features of the Gothic marriage derive from the subgenre of fiction that Ellen Moers dubbed the "Female Gothic," in order to classify those novels, written by women such as Anne Radcliffe and Charlotte Brontë, that thematize female confinement (90). But precisely because of the gendered logic of the Gothic marriage, Irish Gothic novels rework, reimagine, and blur the normal generic categories of the English Gothic tradition

The female Gothic remains a much-discussed and singular phenomenon in English literary history in no small part because it names the first novelistic form written by, for, and about women, with Radcliffe as the maternal *Arche* of this remarkably popular genre. As the typical Radcliffean female-Gothic story goes, a young, virtuous woman, either orphaned or, through meticulous and deliberate maneuvering, removed from the care of her particular friends, finds herself incarcerated in a castle, abbey, or monastery under the auspices of some "dark" nobleman, usually an Italian count, almost always a Roman Catholic. The logic of the narrative generally devolves upon this feudal patriarch, as he lays out an invidious plan to take the virtue and the ancestral lands of the heroine, to possess her—in every sense of the phrase—by guile, will, and, when necessary, violence.²² And as I've already noted, a contemporary review of the genre, published in 1797 in the *Spirit of Public Journals*, calls Radcliffe's style "Terrorist" because it "makes us fall in love with what we fear to look on" (323). Hence, in a decade where the term terror was inextricably linked to events in France, the female Gothic becomes the novelistic subgenre that exploits terror by invoking a sado-masochistic structure of desire. In these sado-masochistically structured fictions, the desired objects not only manifest themselves as terrors to look upon, which would make them frightening enough, but they also invariably implicate their readers in both poles of the terrorist/terrorized dichotomy. If the kind of "terrorist" fiction written by the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic novelists manipulates the reader's identification with fictive characters, the narrative desire for conflict that underscores these fictions also imagines a doubled reader who must rely on identification with both the terrorized and the terrorist in order to experience the full thrill provided by the genre. The novels work at once to reproduce and to negate the dialectical logic of desire that underwrites the terrorist/terrorized double bind. Hence, they also provide us with a space to rethink the social, political, and historical problematics that attend this double bind. For the reader, the experience provided by

the genre in some sense confirms Burke's fear that the pursuit of those beautiful liberties we so desire leads ineluctably and directly to excess and terror. In the elliptical logic followed by these novels, autonomy and liberty nearly always lead to vulnerability, violence, and excess. What's more, the reader must desire all of these conflicted experiences at once merely in order to finish reading a female Gothic novel.

The failed unions and marriages depicted in the female Gothic are always rather brutal and sensational affairs whose bans, to borrow Sheridan's terminology, are published by force, and the female Gothic itself reads as a double for the British model of domesticity that had grown out of the capitalist ideology of the private sphere. Of course, when we begin surveying the prose fictions of this period from the standpoint of Nancy Armstrong's assertions about the ideological structure of the British private sphere and the rise of the figure of the "domestic woman," we see in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British fiction the groundwork for the construction of a new kind of woman.²³ We also become privy to the architecture of a modern bourgeois consciousness built upon the desire for domesticity and for the hearth rather than upon something as abstract as the individual's civil rights or as uncontrollable as regional, communal, or sectarian loyalty. In modernity, domesticity comes to serve as a central, foundational, and unifying metaphor for Great Britain's various ideological and colonial apparatuses. The autonomy promised by the separate spheres was, of course, only promised to men and corresponded to the ownership of private property.²⁴ At best, the domestic branch of the private sphere promised a kind of safe haven for the woman of the eighteenth century, but, as Kate Ferguson Ellis indicates in *The Contested Castle*, the Gothic novel, the most popular literary material for the woman reader of the period, also performed the paradoxical cultural work of embodying a "resistance to an ideology that imprisons [women] even as it posits a sphere of safety for them" (x). In the Gothic's more nuanced and reflective texts, like *Jane Eyre* or *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the female-confinement narrative unites an anxiety concerning the boundaries that demarcate Great Britain as a civilizing empire to the identifying mechanism that gender plays within the discourse of that civilization. Where English manhood becomes the mode of civilized subjectivity to be emulated, womanhood is coded as partial and often dangerously erratic. In the most overt sense, by structuring the boundaries of women's sexuality, confining it to the compulsorily maternal, heterosexual, corporeal, and vulnerable, these novels shore up the goals of English patriarchy and the burgeoning institutions of the bourgeois public sphere. Hence, the taking of the young woman's body in the novels is naturally mirrored by the taking of the property entailed to her. Both in the strict legal sense and in the social economy of desire imagined by Gothic novels, women figure as objects possessed, never as

subjects allowed self-possession. And in the vast majority of these texts, anxiety concerning land-ownership resolves in the birth of an acknowledgeable male heir who must be allowed to inherit the ancestral land and, if only figuratively, to repossess the body of the mother.

The female Gothic, thusly, deals more directly with the problem of structural dispossession than any other form of domestic fiction. The male heir whose birth signifies a repossession of the land and of the mother's figural body appears, at least at first, as a kind of hybrid who embodies the union of masculine rational authority and feminine corporeal reproduction. The heir connects Burke's sublime masculine authority to the potentially dispossessed maternal line. But the novels themselves remain far more emphatic about patrilineal succession and about what Burke called the "awful gravity" and authority that this line of succession comes to signify. From the male heirs in Radcliffe's novels through to the multiply named male child of Jonathan Harker and Mina Murray in Stoker's *Dracula*, the masculine inheritor always points to the desire to ameliorate the structural dispossession that attends woman's position as object in the marriage contract. At the same time, even when we read him as a symbol of hybridity, the male heir reasserts precisely the male/female binary that his presence intends to smooth over. The Gothic male heir does not dispel fear so much as he signifies its shivering, uneasy presence beneath the deceptively placid surface of bourgeois domestic propriety. With the birth of the heir, the system might appear to have solved a problem, but in point of fact it has merely reaffirmed its initial social schema and returned to something resembling a status quo or, that is, to what a Hegelian-Marxist philosopher like Theodor Adorno would call the bourgeois ever-same.

By imagining its Emily St. Auberts and Mina Harkers as potential victims who fret over their respective positions within the private and intimate spheres, the Gothic novel obsesses about and worries over the cultural and social implications of structural dispossession in a more overt way than any other genre of fiction from the period. In so doing, the Gothic also allegorizes a historical problem, an anxiety concerning woman's confinement within the intimate and private spheres. It seems like no mere accident, then, that a revision of the female Gothic that represents the entire population of Ireland—male and female—as vulnerable, feminine, and other was also one of the most popular forms of nineteenth-century Irish fiction. The issue of structural dispossession lies at the heart of the domestic-affection metaphor, and in an admittedly shadowy, unsteady, and unsure way, the female Gothic points to the failings of domesticity as a model for understanding political authority. Moreover, when we read feminine confinement itself as a negative allegory of the autonomy promised by the notion of a private sphere, then we see dialectically enfolded into the female Gothic the social failings of the