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Citation: Weston, Kelli (2022) 'The other' women: Black women as the double in female gothic cinema. [Thesis] (Unpublished)

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‘The Other’ Women: Black Women as the Double in Female Gothic Cinema

A Thesis Submitted to the Department of Film and Screen Media

Birkbeck University of London

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by

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April 2021

ABSTRACT

The Female Gothic has traditionally concerned and addressed the anxieties of white middle-class women, confined to the domestic by patriarchy. My dissertation focuses on the representation of Black women in horror cinema, specifically the thinly concealed Black feminine in the American domestic, where she has popularly been relegated in the cultural consciousness. Combining W. E. B. Du Bois's concepts of double-consciousness and the veil with D. W. Winnicott's mother-mirror role theory, I outline the spectral Black feminine as both character and spectator. I argue that, whether veiled or visualized, the Black feminine frequently emerges in films that adopt the Female Gothic model through what I identify as the racialized female double. My dissertation charts her (RFD) expression through a textual analysis of diegetic performances of racialized and gendered looking. By situating these films in their respective socio-historical contexts, principally applying psychoanalysis and Du Bois's contributions to race theory, the racialized female double represents the threat Black femininity poses to the social order in cinema that centers white spectatorship and follows the Female Gothic formula. However, contemporary narratives of fear from filmmakers Kasi Lemmons and Jordan Peele establishes a Black Female Gothic cinema tradition characterized by a purposeful engagement with Black feminine spectatorship that harnesses the racialized female double to expose and disrupt patriarchal constructions of Black women, empowered by an intersectional gaze. I conclude with a discussion of the genre's capacity to accommodate the Black feminine experience in a way that equally reflects on its own structural technologies of Othering and formidably expresses her rebellion against white patriarchal confinement.

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, this has been indicated by appropriate author citations.

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Introduction

To speak of the African-American Gothic means usually - if not necessarily - to speak of Toni Morrison's 1987 novel *Beloved*, about a family of formerly enslaved people haunted by the ghost of a slain infant. After all, it contains perhaps the most essential ingredient: a house terrorized by a malevolent spirit. But in fact, it was *The Bluest Eye* (1970), Morrison's harrowing debut, that first established her in the Gothic tradition.

For a writer whose dense meditations on the interior lives of Black women have often been deemed unfilmable, it is easily her most cinematic book, narratively and thematically. The tragedy of young Pecola Breedlove, a relentlessly abused Black girl desperate for Shirley-Temple-blue-eyes, seems in large part precipitated by the screen. Cinema is where Pecola and her mother both locate their most feverish desires: the only thing akin to happiness either of them seem to find throughout the whole book. In fact, the consequences of a screen that not only celebrates and glamorizes whiteness, but actively degrades Blackness, consumes their entire community, cinephile or otherwise. The unbridled contempt for the dark-skinned, love-starved Pecola because she is 'ugly' foregrounds the role that the image plays in psychologically enforcing the most insidious dimensions of white supremacy. To Pecola's understanding, blue eyes would not only change the way people see her, it would change the way she herself *sees* the world. By the end, the child is driven insane after she has been raped twice by her own father and gives birth to a baby who dies prematurely. But the novel's narrator, Pecola's schoolmate Claudia, believes that their entire community bears responsibility for Pecola's fate. She comes to represent their mangled conceptions of Blackness: a shadowy double, the lurking reflection of all the horror conceived to justify violence against them. More than a melancholy tale about one girl betrayed by her family and failed by society, Morrison's novel is a parable on the terrorized gaze.

There are no haunted houses in *The Bluest Eye*, but there are key components of the Female Gothic: namely, the sexually threatening patriarch and the endangered heroine, social and spatial confinement her ever present condition. Ellen Moers famously defined the ‘Female Gothic’ as those literary works by women writers in a form that ‘has to do with fear.’¹ But she positioned the genre as one that uniquely spoke to women’s anxieties, nominating it as a space of expressly female resistance to the patriarchal structures that limited the authors themselves and their heroines. The essential entrapment that animates the genre seems primed to convey the historical status of Black women, bound as they long have been to the American domestic. Traditionally, the mode has concerned the European middle-classes, particularly virginal young women who must reconcile themselves to stifling gender expectations - like motherhood - generally emblematised by the ominous ancestral manor or castle. True to the form, *The Bluest Eye* is also rather preoccupied with houses: how they look; how comfortable they are or aren’t; how they often become spaces where sexual violence is visited upon little Black girls, who find themselves unprotected and the crimes against them overlooked. Given its oft-touted propensity to give voice to the trapped and silenced, the Female Gothic thus becomes a rich site to explore this muted, marginalized experience.

In this thesis I seek to examine the Black feminine in cinematic narratives of fear. The African-American Gothic has been extensively established in literature, most prominently outlined by scholars such as Teresa A. Goddu, Maisha L. Wester, Theodore L. Gross, and many others. As my research took shape, so, too, did a burgeoning class of contemporary Black horror cinema from Black directors. But in the beginning, I mainly sought to chart how Female Gothic cinema - which I suspected innately entailed the racialized feminine - had evolved, and, importantly, how Black filmmakers had responded to a film legacy that broadly implicated them as monstrous Other. While the distinctions and connections between European, European-American, and African-American Gothic traditions have been much covered in literature, this genealogy has received comparatively less attention in cinema. Therefore, from its inception two major pillars have steered this thesis: horror and the gaze.

Throughout this dissertation, I frequently use the terms ‘horror’ and ‘Gothic’ interchangeably, because what is often deemed horror in cinema usually incorporates significant elements of Gothic fiction. These elements - the patriarchal house or family structure, treacherous landscapes, the vulnerable heroine pursued by sinister or otherwise supernatural forces, and so on - provide direction; but, of course, the Gothic is much more than these tropes. It is perhaps most convincingly described as a ‘language.’ Linda Badley argues that the genre

¹ Ellen Moers, *Literary Women: The Great Writers* (New York: Doubleday, 1976), p. 90.

provides a ‘language’ for ‘its sense of victimization and its rage.’² Similarly, H. L. Malchow contends that the Gothic is ‘a language of panic, of unreasoning anxiety, blind revulsion, and distancing sensationalism...this language of terror was no monopoly of the novelist, but can be found throughout the discourse on racial difference...’³ Thus, we can begin to understand the Gothic more precisely as a mode that, far from generic, may lurk within the bounds of many different forms, narrative and otherwise, as Malchow attests. That is, while the Gothic can function as a category all its own and has been regarded through that lens, it is perhaps better described as a signature that may infiltrate any number of genres.

Already in literature, the Gothic includes the Gothic horror, the Gothic romance, the Gothic comedy, and so on, evidence of its innate diversity. From melodrama to satire, certain tropes and characteristics signal the mode, whether that means an encounter with the supernatural, mystery, or simply the more sinister dimensions of human nature. Indeed, the cases here will also occupy a range of broader genres wherein the Gothic expression transforms with each text. In part, the work of this thesis is to identify the formula of the Female Gothic in films where it has historically been overlooked. Acknowledging its so often neglected outline provides a new way to consider these texts, which have more often been described as noir or thriller or outright horror. It is my argument that the Gothic adds invaluable specificity, for its conventions yield profound insights where cinematic conceptions of the Black feminine are concerned. These films may not have been made with the Gothic strategy in mind, but the mode matters here because it speaks to a particular entrapment, both narratively and socially. In other words, if the Black feminine has generally been rendered invisible in American cinema, the Gothic may be incisively employed to locate her. So the Gothic principally operates in this thesis as a compass, a framework that maps the racialized and gendered anxieties that have long troubled the American imaginary. Put more plainly, in this thesis I will classify the discernible - if, perhaps, understated - Female Gothic dimension of films that have not commonly been associated with the mode, which in fact translates across multiple genres, as demonstrated by the case studies presented throughout this thesis. In naming the Gothic influence, we see how much its architecture reveals to us about the forces that have historically and socially shaped our fears, and how the same mode may be harnessed to upend dominant images of the racialized.

In other words, the Gothic is necessarily elastic, intrinsically changeable, always shape-shifting according to the central cultural tensions of the age; its Other (s) are all at once racial, sexual, and gendered threats to white patriarchy. The themes and symbols that typically characterize the mode are harnessed to express

² Linda Badley, *Film, Horror, and the Body Fantastic* (Westport:Greenwood Publishing Group, 1995), p. 103.

³ H. L. Malchow, *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 4 - 5.

whatever prevailing anxieties have gripped the culture. I aim here to elucidate this ‘sense’ of panic, using the instruments that compose this ‘language,’ to reveal how cinema specifically reckons with these anxieties. In his essay, ‘The Survival of the Gothic Response’ James Keech writes, ‘The Gothic has, quite simply, too frequently been regarded as an end in itself. Thus the thematic intentions of the...Gothic effects, that metaphorical equation through device and atmosphere of the fearful in the Gothic world and the fearful in his own world, becomes ignored.’⁴ That is to say, identifying the Gothic has frequently supplanted a more productive calculus that explores what wider designs these tropes enable. For Keech this means prioritizing atmosphere and audience response over the features that have traditionally marked the genre, a hugely constructive process for this research, where the Gothic character of a text is not always immediately recognizable. As Keech discerns, the response becomes a catalyst for even more fascinating revelations. Here, that response will be determined by the diegetic horror experienced by principal - and, as I argue, racialized - female characters who encounter their own image or double with fear, therefore conveying the racialized feminine as spectator. The genre functions as a useful framework within which to study this particular dynamic precisely because its distinct scaffolding yields fascinating implications, given its historical treatment of race and gender. Furthermore, cinema equally provides an interesting space to consider the ways that women look at themselves, or, rather, how they are directed to look.

To be clear, the central question of the Female Gothic seems to be one of ownership: to whom does the female body belong, sexually, politically, socially. Black women’s lives in America continue to be defined by their history as property. Apropos, writers such as Morrison and Goddu have persuasively argued that the American literary tradition is inescapably rooted in slavery and the long silenced Black presence. While, crucially, slave narratives are distinguished by their moral and political agenda, Kari Winter draws interesting connections between women’s slave accounts and Female Gothic fiction. Winter notes that both genres focus on the sexual politics at the heart of patriarchal culture, and share, moreover, remarkably similar structures and ideological stances.⁵ Winter’s research has been especially productive for this project because she, too, concerns herself in part with how Gothic literary tropes may be used to convey a Black female experience although, significantly, she does not conflate the Female Gothic and the slave narrative. Winter’s analysis of the similarities between the two modes makes way here for an examination of how the Female Gothic accommodates Black womanhood. Even

⁴ Keech, p. 138.

⁵ Kari J. Winter, *Subjects of Slavery, Agents of Change Women and Power in Gothic Novels and Slave Narratives, 1790-1865* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), p. 13.

though she is careful not to equate the status of slave and woman, Winters evinces that both forms operate as political resistance against the same forces.

In *Playing in the Dark*, Toni Morrison details what she calls an 'Africanist' presence that pervades American literature. She writes against conventional consensus among scholars, writers, and historians that implicitly maintains 'traditional, canonical American literature is free of, uninformed, and unshaped by the four-hundred-year-old presence of, first, Africans and then African-Americans in the United States.'⁶ In other words, if scholarship has largely ignored the impact of slavery on the country's culture and mythology, Morrison contends that formative American literature - the works of Edgar Allan Poe, William Faulkner, and so on - directly emerges in the shadow of slavery, the sinister institution upon which the nation was forged. She argues, 'American writers were able to employ an imagined Africanist persona to articulate and imaginatively act out the forbidden in American culture...a writer's response to American Africanism often provides a subtext that either sabotages the surface text's expressed intentions or escapes them through a language that mystifies what it cannot bring itself to articulate but still attempts to register.'⁷ Whether explicit or tacit, intentional or unwitting, these narratives intuitively signal to these origins. Her analysis of the white literary imagination categorizes the Africanist figure as surrogate and enabler, an encounter with the past and ongoing savagery of the white colonial project. So the Black Other, like any proper Other, is fundamentally self-reflexive, immanent: a mirror.

If this is true of literature - and I believe it is - then it must certainly be true of cinema. While much scholarship exists on the general dearth of a Black presence on screen (and behind it, for that matter), the noxious stereotypes Black actors are frequently called on to perform, and how Black spectatorship inevitably becomes political, almost nothing had been said about what seemed to me a natural harbor for the Black feminine and how she might be discerned by a community for whom the gaze has always been a fraught site. Returning to *The Bluest Eye*, consider that, of all things, Pecola does not wish to change her skin color or her hair, but her eyes, and consequently her sight. It seems important to trace the connections between the seen and unseen, power and visibility, in an era when there has been increased demand for the visibility of Black people and people of color.

There is no question that Black women in particular rarely receive the complexity they deserve in film. Historically, when they have appeared at all, they were often mammies, a figure who paved the way in later years for the less gender exclusive magical negroes and Black best friends, all of them designed to nurture white lead

⁶ Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 4 - 5.

⁷ Morrison, p. 66.

characters. There are, of course, other archetypes, like the tragic mulatto or the lascivious Jezebel. But you could find the mammy or the maternal Black maid almost everywhere in film, usually in the background, the white American household's most enduring embellishment. Indeed, hers is a lasting image, one that predates cinema. Among these types, she is arguably the most 'positive' or, more accurately, the least likely to be horribly punished or violated on screen. She is reliably comedic. Yet the scholar Saidiya Hartman reveals the truth of her situation most concisely: 'The servant in the house - the ubiquitous figure of the captive maternal - was conscripted to be friend, nurse, confidante, nanny, and bed-warmer.'⁸ The Black woman trapped in the white household is inherently vulnerable, relentlessly exploited, and sexually endangered. I argue that considering how the Female Gothic is principally located in the domestic, then the Black feminine - who already haunts this space in the historical and mythical cultural consciousness - might reasonably be triangulated there.

With this premise in place, I seek to illuminate the frequently illegible Black feminine in cinema which follows the Female Gothic formula. In doing so, I aim to negotiate questions of visibility, and to complicate the conventional mapping of invisibility and visibility to disempowerment and empowerment. I speculate that even when the Black feminine cannot be seen, the infrastructure of the Gothic narrative - with its conceptions of 'darkness' that typically gesture to racial and gendered fears, and its attention to confinement - invites not only the spectral Black feminine within the film's diegesis, but a Black feminine spectator prepared to read her.

To do this, I applied a critical, gendered analysis of W. E. B. Du Bois's theory of double-consciousness and the veil to my chosen films. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois would use double-consciousness to characterize the psychological tension between the gaze - 'always looking at one's self through the eyes of others...measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity'- and identity - 'One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body.'⁹ Meanwhile, the veil, a central Gothic trope, operates for Du Bois as a layered metaphor for both this psychological dissonance and the material disparities that regulate Black life in America. In other words, the veil not only encompasses economic and legislative discrimination, or the many ways that Black people are shut out from opportunities, it also becomes a lens, an enhanced way of looking at the world. According to Du Bois, the 'gift' of Black life is this gaze, what he deems a 'second sight'.¹⁰ In the Female Gothic, the veil often symbolically mediates between the known and unknown (Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* and the

⁸ Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals* (New York: Norton & Co., 2019), pp. 233-234.

⁹ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Company, 1903), p. 8.

¹⁰ Ibid.

wax image covered by the veil), and conceals a horror (the unknown). These two operational uses possess rich implications when applied intersectionally.

In part, I examine how cinema contributes to the trauma that cultivates this psychic split Du Bois describes, specifically as it concerns Black women, using the doppelgänger trope. By deconstructing racialized images in the Gothic, I interrogate intersecting institutions of domination and examine how the double performs the fragmented psyche in addition to betraying social anxieties around race and hybridity. These concepts as defined by Du Bois have continually been revised and expanded by subsequent generations of theorists, as I elaborate on in the first chapter. But although his text largely reflects patriarchal language and ideological concerns, I stay close to the original material which remains profoundly insightful. My objective is to uncover the depth of the narcissistic wound inflicted upon the Black female psyche by applying this gendered reading of Du Bois to the racialized Female Gothic, where doubles, mirrors, and veils become an expression of neurotic colonial aggression, the ensuing psychic trauma, and alternately a tool of restoration for Black filmmakers and spectators.

It is important to say that although Black audiences continue to have trouble finding themselves in most mainstream films, Black horror cinema notably boasts a far more storied legacy than is often recognized. *Hellbound Train* (1930) is one of the earliest features in the genre to be directed by Black filmmakers, married evangelists James and Eloyce Gist. The film catalogues a range of sins through railroad cars populated by - as title cards announce - bootleggers, thieves, adulterous women, and so on, with frequent cutaways to the train's engineer, Satan. These decidedly religious themes can be traced throughout Black American horror cinema. Like the Gists, Spencer Williams employs horror to enforce morality in his influential 1941 film *The Blood of Jesus*, where a devout woman, accidentally shot by her husband (played by Williams), has a near-death spiritual experience and ultimately survives after she resists the Devil's temptations. Bill Gunn's canonical *Ganja & Hess* (1973) - remade by Spike Lee, in an apparent nod to this lineage, as *Da Sweet Blood Of Jesus* (2015) - concludes with the vampire Dr. Hess Green (Duane Jones) returning to the Christian church and killing himself, again. The exhortation of Christian principles continues with James Bond III's *Def by Temptation* (1990), about a Black succubus eventually defeated with holy water and a crucifix. Ernest Dickerson's *Tales from the Crypt: Demon Knight* (1995) merges fear and comedy with Biblical motifs: holy blood and divine, immortal guardians. There are, of course, the spate of horror films during the Blaxploitation period that rewrote prominent Gothic texts around Black characters such as *Blacula* (1972) and *Dr. Black, Mr. Hyde* (1976), both directed by William Crain. But even when Black filmmakers work in drama, they often incorporate Gothic elements or atmosphere:

for example, Dickerson's feature debut *Juice* (1992) or Albert and Allen Hughes's crime drama *Dead Presidents* (1995).

However, the number of Black women filmmakers, as well as overall characterizations of Black women, remained largely stunted. For all the strides made in African-American cinema, particularly in the eighties and nineties, much of it depicted the stark emotional and psychological traumas of Black masculinity forged in the metropolis. These stories frequently concerned young Black men in the inner city where they were either drawn into criminal enterprise, animated by capitalist structures that found legal and economic ways to malign them, or where they, merely by existing, personified an affront to the white supremacist establishment that endeavoured to stymie and subjugate them. These otherwise complex masculinist narratives often had little room for the Black women appearing in them. Mothers, girlfriends, wives and mistresses alike were invariably marginal, if not an outright hindrance to the development of Black masculine identity. Such were the stories amplified by the mainstream, although this does not account for all Black films. The era equally saw icons of the L. A. Rebellion Charles Burnett and Haile Gerima produce some of their most visionary works featuring dimensional portrayals of Black womanhood. In 1992, Leslie Harris released *Just Another Girl on the I. R. T.*, about a determined, lovestruck Black teenager from Brooklyn, perhaps in response to the one-sided depiction of Black American urban life where Black women could not count upon seeing themselves fully realized or even positively rendered. Harris was hardly alone in this project. Just the year before, Julie Dash's landmark film *Daughters of the Dust* (1991) became the first feature directed by an African-American woman to be distributed theatrically in the United States.

That said, Black women as spectators could not consistently rely on films to reflect them. Saidiya Hartman, whose work formidably shapes this thesis, writes, 'Am I not here? Am I an absent presence?...[Black women] fell out of the order of representation all together. Neither subject nor object, but a mute, silenced thing, like an impossible metaphor...or a form yet to be named.'¹¹ As I have stated, this thesis does not only concern horror, but the gaze. More specifically, I want to emphasize the consequences of the colonial gaze in these narratives so anxious about the racial Other that Black people are often not even seen. Their omission does not indicate the absence of fear organized around racial and gendered difference, but, like Morrison suggests, betrays it when these films fundamentally premise themselves on the monstrous Other, who comes to symbolize this horror.

¹¹ Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals* (New York: Norton & Co., 2019), p. 259.

Naturally, films from Black American directors - often shot by Black cinematographers (the aforementioned cult horror director Dickerson, for example, began his career as a cinematographer for Spike Lee) - tend to evade racially hegemonic ways of presenting Black characters, even as they frequently fall prey to gendered looking dynamics. But a rich Black film tradition has always existed, broadly independent of white spectatorial arrangement of power, if only because these films were almost entirely populated by Black people and purposefully designed for them as audiences. Nevertheless, mainstream cinema in America remains predominantly white. Historically, to be sure, the films most widely distributed and the images most likely to be encountered established whiteness as the standard. Therefore, many of the cases covered in this research will consider the ramifications of this widespread lack of reflection through the prism of D. W. Winnicott's theory of the mother's role as mirror.

In his prominent essay, 'The Mirror-role of Mother and Family in Child Development,' Winnicott essentially argues that an infant first builds their sense of self by recognizing themselves in the mother's gaze. The mother's face is the precursor to the mirror. If the mother returns the infant's gaze, healthy ego development can begin, whereas if the infant does not receive recognition from the mother, there are damaging consequences to the psyche. To be clear, I am not equating audiences with infants, nor do I conceive of cinema as integral to healthy psychology. On the contrary, I hope to address the comparable dynamic that film as a formative cultural mirror forges with spectators using Winnicott's understanding of reflection as essential to ego formation. The psychoanalyst remains a pillar of object relations theory, and his explanation of mirroring feels urgently applicable to concepts I have chosen to negotiate here, particularly reflection as both a Gothic trope and a condition of cinematic spectatorship. Importantly, Winnicott's understanding of this relationship proves powerfully evocative and pertinent. He writes, 'What does the baby see when he or she looks at the mother's face? I am suggesting that, ordinarily, what the baby sees is himself or herself...In other words the mother is looking at the baby and what she looks like is related to what she sees there.'¹² He shrewdly perceives that the infant requires not merely reflection or even precisely identification, but necessarily connection, a gaze that registers he or she is there and exists. Again, I want to emphasize that Black women as spectators can and do get themselves reflected elsewhere, in and outside of cinema. And in fact, not all representation is quality representation. By this I mean, and seek to demonstrate, that simply casting Black actresses is not on its own satisfying or rewarding mirroring practice. However, by considering the spectator's relationship to the screen

¹² D. W. Winnicott, 'Mirror-role of the Mother and Family in Child Development in Playing & Reality' (Tavistock Publications, 1971) pp. 1 - 2 <<http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/winnicott2.pdf>> [accessed 24 June 2016].

through Winnicott's mother-mirror theory, I address complicated questions around cinematic representation and speak to the psychological impact of the colonial gaze: the denial of reflection and recognition. Significantly, through Winnicott, I am able to configure the ideal Black feminine spectator these narratives produce.

Typically, Black spectatorship is measured in more historical, empirical, political, and even spatial terms. It should be said that Winnicott himself is woefully myopic where it concerns issues of race. He adds an admittedly poetic dimension to this thesis, for just as the mother is essential to his theories, so, too, the maternal occupies a central place in the Female Gothic, where the heroine is almost always required to, in some way, confront her. Winnicott's position on the power of maternal recognition intriguingly compliments the Female Gothic's structural deference to her. Indeed, nothing may more powerfully link the African-American Gothic literary tradition to the Female Gothic than the repressed maternal. Certainly, that translates thematically to the films I analyze here, and becomes doubly relevant due to the links between cinema, psychoanalysis, and the phantasmagoric realm of the visual. In other words, Winnicott adds to the dense maternal underpinnings of the Female Gothic, particularly in cinema where his theories accommodate the narrative and the spectator. More to the point, despite his racial blindspots, he does manage to wield incredibly astute language when he describes what the mother as the mirror - and thus, the screen - engenders by mirroring her infant. He argues, 'if the mother's face is unresponsive, then a mirror is a thing to be looked at but not to be looked into.'¹³ So it is with the screen and the Black, especially female, spectator. The screen, then, does not offer what Winnicott describes of this process with the mother, 'a significant exchange with the world, a two-way process in which self-enrichment alternates with the discovery of meaning in the world of seen things.'¹⁴ In this way Winnicott lends the framework and vocabulary to articulate the full psychological weight of an antagonistic screen, particularly in a genre already powerfully motivated by mirrors and unseen dimensions.

At the same time, my analysis of the screen's function as a colonial apparatus requires the vigorous criticism of race theorists who specialize in cinema and specifically spectatorship. I depend heavily on scholars such as bell hooks, Manthia Diawara, Jacqueline Stewart, Michele Wallace, Jacqueline Bobo, and James Baldwin, all of whom contextualize racial and gendered screen operations with colonial history. If Winnicott offers a cogent psychological portrait of the way the visual generally impacts the thwarted, denied viewer, then the aforementioned writers outline the historical and socio-political forces that shape not only the seen world itself, but crucially the colonized gaze.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Winnicott, p. 2.

Before I expand on the critical analyses that these above authors lend to this thesis, I want to clarify how spectatorship as a lens will be integrated here. In general, my own framework does not veer far from the structure that defined the emerging apparatus theory of the 1970s, established by those theorists (Jean-Louis Baudry, Christian Metz, Laura Mulvey) who vitally worked to define how cinema functions institutionally, or as a machine that influences the way spectators find pleasure in film viewing, pleasure that reflects prevailing ideology. Concerned as this practice is with desire and the instincts awakened by the gaze, psychoanalysis has always been integral to interpreting cinema. From its inception, Jacques Lacan and Sigmund Freud have been fundamental influences on cinema theory, which has largely sought to unravel all the ways film language may conspire upon the audience. Of course, the psychoanalytic model often entailed certain presumptions about the spectator. For instance, Metz's delineation between primary (put simply, the act of recognizing oneself as spectator) and secondary identification (identifying with the characters on screen) is steeped in patriarchal conceptions of audiences' response to films, which is to say 'the history of the subject's secondary identifications is the history of its positioning in an intersubjective economy, which in Freud is dominated by the Oedipal complex.'¹⁵ In other words, the Metzian approach implies a universal - white, male, heterosexual - subject; that is, identification with the Father becomes the psychic model for all secondary identifications.¹⁶ Feminist film theory necessarily challenges this classic schema, wherein female identification is interrupted and compromised. Mulvey, of course, introduced a female, but still unquestioningly white, observer. Likewise, Mary Ann Doane and Teresa de Lauretis, among many others, argued that cinema was in fact organized by a phallocentric fantasy of dominance over women as spectacle, pressing female viewers into masochistic identification or alienating them.

As spectatorship studies have evolved, theorists have evaded the pitfalls presented by this traditional paradigm with the empirical approach - which eludes essentializing audiences to study real people - and in addition to gender difference, sexually and racially diverse strategies for looking have been employed to interpret the exchange between screen and spectator. Admittedly, this exchange is forged out of a number of different circumstances: for example, a formative, cultural awareness that one is already estranged from the visual realm. Identification is a complex process, in some ways impossible to fully account for in all its manifold social and psychic workings. Most pertinently, the natural response to these questions of seeing, particularly where it concerns Black audiences, is the more pronounced presence of the historically underrepresented on screen.

¹⁵ Mary Ann Doane, 'Misrecognition and Identity,' in *Explorations in Film Theory: Selected Essays from Ciné-tracts* ed. by Ronald F. Burnett (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 15 - 25 (p. 20).

¹⁶ Ibid.

A theory of spectatorship is important here because it illuminates some of the blindspots (ironically) in the prevailing discourse around representation. That is, the processes of relating to the images on screen - or what Mulvey herself aptly deems 'recognition' - do not rest so neatly upon what is seen, particularly for those audiences already primed for their own disavowal. When Mulvey privileges the gender difference that alienates women from the screen, at least partially implicit in this denial is an expectation of inclusion. On the contrary, Black female audiences are compelled to find pleasure in a space that has never purported to accommodate them. They are doubly antagonized, neither seen (reduced to the margins or disappeared altogether) nor - consciously - invited to see. Thus, the conditions of their engagement with cinema are entirely different. However, rather than navigate the intricacy of Black women's viewership, as individual as anyone's, I turn to cinema itself for narrative examples of looking, which materially gesture to the positionality constructed for Black female audiences. I have observed in certain films a pattern of looking that indicates a racialized dynamic between characters and here I employ spectatorship to examine the central role the gaze plays in enforcing the racial disassociation that Du Bois describes.

Therefore, in this thesis, I am principally committed to exploring the gaze as it unfolds diegetically and, consequently, its metaphorical significance. What follows here are analyses that consider how the gaze is portrayed narratively and its implications, even when the characters themselves do not explicitly present as Black. At times I allude to a Black feminine viewership, a hypothetical audience, or a produced spectator, which I feel these racialized looking relations depicted on screen evoke. One cannot help but draw such connections from a symbolic performance of the dynamic white supremacist imagery engenders in Black female audiences. The portrait of white femininity beheld by a racialized character or vice versa inevitably speaks to the relationship between cinema - overwhelmingly arranged around white dominance - and the (ideal) Black woman spectator. But primarily I aim to characterize the narrative visualization of racialized spectatorship as reflective of the psychological condition that Du Bois describes, for he has so significantly influenced Black thought, art and literature (some of which is included in this thesis) because his arguments in *The Souls of Black Folk* remain an incisive and astute interpretation of the forces that continue to shape Black life in America. Thus, the films covered here concern women who look, without seeking to address real, embodied viewers.

Throughout her oeuvre feminist author bell hooks grapples with the same ideas that Morrison raises in *The Bluest Eye*, with attention to film, racialized looking, and the particular anguish of Black girls and women who find themselves peculiarly situated in prevailing power paradigms. In fact, hooks remains one of the foremost voices on the subject, so naturally her theories feature significantly in my research. In an especially

influential paper, ‘The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators,’ on the implications of the Black image in popular culture, hooks argues for what she calls an ‘oppositional gaze’ that interrogates prevalent, stereotypical portrayals of Black identity on screen.¹⁷ The oppositional gaze emerged as a direct critique of that other well-known gaze, that is the ‘male gaze,’ defined by Mulvey in her 1975 groundbreaking article ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.’ Mulvey contends that cinema formulates spectatorship such that women must adopt a masculine perspective in a viewing process that makes women the object of desire. Although Mulvey’s landmark explanation of the male gaze would go on to define decades of feminist scholarship, its criticisms have also ushered in profound change by opening up new ways of understanding cinema and the complex structures that prioritize (white) masculine heteronormative positionality. According to hooks, Mulvey’s analysis of cinematic relations cannot accommodate Black women, broadly absent from the screen or, if present, likely not the intended object of male gazing. Their discourse beckons multiple modes of critical looking that challenges patriarchal and racial power structures. The intersectional perspective that hooks prescribes, a position that addresses both racial and gendered concerns, is integral to this research. However, I seek to contribute to existing scholarship by applying spectatorship mainly through a synthesis of Du Bois and Winnicott’s understanding of looking relations to illuminate the ways the psychic Black feminine is made illegible and, in so doing, map her interiority.

Like Winnicott, both hooks and Mulvey organize their thoughts on the cinematic gaze around the psychoanalytic mirror stage: Mulvey steepes her argument in Freudian concepts; hooks applies the theories of Michel Foucault as a starting point for the oppositional gaze. Freud, of course, must enter this thesis, with his definition of the Uncanny and the double’s deathly origins, because my analysis is steeped in the diegetic looking dynamics that play out between cinematic twinships. The doppelgänger is not merely a construct of horror here, but another way to explore the racialized gaze. If, as Du Bois argues, Black Americans constantly regard themselves through the eyes of the other, then the on-screen double portrays this process. When these racialized looking relations are performed, the filmmakers produce the Black feminine as spectator, even when they broadly center white anxieties. Furthermore, these female doubles contribute the intersectionality that is missing from Du Bois’s generally masculinist notions of Black identity in this text. Du Bois’s theory of double-consciousness marks these characters as racialized and contextualizes the psychological violence that Winnicott describes, all the more applicable because the confrontations between these on-screen Gothic female

¹⁷ bell hooks, ‘The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators’ in *Movies and Mass Culture* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996).

doppelgängers often bear maternal or genealogical implications. Through these fictional examples of racialized looking, I will contribute to a discourse on Black feminine spectatorship that considers how she is covertly conjured in narratives that broadly exclude her.

Although both Du Bois and Winnicott did not seem to give much thought to cinema, or at least did not significantly include film in their analyses, ‘double-consciousness’ discernibly shapes the politics of many Black American films and increasingly Winnicott’s theories have been tested upon the visual arts. Among the most notable, Vicky Lebeau has repeatedly employed Winnicott’s evaluations to her studies of film, and even rewrites his rendition of the mirror stage in cinematic terms: ‘the limits of perception become tangible in that imaginary scene in which a child, standing before the mirror, sees nothing. The phrase may strain our capacity to visualize, but the patient’s sense of its terror orients us toward an aspect of the visual field characterized by blankness, emptiness, non-presence.’¹⁸ Likewise, Annette Kuhn’s *Little Madnesses: Winnicott, Transitional Phenomena and Cultural Experience* compiles essays that navigate cinema and art through Winnicott’s conception of transitional phenomena. William Veeder, too, draws on Winnicott’s notions of transitional objects, potential space, and play to make sense of the emotional response the Gothic inspires and its prominent, ‘nurturing’ position in culture. So the psychoanalyst’s theories are alien to neither the genre nor to film. Moreover, Lacanian film theorists such as Louis Althusser, Christian Metz, and Jean-Louis Baudry, among others, have long brought psychoanalytic concepts, and the mirror stage specifically, to the research of cinema and spectatorship. Significantly, James Snead recognizes the fluidity of spectatorial identification: ‘It is not true that we identify only with those in a film whose race or sex we share. Rather, the filmic space is subversive in allowing an almost polymorphically perverse oscillation between possible roles, creating a radically broadened freedom of identification.’¹⁹ Indeed, what I explore in this thesis is the Gothic’s capacity to communicate to and about the Black feminine whether she exists physically on screen or not. I want to characterize the nature of her silence - her silencing - and how she emerges despite the forces that conspire to contain her. Only then can I speak to her efforts of refusal and defiance, and the Gothic’s unique ability to convey her particular sense of displacement and rage.

It is equally important to state that, like many of the resources I have turned to here, the Female Gothic has its failings. Many of its critics, such as Diane Long Hoeveler and Eugenia DeLamotte, have argued that its conservative portrait of gender, its fetishization of victimization, ultimately prove detrimental to women.

¹⁸ Vicky Lebeau, ‘Mirror images: D. W. Winnicott in the visual field,’ in *Embodied Encounters: New approaches to psychoanalysis and cinema* ed. by Agnieszka Piotrowska (New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 171 - 182 (p. 176).

¹⁹ James Snead, *White Screens, Black Images: Hollywood from the Dark Side* (Routledge: New York, 1994), p. 23.

Suzanne Becker calls for a ‘feminine Gothic’ to reflect the gender of the narrative’s subject and resist the form’s essentialist qualities. Likewise, I also want to be careful not to embrace essentialist masculine and feminine conventions. Here, I hope to unravel how cultural circumstances produce the Black woman as a subjugated class. Although racialized men, too, are included in this systematic subjection, it is urgent to communicate the specificity of Black women’s experience. For as hooks posits - and countless examples throughout history confirm - the sexual violation of the Black female body was an institutionalised practice, not simply sanctioned, but integral to the survival and, indeed, the success of slavery. Black women were conceived as bodies, manufacturers of more bodies, more enslaved people, more property. They were inherently ‘not human,’ subject to the dominion of white men and confined by their status as chattel. This produced a unique dynamic between Black men and women that enduringly leaves Black women at the mercy of intersectional racial and gendered structures of oppression. In *African American Gothic: Screams from Shadowed Places*, Maisha L. Wester writes of this literary tradition as practiced by Black authors and asserts, ‘recognition of the subjugation of female slave bodies proved a central moment for the definition of black masculinity and recognition of its complexes and challenges, its drive and (in)ability to act as heroic patriarch.’²⁰ Dissemblance from Black men’s experiences is imperative for Black women, whose ordeal has historically been obfuscated and overlooked. While Black men have their own specific and complex relationship with the screen, as characters and spectators, I want to consider the (non) representation of Black women.

Ultimately this project looks to the Female Gothic to consider how this space both excludes and serves the Black feminine, a figure it is especially suited to accommodate. As I explore the conditions of her silencing, the principal aim of this thesis is to prove how she pervades this genre, particularly cinematically, whether visually concealed or Fantastically realized. More specifically, I track the depiction of the Black feminine in Female Gothic film texts, where she is more likely to be disguised, to contemporary films by Black filmmakers who reveal her and reckon openly with the racialized gaze. This racialized gaze necessitates a focus on how these productions from white filmmakers, organized around anxieties about racial Otherness, become part of the fabric that engenders double-consciousness. Therefore, films such as *The Devil’s Daughter* (1939), with its majority Black cast, or *Beloved* (1998), about generational conflicts between Black women in the afterlife of slavery, or films from the Blaxploitation era, are not covered here, for these texts do not tend to diegetically concern themselves with the colonial arrangement of spectatorship, even as they seek to correct it. Essentially, I

²⁰ Maisha L. Wester, *African American Gothic: Screams from Shadowed Places* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 70.

want to cover a handful (by no means comprehensive) of pertinent films to find what might be resolved, in their obfuscation, about the racialized two-ness that preoccupies the genre and characterizes the void between the antagonistic screen and racialized spectator. In fact, the use of case studies throughout this thesis will vary. In the first two chapters, I survey a number of films in an attempt to draw together recurring patterns in traditional Female Gothic texts. These texts are not consistently or evenly dispersed by year; there are significant gaps in time between films which were mainly chosen here for their influence and common themes. Some films then will receive more general, or shorter, analyses than others. The noted cases in these chapters exemplify the conventions of the genre. The last three chapters are devoted to the films *Eve's Bayou* (1997), *Get Out* (2017) and *Us* (2019) respectively. It is important to provide a more thorough examination of these texts because the fundamental goal of this project is to explore how Black filmmakers have employed the Female Gothic framework to speak of, and to, the Black feminine.

The first chapter, 'The Dark Mirror,' establishes the parameters of this research. Although Winnicott and Du Bois have been applied to cinema for political and psychological readings, here I want to combine their theories to discern the Black feminine as character and spectator in narratives of fear where racial and gendered anxieties intersect to repudiate her. This rejection, however, first requires her presence, and in this chapter I elaborate on how the literary and cinematic Gothic is animated by racial symbolism. In doing so, I use three films that are not seemingly predicated on racial divisions to determine how racial difference still shapes these films textually. The first is Alfred Hitchcock's *Rebecca* (1940), perhaps the most influential of Female Gothic films, for its impact reverberates across the genre's cinematic iterations. Then, I analyze the films *Single White Female* (1992) and *Black Swan* (2010) to illustrate how contemporary narratives of fear that purposefully evade race still make use of its intrinsically Gothic codes and symbols, which betray a preoccupation with the racialized feminine.

In the second chapter, 'Four Women,' I examine the patterns and ubiquitous themes that persist in traditional Female Gothic films. Because this chapter contains an ambitious scope of films, I have divided the cases into four horror archetypes: the zombie, the beast, the ghost, and the witch. I identify the conventions of the genre in cinema, and denote how these films not only contribute to double-consciousness through their depiction of racialized femininity, but recreate it on screen and consequently conjure the Black feminine spectator whose gaze is performed through the racialized female double (RFD). This repeated performance of looking, and the cinematic climate produced by these anxious colonial features, heralds contemporary Black Gothic cinema that reflects this legacy as it restoratively centers Black spectatorship.

In the third chapter, ‘Three Faces of Eve,’ I provide a close analysis of Kasi Lemmons’s film *Eve’s Bayou* to explain how it revises the central tropes of the Female Gothic to convey the interiority of predominantly Black female characters. This film introduces a Black Gothic family haunted by American slavery, the consequences of which continue to surface in the bonds they forge with each other and the repressive models of femininity that stifle them. Thus, the traditional implications of the genre shift with their presence. I dissect the distinctions that the Black characters bring to this framework, particularly where it concerns the patriarchal house, the uncanny, the veil, and the double, which here becomes a complex symbol of kinship. The film also arguably initiates or, at least, institutes certain devices and motifs that can also be found in Jordan Peele’s films, which suggests the potential for a cinematic Black Female Gothic tradition.

In the fourth chapter ‘Black Mother,’ I analyze Peele’s film *Get Out*, where cinematic spectatorship becomes the principal language of the narrative’s horror. The film envisions the disavowal processes that have historically displaced the Black feminine and pointedly announces the role that cinema plays in the psychological trauma Du Bois describes as shaping Black identity in America. Like *Eve’s Bayou* before it, *Get Out* elaborates on themes such as maternal hauntings, fragmented families, alienation, the grotesque white middle-class with its generational legacy of exploitation, and dual looking relations. This particular film also demonstrates an essential queering of the Black Gothic family that moves away from patriarchal gender roles while leaving room to reflect on the specificity of Black women’s subjugation.

In the final chapter, I explore Peele’s second film *Us*, which not only possesses the prevailing Gothic components of its predecessors, but significantly builds on the racialized feminine’s collusion with the Du Boisian veil, which becomes a transformative defense in the supernatural context of the Gothic. *Us* poignantly reflects back on all the previous films with its incorporation of elements from the zombie, ghost, and beast archetypes, while cementing a Black Female Gothic tradition that centers Black feminine spectatorship and attends to their dimensionality in the shadow of double-consciousness.

The major impetus of this dissertation is to assess the Female Gothic’s capacity to express the Black feminine’s ordeal, an experience it has traditionally been weaponized against. The films in these final chapters reveal Black filmmakers’ connection to a form that has always engaged with the history of their entrapment, whether explicitly or allegorically. In the search for the Black feminine, this project discovers that she has long been one of the genre’s most powerful figures; seen or unseen, she always rises.

one

THE DARK MIRROR

I saw a robed and veiled figure, so unlike my usual self that it seemed almost the image of a stranger.

- Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 1847²¹

The mirror has frequently come to represent duplicity, and never more than when a woman is doing the looking. In *Vertigo* (1958) mirrors alert us to the two faces of 'Madeleine'.²² In *Double Indemnity* (1944), the conniving Phyllis Dietrichson famously turns to a mirror and says, 'I hope I've got my face on straight'.²³ And the climactic shootout in *The Lady From Shanghai* (1948) unfolds in a funhouse hall of trick mirrors, blurring the lines between real image and decoy, Elsa Bannister's icy countenance chief among them.²⁴ Each of these characters meets a painful demise, Hays Code-mandated recompense for misleading men, often to murderous ends.

But if cinema ultimately disapproves of these 'deadly' women, it does not leave them without their share of humanity. In fact, the tragedy of her, the *femme fatale*, seems wound up in her failed potential. Before Madeleine, née Judy, falls to her death, she confesses her love for Scottie; and Phyllis cannot fire the second shot that would kill her co-conspirator and lover Walter Neff because, she says, she never loved him 'until a minute ago.' They have the capacity to love and, therefore, sacrifice. It seems they are monstrous not by nature, but by choice. It is their adamant refusal to be 'good' women that incurs their destruction. So goes the ancient tradition of the female binary: good woman/bad woman, madonna/whore. But ultimately, as this project aims to

²¹ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (London: Penguin Classics, 1847, repr. 2006), p. 362.

²² *Vertigo*, dir. by Alfred Hitchcock (Paramount Pictures, 1958).

²³ *Double Indemnity*, dir. by Billy Wilder (Paramount Pictures, 1944).

²⁴ *The Lady from Shanghai*, dir. by Orson Welles (Columbia, 1947).

uncover, duality may well be the most human trait of all, in so much as that duality signifies the psychic struggle to make oneself whole.

Of course, all this takes for granted the privilege of a reflection to begin with: from Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) to Marc Lamont Hill's *Nobody* (2016), Black authors and scholars continue to reckon with racialized invisibility. 'To be Nobody is to be abandoned by the State,' Hill explains, 'to be nobody is to be considered disposable.'²⁵ He details the myriad of ways this culture manifests across social, political, and economic lines with frequently fatal ramifications for Black Americans. In 2015, Ta-Nehisi Coates published *Between the World and Me*, written in the vein of James Baldwin's 1963 book *The Fire Next Time*, a galvanizing contemplation of Black identity in the 1960s released, not coincidentally, on the 100th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. While Baldwin wrote to his 14-year-old nephew, Coates dedicated his account of State-enforced assault on the Black body to his then 15-year-old son. But each of them writes of the same fear more than fifty years apart. Ellison had similar things to say; so, too, Richard Wright and August Wilson where fiction was concerned. The efforts to render an entire community invisible, which is to say without representation, without image or voice, and therefore without value, have had far-reaching consequences, but the perspective from which these issues are typically addressed - if not always without merit - has been overwhelmingly male and masculinist. And perhaps none of the aforementioned authors would have found the tools to examine their position as Black men in America had it not been for W. E. B. Du Bois, whose studies formed the bedrock of racial discourse thereafter.

The Souls of Black Folk

Du Bois first appropriated the term 'double-consciousness' in an effort to articulate the 'two-ness' of the Black American experience, essentially the 'problem' of being both American and Negro, 'two warring ideals in one dark body'.²⁶ When he published this theory in his *Atlantic Monthly* article 'Strivings of the Negro People' - the earliest in a series of essays that would later become the seminal sociological work *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) - it was 1897. Du Bois had witnessed not just the Reconstruction's failure to remedy the condition of formerly enslaved Black people, but also, disturbingly, the dawn of Jim Crow. Therefore, he set about describing the trauma of a people torn, terrorized, stymied, and disenfranchised. In the wake of the Civil War, an era hugely

²⁵ Marc Lamont Hill, *Nobody* (New York: Atria Books, 2016), pp. xviii - xix.

²⁶ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1903)

<<http://sites.middlebury.edu/soan105tiger/files/2014/08/Du-Bois-The-Souls-of-Black-Folks.pdf>> [accessed 10 May 2016] p. 3.

driven by what to do about ‘the Negro problem,’²⁷ the psychological well-being of Black Americans became less urgent than economic and educational opportunity. Black and white leaders alike concerned themselves principally with this more tangible justice, but Du Bois understood all these matters to be linked. Before he ever details the social circumstances responsible, he defines the wounded psyche:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One feels his two-ness - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings...the history of the American Negro is the history of this strife - his longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self.²⁸

According to Du Bois, a world that sees them as a ‘problem’ can yield black Americans no true self-consciousness, and instead leaves them to regard themselves constantly as Other. Black identity in America thus emerges in a particular state of crisis, split between two seemingly incompatible parts, unable to merge into a complete self uncomplicated by that persistent outside gaze.

This project seeks to expose the depth of this narcissistic wound as relayed through cinema. First, I want to look at several classic Female Gothic/domestic horror films that employ the colonialist gaze through the female double. I will then trace these films to contemporaneous features from Black filmmakers who adopt the Female Gothic model and reposition the gaze to communicate the anxieties of Black women. Given the legacy of the genre, from its racially coded symbolism to its racialized villains, I argue here that the cinematic doppelgänger, specifically female twinships, often carry racial implications, at their most potent in narratives of fear, historically composed to reflect dominant cultural apprehensions. Applying a gendered reading of Du Bois to cinematic representations of what I will refer to as the racialized female double, I will render her legible and characterize the psychic rupture Du Bois describes when imaged or portrayed in film. Indeed, many of these films, particularly the early ones, are deeply conservative, antagonistic texts that contribute to the very psychological frictions upon which Du Bois theorizes. Although the filmmakers behind these pictures likely never intended to speak to, much less articulate, a Black American experience, this research aims to make of these cases a useful two-way mirror to consider the fears underpinning narratives cloaked in white supremacy and the position such films construct for a Black feminine spectator.

²⁷*The Negro Problem*, ed. by Booker T. Washington (New York: J. Pott & Company, 1903).

²⁸ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, p. 3.

Over the centuries the doppelgänger has undergone a considerable shift in Western culture, from guardian angel in the ‘primitive’ to omen of death in modern civilization.²⁹ It predates literature: universal duality finds origins in pagan beliefs, symbolizing nature in its creative and destructive aspects. This ambiguity was allowed to exist unchallenged in its early mythological and folkloric incarnations, broadly accepted as the logical order of things. However, with the influence of Christianity and the rise of Western individualism, the double began to acquire new meanings. As humans’ perception of themselves changed, so, too, did their interpretation of evil. According to Frederic Jameson, the naming of evil is especially significant, for ‘it is the identification of evil, the naming of otherness, which is a telling index of a society’s deepest beliefs,’ since any social structure tends to characterize evil as anything radically different from itself or anything which threatens it with destruction.³⁰ In the act of Othering there lies the suggestion of ‘evil,’ of unlike, and crucially, the establishment of what is standard, acceptable, normal. Ultimately this act says less about the object that has been alienated than it does about the subject performing the alienation. At any rate, the increasing polarization of modern ideology - conceptions of body and soul, life and death, man and woman, good and evil - gave way to an urgency to resolve and unify two-ness. The double would eventually emerge as a threat to wholeness and individuality, ‘the announcer of death itself.’³¹

Du Bois appears to draw similar conclusions. As he laments the divided Black self, he prioritizes wholeness and invests in certain philosophical aspects of individualism, even as he speaks to the collective. Freud famously deviated from the philosophical leanings the presence of the double seems to propose, instead formulating a largely literary and psychological argument around the figure. For him, the double has ‘sprung from the soul of unbounded self-love, from the primary narcissism which dominates the mind of the child and the primitive man.’³² Freud elaborates on a theory originally espoused by Otto Rank in his 1914 work, aptly titled *The Double*. In his own notable essay ‘Das Unheimliche’ (The Uncanny), Freud reasons that although initially ‘an assurance of immortality,’ the double flips its function and becomes an object of fear when the subject moves past the stage of narcissism: ‘The “double” has become a thing of terror, just as, after the collapse of their religion, the gods turned into demons.’³³ In other words, the double begins as an infantile source of

²⁹ Milika Živković, ‘The Double as the “Unseen” of Culture: Toward a Definition of the Doppelganger’, *Facta Universitatis*, 20.7 (2000), 121 - 128 (p. 124).

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Otto Rank, *Beyond Psychology* (Dover, New York, 1958), p. 74.

³² Sigmund Freud, ‘The Uncanny’ in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth Press, 1948), p. 235.

³³ Ibid.

comfort only to emblematize later on the very terror - death - that it once protected against. Here, the spiritual implications eclipse its physical potential. Freud has already explained that doubling 'was originally an insurance against the destruction of the ego,' and so 'probably the "immortal" soul was the first "double" of the body,' but these spiritual attachments the double carries seem to diminish its significance in the material world, or outside the experience of the uncanny; hence it is generally the fantasy of the infantile and 'the primitive.'

Critiques of Freud's analysis frequently regard this reading of the double as a myopic one, and probably Du Bois would agree. Of course, the influential contributions provided by a Freudian approach to the double are not to be dismissed. However, Du Bois's understanding of double-consciousness - if not directly the concept of the double - appears to stem from European Romanticism and American Transcendentalism. Ralph Waldo Emerson uses 'double consciousness' (unlike Du Bois, who hyphenates the term) in his essay 'The Transcendentalist' to express the 'dialectical tension between the self and the world, the Soul and Nature.'³⁴ Du Bois revisions these ideas in the context of a stratified, racialized American society. Spirituality and moral uplift were central to his rhetoric. In *Souls*, Du Bois laments what he saw as a spiritual decline in the Black community in the years following emancipation: pain, self-doubt, and cynicism in place of hope and optimism. He writes of a 'peculiar wrenching of the soul,' for it seemed to him that the 'double life' forced upon Black Americans gave rise to a 'moral hesitancy' or rather that 'the all-important question of their civil, political, and economic status' dwarfed religious and ethical considerations.³⁵ Du Bois elaborates, 'such a double life, with double thoughts, double duties, and double social classes, must give rise to double words and double ideals, and tempt the mind to pretence or to revolt, to hypocrisy or to radicalism.'³⁶ Crucially, he describes a toil on both the soul and the psyche. For him, this duality spoke to something both social and spiritual, intangible perhaps but no less real and deeply dangerous.

Throughout *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois examines the emotional and psychic ramifications of a persistently threatened existence. In addition to philosophical and cultural movements, to form his argument he most certainly drew inspiration from emerging medical and psychological discourse.³⁷ Michael Wainwright writes that double-consciousness 'derives from the psychological watershed elicited from the traumatic

³⁴ Bernard Bell, 'Genealogical Shifts in Du Bois's Discourse on Double Consciousness as the Sign of African American Difference,' in *W.E.B. Du Bois on Race and Culture: Philosophy, Politics, and Poetics*, ed. by Bernard W. Bell, Emily R. Grosholz, James B. Stewart (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 87 - 108 (p. 89).

³⁵ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Company, 1903), p. 202.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Dickson D. Bruce, Jr., "W. E. B. Du Bois and the Idea of Double Consciousness," *American Literature*, 64 (June 1992), pp. 299 - 309.

imposition of a supposedly inferior racial identity onto a previously healthy subject.³⁸ As Du Bois portrays it, double-consciousness has all the markings of what today might be referred to in psychiatric circles as dissociative identity disorder (a widely contested condition, admittedly). Above all, this concept of an interior ‘two-ness’ must have struck Du Bois as something far too real, far too painful, to be purely symbolic, for he constructs his entire analysis of Black being around it.

But *Souls* is hardly comprehensive in its assessment of Black being. It has been widely acknowledged that Black men are prioritized in the political discourse on race while white women are prioritized in the political discourse on gender. Deborah Gray White elegantly describes the quandary of the Black feminine experience: ‘African American women are confronted with an impossible task. If she is rescued from the myth of the negro, the myth of the woman traps her. If she escapes the myth of the women, the myth of the negro still ensnares her.’³⁹ In other words, Black women are doubly trapped; indeed, one trap informs the other, race and gender inextricably bonded to relegate them to the margins. As such, Black women have frequently had to create their own language (e.g. ‘womanism’ rather than feminism) and develop their own strategies for progress outside the either sexist or racist boundaries of the aforementioned movements. *Souls*, it must be said, is emblematic of this exclusion: How can it be that this remains one of the most defining and enduring texts on Black identity in America and yet sweepingly overlooks Black women and their struggle, particular as it is?

Since its publication, scholars have challenged the bounds of Du Bois’s analysis and modified them to accommodate Black women and other cultures (and ethnicities) beyond America. That said, perhaps paradoxically, the limits of this text make it an incredibly beneficial framework for me. It is not just a major record of ideological thought, but a formative and seminal base of scholarship on race in America. Henry Louis Gates Jr. writes, ‘No work of his has done more to shape an African-American literary tradition than “The Souls of Black Folk,” and no metaphor in this intricately layered book has proved more enduring than that of double-consciousness.’⁴⁰ This much is most certainly true, and not only in literature. Recent years have seen filmmakers openly reckoning with double-consciousness: for example, Spike Lee in *BlacKkKlansman* (2018) and Jordan Peele in his films *Get Out* (2017) and *Us* (2019), the latter two films to be discussed in later chapters. This overt resurgence of Du Bois’s work in film is in large part why I wish to foreground his foundational

³⁸ Michael Wainwright, ‘On What Matters for African Americans: W. E. B. Du Bois’s “Double Consciousness” in the Light of Derek Parfit’s *Reasons and Persons*’, *Janus Head*, 15 (2016), 113 - 135 (p. 118).

³⁹ Deborah Gray White, *Arn’t I a woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (London: Norton, 1999), p. 28.

⁴⁰ Henry Louis Gates Jr. ‘THE CLOSE READER; Both Sides Now,’ *The New York Times* (May 2003)

<<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/05/04/books/the-close-reader-both-sides-now.html>>

writings in this project. But I must first acknowledge that *Souls*, as a text, reproduces exactly the kind of trauma I hope to excavate here: the invisibility of Black women traced through the axis of dominant political discourse and cinema. Given Du Bois's flawed lens, my application of his work requires the structural and feminist critiques it has garnered over the past century. However, it remains of fundamental use here because *Souls* possesses powerfully illustrative language that, far from just poetically capturing a specific psychic toil, also fittingly signals and thus suits a gendered examination of the racialized.

For ‘the veil’ - frequently identified by Du Bois as the ‘Veil of Race’ - is the linchpin of Du Bois’s argument, best and most succinctly explained as ‘a recognition of the psychic and spatial tension that White supremacy engenders.’⁴¹ In fact, the veil is a layered, multifaceted, complicated thing, as much a barrier as a frame of reference, representing both 1) the established parameters of Black potential socially and economically, and 2) the subjective relationship to the self and to the world. Du Bois recalls a moment from his childhood when this distance was first made clear to him:

Something put it into the boys’ and girls’ heads to buy gorgeous visiting-cards—ten cents a package—and exchange. The exchange was merry, till one girl, a tall newcomer, refused my card,—refused it peremptorily, with a glance. Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil. I had thereafter no desire to tear down that veil...⁴²

He grasps instantly that he is ‘different,’ though not so different that he cannot recognize the common humanity he shares with the other children, the same ‘heart and life and longing.’ But he is forced to see himself as he appears to a foreign gaze, a gaze conditioned to see him as inferior, as Other. A cruel, if critical, process in self-building has taken place here. Shawn Michelle Smith explains, ‘This violent negotiation proves shocking and transformative, and its effects reverberate back to and disrupt the very foundation of one’s initial, idealized misrecognition of self as image in the (Lacanian) mirror stage.’⁴³ The developing ego takes a great hit in this ‘inverted mirror stage.’⁴⁴ Charles Peterson puts it this way:

⁴¹ Charles F. Peterson, *Dubois, Fanon, Cabral: The Margins of Elite Anti-colonial Leadership* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2007), p. 15.

⁴² *Souls of Black Folk*, p. 2.

⁴³ Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line: W. E. B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 31.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

The DuBoisian sketch of the relationship between Black self-consciousness and its racial “other” is the foundation the “I”s (Negro’s) identity formation. Once the “White presence” is established, the “not White” (Negro) is apparent. Or vice versa, once the Negro is formed, Whiteness reveals itself. The chronology is unimportant; the point is the creation of the DuBoisian subject through dependence on a dominant identity...the Du Boisian subject would assert, ‘Only when I apprehend what I am not (White), does the self become objective to me.’⁴⁵

Essentially Du Bois’s theory posits that the formation of one’s Blackness develops through ‘the clash, interaction, exchange between the “I/Negro” and “the other/White.”’⁴⁶ Mirrors and ways of seeing are to become a great theme in this thesis, so it is important to understand the relationship this way: This shattered consciousness/mirror is inextricable from the white colonial gaze. Of note, Du Bois - meticulous writer and speaker that he was - is sure to add in his recollection of the event that she refuses the card ‘with a glance.’ She looked, whether at the card or Du Bois, and so everything begins with her gaze, which imparts upon him his own helpless difference, and which, far from unique, becomes a ubiquitous fact of his life.

This is not to say, of course, that Black people do not possess interiority away from the ‘white look,’ rather that racialization emerges with the white gaze and so thoroughly permeates the fabric of American society that it forces its perspective upon its object. If Du Bois, in this early exchange, does not immediately apprehend the arrangement of power, he surely realizes the impossibility of closing the divide between them, as all those born with the veil, ‘gifted,’ he writes, with its second sight, are fully aware of the world just outside their reach, where those without the veil live uninhibited. And this relationship is not reciprocal. Lawrence Richard Rodgers views the veil as ‘a kind of two-way mirror’ that allows Black people to see out, but ‘without being seen in return and without clearly seeing itself, the veil image describes a conceptual barrier between two cultures.’⁴⁷ An essentially visual metaphor, the veil seamlessly actualizes the elusive barricade between two worlds, akin to a trick mirror that deceives by design.

Perhaps no genre has found more fascinating use for the mirror than horror. Symbolically it has many functions, but generally the mirror will operate in two major ways: as a portal to another realm, through which the evil of that realm enters the human world, or as an apparatus of truth, reflecting the true soul of the being who beholds his/her image. One of the earliest examples of the mirror’s power in horror can be found in Rouben Mamoulian’s 1931 adaptation of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, where mirrors become a dominant motif.

⁴⁵ Dubois, *Fanon, Cabral*, p. 15.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Lawrence Richard Rodgers, *Canaan Bound: The African-American Great Migration Novel* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), p. 48.

Significantly, Dr. Jekyll witnesses his first transformation into Mr. Hyde through a mirror.⁴⁸ Notably, in Robert Louis Stevenson's famous novella *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, there exists no real description of Hyde's physical appearance, merely the impression he leaves upon the narrator. This, of course, provides space for the filmmaker to create a monster of his own vision each time. The Hyde of the 1920 adaptation starring John Barrymore, for example, could not be more different from the Hyde of Mamoulian's version. Crucially, Mamoulian's Hyde bears an ape-like physicality with his protruding teeth, broad nose, and thick bushy hair on his face, arms and hands. His Darwinist physiognomy, which would narrowly escape Hays Code regulations that prevented the promotion of evolution theory,⁴⁹ does not at all preclude the long history of likening Black people to primates, not just in popular culture but in serious scientific discourse.⁵⁰ Hyde's regression to the baser, animal origins of man carries racialized associations that will reverberate in cinematic material featuring the double. Furthermore, although Mamoulian's film predates *King Kong* (1933) by two years, the promotional materials - which feature Hyde with his hands around the throat of blonde actress Miriam Hopkins (Fig.1.1), who plays the film's resident damsel Ivy - would vividly resemble the well-theorized, plainly racialized iconography rampant in *King Kong*.⁵¹ Unlike the mirror, which reveals, the veil obscures or conceals. Those without the veil, according to Du Bois, move freely and oblivious of the other side, for 'one of the most grievous effects of the colour line was the erasure of any relational apprehension of power' and 'a denial of the agency of those living behind the veil'.⁵² The preservation of this divide comes as much from an unwillingness to look as it does from an inability to see; the very term 'veil' implies something covered, something hidden from plain sight. For those without the veil, not only do the 'veiled' themselves appear blurred but so, too, its effects. The consequences of racialization, in other words, are not clearly seen by those who themselves are not veiled. Du Bois ends his analysis with the hope that an 'Eternal Good' will somehow 'rend the Veil and the prisoned shall go free,'⁵³ because to him those born with the veil are truly trapped. They are 'prisoned by the Veil, by the blackness of their bodies.'⁵⁴ For Du Bois, 'the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the

⁴⁸ Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Dir. Rouben Mamoulian. Frederic March. Paramount Pictures. 1931.

⁴⁹ Sharon Packer, *Cinema's Sinister Psychiatrists: From Caligari to Hannibal* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2012), p. 166.

⁵⁰ David Livingstone Smith and Ioana Panaitiu, 'Aping the Human Essence: Simianization as Dehumanization' in *Simianization: Apes, Gender, Class, and Race* (Zurich: Lit Verlag, 2015), pp. 77-104 (p. 78).

⁵¹ Snead, p. 20.

⁵² Alexander Anievas, Nivi Manchanda, and Robbie Shilliam, 'Confronting the global colour line: an introduction' in *Race and Racism in International Relations: Confronting the Global Colour Line* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), p. 5.

⁵³ Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, p. 111.

⁵⁴ Carrie Cowherd, 'The Wings of Atalanta: Classical Influences in "The Souls of Black Folk" in *The Souls of Black Folk: One Hundred Years Later*', ed. by Dolan Hubbard (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003), p. 294.



"DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE" A Rouben Mamoulian Production, with Fredric March,

© 1931 by Paramount Pictures, Inc.
Can't get enough for newspaper reproduction.

Miriam Hopkins and Rose Hobart. A Paramount Picture

Made in U.S.A.

Figure 1.1. Promotional material for *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Mamoulian, 1931) evokes familiar racialized iconography.

color-line—the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea.⁵⁵ And the veil provides a lasting metaphor for this thinly disguised chasm.

The Souls of Black Folk is a seminal document, the seeds of which continue to inform American thought from sociology to politics. It remains a difficult text to classify, for it contains both history and fiction, and Du Bois draws significantly from the language of Negro spirituals and slave folklore. Over the years, as he watched the same divisive social forces reenacted in other nations, he challenged his former understanding of the color line as a phenomenon specific to Black Americans. In 1952, following a series of trips to Poland where he visited the Warsaw Ghetto, he concluded that the color line was beyond ‘a matter of color and physical and racial characteristics.’⁵⁶ For this research, where racial difference is not always physically perceivable, Du Bois’s observations certainly bear out, in a testament to his precision. Indeed, physical attributes do not necessarily precede racial categories, and this thesis especially concerns itself with racial (in)visibility and ‘passing.’ What Du Bois always grasps is that the veil characterizes the conditions of racialization and the psycho-social disorder this status engenders. More precisely, the veil epitomizes the partition or the distance from power (and, put reductively, the visualized) that marks the racialized, who are never in doubt about their own Otherness, whether it is discernible or not.

This project aims to illuminate the concealed Black feminine. Several of the filmic texts I want to unpack here do not feature Black women as characters at all. Therefore, Du Bois’s conceptions of double-consciousness and the veil, alongside the mirror, will serve as my instruments, translating those characters and interactions in the Gothic that do not explicitly present as racialized.

Invisible Women

If Du Bois succeeds in his measure of the psychological disparity between these two particular ‘races,’ his analysis ultimately suffers from his own gendered, hierarchical sensibilities. *The Souls of Black Folk* was more than just the characterization of a problem; he intended to mobilize his readers. For him, the prosperity of Black people depended upon their ‘moral uplift,’ even more than education - ‘after all the education of men comes but in small degree from schools’ - and he believed this was best achieved ‘by planting in every community of Negroes

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ W. E. B. Du Bois ‘Social Theory of W. E. B. Du Bois “The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto”’, *Jewish Life*, 1952. ed. by Phil Zuckerman (Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press, 2004), pp. 45–46.

black men with ideals of life and thrift and civilization.⁵⁷ He was 15-years-old when Sojourner Truth died and he surely counted Ida B. Wells and Ella Baker as valuable peers, but Black male leadership appeared to him at the time much more imperative to progress.

Joy James writes, ‘in theory and practice Du Bois opposed women’s subjugation; yet his political representations reflect considerable ambivalence towards black women’s political independence...Du Bois rejected patriarchal thought that posits the inferiority of women and the superiority of men. Yet his masculinist framework presents the male as normative.’⁵⁸ Throughout *The Souls of Black Folk* he uses masculine pronouns: He continually stresses the plight of the Black American in terms of ‘*his* [emphasis added] striving’ and ‘*his* [emphasis added] double self,’ and in chapter titles ‘Of the Training of Black Men’ and ‘Of the Sons of Master and Man.’ Even if we concede that such pronouns were common at the time, consider, too, his failure to perceive the benefits of Black female leadership; Du Bois clearly believed Black women could also become the mediators through which the nation-state oppressed Black men,⁵⁹ and he apparently does not recognize the ways in which they found themselves uniquely vulnerable.

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, two figures embody the Compromise of 1877, which ended the Reconstruction, removing the remaining Federal troops from the South and giving way to mass disenfranchisement and the legitimized subjugation of Black people. The first figure is a ‘gray-haired gentleman’ whose ‘sons lay in nameless graves’ and who, having ‘bowed to the evil of slavery’ now stood a ‘blighted, ruined form.’⁶⁰ But it is really the second, especially for the purposes of this project, who becomes most significant. Du Bois envisions her this way:

A form hovering dark and mother-like, her awful face black with the mists of centuries, had aforetime quailed at that white master’s command, had bent in love over the cradles of his sons and daughters, and closed in death the sunken eyes of his wife - aye, too, at his behest had laid herself low to his lust, and borne a tawny man-child to the world...⁶¹

⁵⁷W. E. B. Du Bois, ‘The Development of a People,’ in *Classics of American Political and Constitutional Thought: Reconstruction to the Present*, Vol. 2 ed. by Scott J. Hammond, Kevin R. Hardwicke, and Howard L. Lubert (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2007), 196 - 205 (p. 205).

⁵⁸Joy James, ‘The Profeminist Politics of W. E. B. Du Bois with Respects to Anna Julia Cooper and Ida B. Wells Barnett’ in *W.E.B. Du Bois on Race and Culture*, ed. by Bernard W. Bell, Emily Grosholz, and James B. Stewart (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 141-160 (p. 142).

⁵⁹Hazel V. Carby, *Race Men* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 33.

⁶⁰Du Bois, p. 14.

⁶¹Ibid.

In both instances Du Bois describes a compromise of morality in sexual terms. While the former may well be more political, for his betrayal the gray-haired man finds himself rewarded with impotence: the death of his sons and his virility. For the second figure, however, whose value, Du Bois suggests, is entirely sexual - particularly her ability to nurture and reproduce - her greatest betrayal, then, is that she would submit to a white master rather than a Black one, denying the latter the dominance he requires to cement his masculinity, threatening his authority and even his existence. Thus she does her part to continue the abasement of Black men. As Hazel Carby puts it, 'Du Bois described and challenged the hegemony of the national and racial formations in the United States at the dawn of a new century, but he did so in ways that both assumed and privileged a discourse of black masculinity.'⁶²

It is important to note that Du Bois rigorously supported women's rights throughout his life. He frequently advocated for Black women, not least in his essays in *The Horizon*, *Voice of the Negro*, *The Independent*, and his autobiography *Darkwater*.⁶³ In many ways he was ahead of his time, but he, like so many before and to follow, would fall into a trap bell hooks details in her own formative text *Ain't I A Woman*:

Scholars have emphasized the impact of slavery on the black male consciousness, arguing that black men, more so than black women, were the 'real' victims of slavery. Sexist historians and sociologists have provided the American public with a perspective on slavery in which the most cruel and dehumanizing impact of slavery...was that black men were stripped of their masculinity, which they then argue resulted in the dissolution and overall disruption of any black familial structure.⁶⁴

Such a premise purposefully, and in fact dangerously, conflates the Black experience in America with the Black male experience in America, which denies Black women the nuance and specificity of their own ordeal, where they are subject to the aggressions of white and Black men alike.

Du Bois himself is complicit in these same gendered aggressions with his shallow representations of Black women in *Souls*. First, he tells the story of Josie Dowell, daughter of the family he stays with while a student at Fisk University. Characterized as an eager learner - 'she studied doggedly' - and a hard worker - 'always busy at service' - she becomes a symbol for the grind and ambition of Black American communities, in education and in labour; all for naught, for we learn that in ten years time, 'Josie was dead.'⁶⁵ Josie's story is

⁶² Carby, p. 10.

⁶³ Garth E. Pauley, 'W.E.B. Du Bois on Woman Suffrage: A Critical Analysis of His Crisis Writings,' *Journal of Black Studies*, 30. 3 (2000), pp. 383-410 (p. 383).

⁶⁴ bell hooks, *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 20.

⁶⁵ Du Bois, p. 28.

immediately followed by the chapter ‘Of the Wings of Atalanta’ in which Du Bois genders the city of Atlanta (“she lay gray and still on the crimson soil of Georgia”⁶⁶) as he aligns it with the myth of Atalanta and Hippomenes, in which the former loses a race to the latter when she succumbs to her own greed. Carby argues that the first section of *The Souls of Black Folk* is ‘a primarily female symbolic space,’⁶⁷ but only symbolically so:

This does not mean that concern with what is female is central to Du Bois’s conceptual frame of reference. On the contrary, the metaphoric and symbolic characteristics of Josie and Atlanta determine that neither is a symbol of hope for the future of the African American folk, indeed neither have a viable political, social, or intellectual future in Du Bois’s text.⁶⁸

On one level, Du Bois was rigorous in his articulation of the problems that faced Black people. On the other hand - its cultural relevance undisputed - it is an exercise that almost entirely excludes Black women. This research reckons with the arguments proposed in *The Souls of Black Folk* like Carby and James and others before me. However, I hope to apply his observations to horror cinema influenced by the Female Gothic, where concepts like the veil and double-consciousness are enlivened, to illuminate the illegible Black feminine. Though she is similarly undermined in his work, *The Souls of Black Folk* and the Female Gothic ultimately prove complementary frameworks here.

Feminist scholars, such as Carby and Frances M. Beale, have pointedly challenged the shortcomings in Du Bois’s analysis while acknowledging the potency of its legacy. Beale’s pamphlet ‘Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female’ revises his conception of double-consciousness and identifies racism as a servant to the system of capitalism, which in turn relentlessly exploits Black people, particularly Black women.⁶⁹ Deborah K. King performs her own interrogation of class politics and its role in Black women’s lives in ‘Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of Black Feminist Ideology.’⁷⁰ Nahum Welang develops a ‘triple consciousness theory,’ which expands the confines of Du Boisian double-consciousness by addressing the ‘triple perspectives’ of Black women, as American, Black, and women.⁷¹ In *Writing the Black Revolutionary Diva: Women’s Subjectivity and the Decolonizing Text*, Kimberly Nichelle Brown traces the evolution of Black

⁶⁶ Du Bois, p. 33.

⁶⁷ Carby, p. 20.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Frances M. Beal, “Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female,” *Meridians*, 8.2 (2008), pp. 166–176 <www.jstor.org/stable/40338758> [accessed 7 Apr 2017].

⁷⁰ Deborah K. King, ‘Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminine Ideology,’ *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture & Society*, 38.4 (1988), pp. 42 - 72.

⁷¹ Neham Welang, ‘Triple Consciousness: The Reimagination of Black Female Identities in Contemporary American Culture’ in *Open Cultural Studies* (2018), pp. 296-306 (p. 298).

revolutionary writing and offers an alternative theoretical approach to double-consciousness that emphasizes the Black aesthetic movement and relocates the gaze between Black women writers and a Black women readership.⁷²

I want to preserve double-consciousness as a metric here because this project proceeds from the premise that, in fact, the American dimension of Black Americans' identity is inseparable from their Blackness. Therefore, Black Americans do not actually negotiate a distance between an 'American identity' so much as whiteness. The birth of the nation was indeed forged in genocide and slavery, and such is the calculus that Du Bois makes when he distinguishes between 'an American' and a 'negro.' But the history of Black life in the country, from slavery onward, is integral to America's cultural identity. Thus, for me, double-consciousness still appropriately accommodates the conditions through which Black women find themselves, as Wehlang puts it, caught between white patriarchy and Black hypermasculinity.⁷³

Sheila Rowbotham also adopts Du Bois's language in *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World*, and moreover uses mirrors as a metaphor to argue that the essentialist image of woman that prevails in dominant culture cuts women off from themselves and each other:

But always we were split in two, straddling silence, not sure where we would begin to find ourselves or one another. From this division, our material dislocation came the experience of one part of ourselves as strange, foreign and cut off from the other which we encountered as tongue-tied paralysis about our own identity.⁷⁴

Du Bois's influence is apparent. She explains that white men enjoy the privilege of seeing themselves as individual, whereas minorities and the marginalized are constantly reminded through a 'hall of mirrors' of their Otherness. She writes, 'the partial image of a particular oppressed group sometimes even serves to magnify the world of the oppressor by projecting itself at the expense of others who share invisibility.'⁷⁵ Rowbotham posits that as a result of this 'hall of mirrors,' women - as Du Bois argued of Black Americans exactly seventy years prior - develop a dual consciousness, composed of the self as socially defined and the self as different from that prescription.⁷⁶ Her work equally builds from *The Second Sex*, in which Simone de Beauvoir argues thus:

⁷² Kimberly Nichelle Brown, *Writing the Black Revolutionary Diva: Women's Subjectivity and the Decolonizing Text* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010)

⁷³ Wehlang, p. 296.

⁷⁴ Sheila Rowbotham, *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World* (Pelican Books, 1973; London: Verso, 2015), p. 31.

⁷⁵ Rowbotham, p. 29.

⁷⁶ *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), p. 75.

Women lack concrete means for organizing themselves into a unit that can stand face to face with the correlative unit...They are not even promiscuously herded together in the way that creates community feeling among the American Negroes, the ghetto Jews, the workers of Saint-Denis, or the factory hands of Renault. They live dispersed among the males, attached through housework, economic condition, and social standing to certain men - fathers or husbands - more firmly than they are to other women. If they belong to the bourgeoisie, they feel solidarity with men of that class, not with proletarian women; if they are white, their allegiance is to white men, not to Negro women.⁷⁷

So women find themselves bound to men economically and, furthermore, emotionally. In fact, these personal, intimate ties often fortify the institutional ones. How to extricate the forces that bind them to their fathers, their husbands, their sons? According to Rowbotham, solidarity among women, specifically so they might develop alternative ways of seeing, offers the surest avenue to progress:

In order to create an alternative an oppressed group must at once shatter the self-reflecting which encircles it and, at the same time, project its own image onto history. In order to discover its own identity as distinct from that of the oppressor it has to become visible to itself. All revolutionary movements create their own ways of seeing.⁷⁸

Several scholars of the screen as an apparatus of oppression have come to the same conclusion: correcting the gaze is vital to advancement. What is also true is that white women can actively participate in and benefit from white supremacy even as it maligns them in other ways; and in large part the advantages of white supremacy have outweighed and long prevented the possibility of their solidarity with women of color. While women collectively experience oppression, they do not all experience it in the same forms. The recognition of these interconnected systems of discrimination, the way that people find themselves disadvantaged through class, race, gender, and so on, is what Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw deems ‘intersectionality.’⁷⁹ While I hope to elucidate the ways Black women specifically find themselves grossly unmirrored, it is just as critical to point out that indigenous women, Asian women, transgender women, and so many others, face in cinema (and elsewhere) the violence of unmirroring, too, and distinct from what I will detail here.

Indeed, the mirror fails us all, but it is important to acknowledge that the mirror poses an even darker threat to those who rarely or never see themselves reflected at all, which carries a number of ramifications that

⁷⁷ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1949; repr. London: Vintage Classics, 1997), p. xxv.

⁷⁸ Rowbotham, p. 27.

⁷⁹ Kimberlé Crenshaw “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* (1989), pp. 139 - 167
<https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=uclf> [accessed June 12 2018]

cannot be remedied without confronting these nuances in discrimination. Still today, Black women must contend with all manner of formal or institutional indignities enveloped in misrecognition and exclusion. In *Algorithms of Oppression*, Safiya Umoja Noble argues that Black women are not even safe from technology, a presumably democratic realm. She finds that the algorithms behind search engines like Google privilege whiteness and give way to a host of negative biases against people of color, specifically women of color, disquieting given the monopoly status of a small number of Internet search engines. While broad, benign searches for white people returned wholesome images, the same algorithms - with similar neutral online inquiries - often yield problematic results that aggregate stereotypical, hypersexualized videos and images of Black women disseminated as ‘information,’ which preserves white supremacy as the dominant lens through which society is organized. Noble’s study highlights ‘the power of algorithms in controlling the image, concepts, and values assigned to people,’⁸⁰ and she insists on an acknowledgement of ‘how power - often exercised simultaneously through White supremacy and sexism - can skew the delivery of credible and representative information.’⁸¹ Joy Buolamwini gets at the same ‘politics of recognition,’ which Noble defines as ‘an essential form of redistributive justice for marginalized groups that have been traditionally maligned, ignored, or rendered invisible by means of disinformation on the part of the dominant culture.’⁸² In a spoken word piece inspired by Gender Shades - a research investigation that exposed gender and skin-tone bias in facial analysis technology - the video of Buolamwini’s freestyle, ‘AI, Ain’t I A Woman’ (based on Sojourner Truth’s landmark address at the Ohio Women’s Rights Convention) reveals that this technology from leading tech companies has misgendered famous figures such as Oprah Winfrey, Michelle Obama, and Truth herself, as men.⁸³

I draw inspiration and foundation from several influential Black feminist critics, including hooks, Crenshaw, Patricia Hill Collins, Hortense Spillers, Cheryl Gilkes, Michele Wallace, Saidiya Hartman, Janell Hobson, among a host of others committed to understanding the forces that seek to confine and disappear Black women. Together these theorists and critics have produced a wealth of scholarship on the Black female body’s extensive, systematized Othering. In fact, in her groundbreaking 1987 essay ‘Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,’ Spillers, too, invokes Du Bois when she writes:

⁸⁰ Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), p. 99.

⁸¹ Noble, p. 84.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Joy Buolamwini, *AI, Ain’t I A Woman?* [online] Algorithmic Justice League, updated 2018 [cited 12 July 2019]. Available from: <<https://www.notflawless.ai>>

[Du Bois] predicted as early as 1903 that the twentieth century would be the century of the “color line.” We could add to this spatiotemporal configuration another thematic of analogously terrible weight: if the “black woman” can be seen as a particular figuration of the split subject that psychoanalytic theory posits, then this century marks the site of “its” profoundest revelation.⁸⁴

For Spillers, the Black woman is a ‘marked woman,’ her body ‘a locus of confounded identities, a meeting ground of investments and privations in the national treasury of rhetorical wealth.’⁸⁵ She is marked but ‘misnamed’ and Spillers attempts to ‘undo this misnaming’⁸⁶ with a powerful diagnosis of the enduring psychological impact of slavery on the structure of the Black family, as famously disparaged by the Moynihan Report. Similarly, in her efforts to resolve the veiled Black feminine in cinema, Janell Hobson writes, ‘Although the black female body in American popular cinema is often rendered “invisible,” its presence is often detected in subtle ways,’ and she calls additionally for a cinematic literacy that ‘moves beyond the visual.’⁸⁷ Not only does Hobson conspicuously draw from the arguments espoused by Toni Morrison in *Playing in the Dark* and apply them to cinema (as I intend to), but the theorist has also made an overarching project out of the ‘extra-visual’ in an effort to make the Black feminine discernible. For example, in her essay ‘Viewing in the Dark: Toward a Black Feminist Approach to Film,’ this emerges as a largely auditory examination of Black women’s disembodied voices (singing or otherwise) in mainstream cinema where their bodies are generally absent.

Likewise, in many of the films I work with here Black women are either unseen or tertiary characters. An ‘extra-visual’ approach will be necessary. In lieu of her physical presence, socio-historical symbols or the material conditions of Otherness - conveyed through musical cues, setting, character background, the mythical or otherwise literary sources that have influenced the film text - collectively announce the Black feminine specter. In short, I want to foreground the ways cinema visually and contextually establishes difference. The ‘instruments’ that come to signify Blackness - say, for instance, voodoo or a history of enslavement - will be varied, manifold, and not always so obvious, especially as these films are likely to relegate Black characters to the perimeter of the narrative or exclude them altogether. But it is typically in that way that films such as *White Zombie* (1932) and *Cat People* (1942) can navigate contemporaneous insecurities around race (and power) without actually confronting the social and political realities that define Black life in America.

⁸⁴ Hortense Spillers, ‘Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,’ *Diacritics*, 17.2 (Summer 1987), pp. 64-81 (p. 65).

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Spillers, p. 66.

⁸⁷ Janell Hobson, ‘Viewing in the Dark: Toward a Black Feminist Approach to Film,’ *Women’s Studies Quarterly*, 30.1/2 (2002), pp. 45-59 (p. 48).

The aforementioned Black women scholars have each described the blow of mis/un-representation of Black women in their own way: Othering, misnaming, misseeing, unmirroring, etc. But they all strive toward the same goal: to have Black women named, seen, reflected and so, too, all that troubles them, psychologically, economically, politically, socially. They have had to manage with the ghosts at the margins, still in service to the anxieties of white supremacy. It is my goal to contribute to this investigation.

Of course, roles for Black women in Hollywood have become more frequent, more complex, and even more high profile thanks to more Black actresses, writers, directors, producers, and in great part because social media has helped to mobilize the social and economic value of equal representation. While this progress is to be celebrated, there remain appalling discrepancies in the opportunities available to Black women, whether in front of or behind the camera. There is still much room for progress, and these advances, while commendable, have not yet grown so numerous that they eclipse the relevance of this project. For what of the generations before? How did they cope? What did they see, or not see?

This project, therefore, concerns itself with decades of Othering, misnaming, and unmirroring in fiction, specifically the cinematic Female Gothic for two reasons: 1) the history of the genre's visual and textual approach to race, whether explicit or implicit, lends to a rich exploration of the psychological dimensions around racial identity and the performance of race; and 2) recognized, for better or worse, as a genre that provides, in Linda Badley's words 'a "language" for its sense of victimization,'⁸⁸ the Female Gothic seems particularly well placed to empower those affected by institutions that stifle women, especially women doubly burdened by racialization. Thus, my aim is to arrange a framework consisting of an intersectional reading of Du Bois's theory of double-consciousness and the veil to apply to Gothic and horror cinema in an effort to discern how film (among other forces) complicates looking relations for Black women. I want to reckon with how cinema both produces and even necessitates a fractured gaze - in other words, a double or 'second sight' - for the Black female spectator, and, consequently, the aims taken to counter it as Black filmmakers develop their own cinematic traditions. These measures to reclaim the screen and remold images of themselves in turn substantiate the psychic dissonance inflicted by the racially paranoid agendas of mainstream American cinema.

My research builds upon the work of these scholars before me who also recognized that the language of cinema is not purely visual, and that the specter of race haunts America and its stories. As noted in the introduction, Morrison's *Playing in the Dark*, an adaptation of a series of lectures the author delivered at Harvard University in 1990, was foundational to this study. In them, Morrison offers a cogent critique of

⁸⁸ Linda Badley, *Film, Horror, and the Body Fantastic* (Westport:Greenwood Publishing Group, 1995), p. 103.

American literary tradition. She argues for the existence of an 'Africanist presence' that bears more than just a latent influence on the national literature, but, in fact, defines it:

Just as the formation of the nation necessitated coded language and purposeful restriction to deal with the racial disingenuousness and moral frailty at its heart, so too did the literature, whose founding characteristics extend into the twentieth century, reproduce the necessity for codes and restriction. Through significant and underscored omissions, startling contradictions, heavily nuanced conflicts, through the way writers peopled their work with the signs and bodies of this presence - one can see that a real or fabricated Africanist presence was crucial to their sense of Americanness. And it shows.⁸⁹

Morrison confines her inquiry to the realm of written narratives where she contends that generally, academic consensus seems to have proceeded under the tacit agreement that centuries of slavery did not play a significant role in shaping the national canon. The Black characters and 'symbolic figurations of blackness' Morrison observes in the fiction of white American writers - such as Edgar Allan Poe, Ernest Hemmingway, and Mark Twain - reveal how desperately the moral identity and classical ideologies (individualism, spirituality) upon which the nation's consciousness (thanks in large part to these writers' fictions) was buttressed requires this Africanist presence. Importantly, this Africanist presence or, what she also calls 'American Africanaism,' does not meaningfully reflect the dimensionality of Black communities, but what 'Blackness' signifies in the white imagination. This 'rhetoric of dread and desire'⁹⁰ reinforced whiteness and patriarchy. Thus, as the Africanist presence informs American culture so, naturally, it informs its literature. Even when the presence cannot be seen, even when it is not named, guilt and horror and hypocrisy spill through these narratives. Overtures of freedom and egalitarianism are undermined by stark class divisions and enslaved peoples; the justification of siege and colonialism tendered in lofty dreams of democracy become transparent grasps at solace for a nation whose birth is steeped in blood. Here, Morrison makes a project of racial subtext in precisely the way I aim to with cinema.

Her fiction, on the other hand, has always centered a Black readership. In 2003, she famously responded to Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* in *The New Yorker*: 'Invisible to whom?'⁹¹ Her first novel *The Bluest Eye* unspools the tragedy of Pecola Breedlove, principally through the eyes of her nine-year-old classmate Claudia MacTeer. Pecola belongs to a much despised family in Lorain, Ohio, and her home life is extremely volatile. Her

⁸⁹Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 6.

⁹⁰Morrison, p. 64.

⁹¹Hilton Als, 'Ghosts in the House,' *The New Yorker*, 19 Oct 2003,

<<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2003/10/27/ghosts-in-the-house>> Profiles.

self-righteous mother Pauline, a maid with a toxic fascination with cinema and glamorous white actresses, dotes on the white family that employs her while neglecting her own children. Pecola's father Cholly, a miserable drunk, verbally and physically assaults his wife. Later, Cholly rapes Pecola twice and leaves her pregnant (the infant dies following a premature birth). Predictably psychologically battered, Pecola wanders town talking to herself, believing she has finally garnered blue eyes. By the end, it seems clear that the entire community, not just her family, has failed her. She is a dark-skinned Black girl, regularly reminded by young and old, white and Black alike that she is 'ugly.' In fact, all of the Breedloves are described as 'ugly' but it is Pecola, the youngest and easily the most vulnerable of them, who seems to bear the brunt of her family's perceived monstrosity. She fosters an unquenchable longing for blue eyes, convinced that with blue eyes she will be beautiful and the world around her will react in kind. Kimberly Nichelle Brown writes that Pecola 'symbolizes the violated black female body, the silenced black female voice, the invisible girl, as well as the schizophrenic and damaged black psyche - all resulting from American racism.'⁹² But importantly, Pecola does not merely wish to be 'beautiful.' In one of the novel's most telling scenes, a young light-skinned classmate called Maureen Peal interferes when Pecola is being bullied, and Pecola concludes that the boys would not dare do anything 'ugly' or untoward in Maureen's sight. Thus Pecola begins to understand that with blue eyes, not only will she be seen differently, but she herself will begin to *see* differently. Far from solely wanting to be an object of value or desire, Pecola desires an entirely new gaze, one untempered by the legacy of her Blackness.

The Eyes Have It

This, then, is very different from the 'pleasure of looking' that Laura Mulvey famously describes in her 1975 essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' where she proposes that cinema largely functions as an apparatus for what she coins 'the male gaze,' forcing women to adopt a masculine perspective in the viewing process and making women the object of desire. Mulvey argues that the woman on screen is doubly objectified - diegetically within the film and for the spectators - and in the interest of male voyeurism, looking becomes the active male position, while the woman is to be looked at, passive.⁹³ Mulvey's landmark account of the male gaze launched a new direction for feminist scholarship, but while the essay offered a convincing analysis of the gendered dynamics that have long shaped cinematic spectatorship, it overlooked racial elements that also exacerbate these looking relations.

⁹² Kimberly Nichelle Brown, *Writing the Black Revolutionary Diva: Women's Subjectivity and the Decolonizing Text* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), p. 43.

⁹³ Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' in *Screen*, 16(3)(1975), pp. 6 - 18.

According to bell hooks, Mulvey's essay excludes Black women because Black women - generally absent from the screen or, if present, likely not the intended object of the male gaze - cannot engage in the kind of communication Mulvey describes, neither as spectators nor as objects. 'Even when representations of black women were present in film,' hooks writes, 'our bodies and beings were there to serve - to enhance and maintain white womanhood as the object of the phallocentric gaze.'⁹⁴ As such, hooks argues for an 'oppositional gaze,' one that interrogates prevalent, traditional portrayals of Blackness on screen. She specifically addresses Black female spectatorship although she resists essentializing the Black female spectator in her analysis: 'Conventional representations of black women have done violence to the image... Then there were those spectators whose gaze was that of desire and complicity. Assuming a posture of subordination, they submitted to cinema's capacity to seduce and betray. They were cinematically "gaslighted."⁹⁵ Black women, argues hooks, could themselves be 'complicit' in their own negation and did not necessarily possess an oppositional gaze by virtue of their experience within a marginalized group. She maintains throughout that the oppositional gaze is an expressly political act, one of purposeful resistance, and links this act to the art of creating new images.

Many of the early analyses that consider Black spectatorship acknowledge that critical thought typically prioritises race and racism at the expense of a nuanced examination of gender. For example, Manthia Diawara's 1988 essay 'Black Spectatorship: Problems of Identification and Resistance' examines Black spectatorship from a masculine perspective, and the call for the 'resisting spectator'⁹⁶ may have informed hooks's 'oppositional gaze' despite the admitted limits of his definition. While hooks invokes Diawara in her analysis, she contends that in fact Black male spectators and 'race' pictures - the films of Oscar Micheaux, for example - engaged in patriarchal, phallocentric looking relations. But she also traces the forces driving these cinematic looking arrangements to the historical, and ever enduring, social politics of racial domination with origins in slavery:

An effective strategy of white supremacist terror and dehumanization during slavery centered around white control of the black gaze. Black slaves, and later manumitted servants, could be brutally punished for looking, for appearing to observe the whites they were serving as only a subject can observe, or see. To be fully an object then was to lack the capacity to see or recognize reality. These looking relations

⁹⁴ bell hooks, 'The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators' in *Movies and Mass Culture* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996) p. 251.

⁹⁵ hooks, p. 252.

⁹⁶ Manthia Diawara, 'Black Spectatorship: Problems of Identification and Resistance,' *Screen*, 29 (1988), pp. 66 - 79

were reinforced as whites cultivated the practice of denying the subjectivity of blacks (the better to dehumanize and oppress), of relegating them to the realm of the invisible.⁹⁷

The Black gaze cannot be disconnected from history. In this passage, hooks points out the major factor that shapes racialized viewing dynamics: denying and, furthermore, punishing the Black gaze, which concedes the power that lies in looking. By governing the gaze, white people maintain dominance by directing, and therefore becoming the architect of, the image. For Black people then, the gaze is - if not inherently rebellious or critical - surely innately political, structured as it is by these persistent power relations writ large on the screen.

Film theorist Jacqueline Stewart, like hooks, relies on past social negotiations of looking to build ‘reconstructive spectatorship,’ by parsing the ways that ‘black viewers attempted to reconstitute and assert themselves in relation to the classical cinema’s racist social and textual operations.’⁹⁸ Stewart emphasizes the ‘public dimension of spectatorship,’ which is to say the circumstances of Black group viewership, such as segregated movie theaters. Not only were Black audiences confronted with damaging stereotypes amplified on the screen, they also often consumed these images in spaces where their existence in said space was conditional. Indeed, Stewart accounts for a host of spectatorial contexts, including urban theaters that exclusively catered to Black moviegoers, the age range found within an audience, and so on. She stresses that Black audiences’ relationship with cinema entails several layers of desire and fantasy inextricable from their spatial embodiment of the movie theater, and often ‘required that the spectator transcend the limitations of his or her public self during and through the motion picture experience.’⁹⁹ Leigh Raiford finds Stewart’s conception of Black spectatorship immensely productive, as it provides a framework to interpret ‘the multiple axes that pressure and fissure black spectatorship;’ or, more specifically, ‘the word “reconstructive” focuses attention on the kinds of political, social, and psychological work to which images are put by black audiences...black spectatorship requires labor in the effort to produce or disavow an ideal subject.’¹⁰⁰ Mark Reid takes a closely related approach, although he addresses an interracial audience. In *Redefining Black Film*, Reid suggests ‘polyphonic spectatorial relationships’ as a mode of engagement that allows for viewers of any race to read ‘black-oriented’ films.¹⁰¹ Reid writes, ‘There

⁹⁷ bell hooks, ‘Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination,’ in *Cultural Studies*, ed. by Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula A. Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 338-346 (p. 340).

⁹⁸ Jacqueline Stewart, ‘Negroes Laughing at Themselves? Black Spectatorship and the Performance of Urban Modernity,’ *Critical Inquiry*, 29.4 (2003), pp. 650–677 (p. 653).

⁹⁹ Stewart, p. 671.

¹⁰⁰ Leigh Raiford, *Imprisoned in a Luminous Glare: Photography and the African American Freedom Struggle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), pp. 49-50.

¹⁰¹ Mark Reid, *Redefining Black Film* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 42.

exists no singular African-American personality; African-Americans belong to a diverse community whose rich complexion equals its international breadth.¹⁰² His analysis then complicates the notion of a monolithic Black viewership and points toward the elusive project of characterizing group spectatorship in general. Stewart puts forth a useful question: ‘What kinds of evidence can we mobilize to understand what happens in viewers’ minds as they watch films?’¹⁰³ Stewart turns to historical accounts and fiction, namely Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* and Richard Wright’s *Native Son*. Jacqueline Bobo collected empirical data from middle-class Black American women on their reactions to popular Black literature and cinema. She sometimes echoes hooks, linking the oppositional gaze to political rebellion. In particular, Bobo looks at the critical response to the film adaptation of Alice Walker’s novel *The Color Purple* (1985) in an effort to establish the unique perspective of a Black female viewership and their frequently overlooked significance as cultural consumers (and, in turn, creators). In her analysis she considers that a ‘vocal minority’ - which she subsequently identifies as ‘mainstream media and black men’¹⁰⁴ - was allowed to drive the discourse around the film. Bobo insists that the film owes its ‘controversy’ to the negative criticism of this ‘vocal minority,’ and this controversy shadowed the way both the book and film were received at large. The reaction implied that the content was problematic, not that it had simply inspired a negative response in certain viewers. Bobo’s survey ultimately determined that Black women did not process the film in the same way at all. They appeared to receive the film far more positively than mainstream criticism suggested. Through their vocal support of the book and the film, Black women began to assert themselves as an audience in the cultural landscape and distinguish themselves as spectators.

In *Feminism, Femininity and Popular Culture* Joanne Hollows argues that Bobo herself relies on some essentialist notions of Black female identity.¹⁰⁵ Feminist cultural theorist Michele Wallace, who praises Bobo, and likewise grounds herself in the historical realities that have directed Black women’s looking relations, also poses a gentle challenge to the architecture of Bobo’s findings: ‘I am not as willing as [Bobo] to cede the psychoanalytic framing of spectatorship. I feel that a psychological approach, even a specifically psychoanalytic approach to black forms of spectatorship is much needed, but I would add that we need not use psychoanalysis as we have found it.’¹⁰⁶ If psychoanalysis has typically operated as a ‘color-blind’ space, Wallace advocates for viewing race as

¹⁰² Reid, p. 41.

¹⁰³ Stewart, p. 654.

¹⁰⁴ Jacqueline Bobo, *Black Women As Cultural Readers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 52.

¹⁰⁵ Joanne Hollows, *Feminism, Femininity and Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 66.

¹⁰⁶ Michele Wallace, ‘Black Female Spectatorship and the Dilemma of Tokenism’ in *Generations: Academic Feminists in Dialogue*, ed. by Devooney Looser and E. Ann Kaplan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 88-102 (p. 90).

a ‘present and relevant (social, historical, material, ideological) context for psychological phenomena and psychoanalytic interpretation.’¹⁰⁷ Certainly, this way of negotiating race, its psychological implications and consequences, will inform this research, just as it essentially drove Du Bois’s findings. Although Bobo concedes throughout that a ‘positive’ or favorable response does not necessarily reflect upon the film’s own substance, one major issue with this approach from my perspective is the precarious measurement of a ‘positive’ reaction, which, individually, may range from mere enjoyment of a film to lasting appreciation. Therefore, in this thesis I concern myself chiefly with the mechanics of the text. Moreover, psychoanalysis essentially suits any reading of horror or the Gothic, because race and fear naturally lend to this framework. Building from Wallace, the rapport between the racialized viewer and the racialized screen constitutes a location rife with psychological rumblings that move beyond satisfaction with a film or its efficacy as entertainment.

Each of these scholars concede that Black audiences have long had to contend with hostile movie environments - spatially and psychologically - and that ultimately, how one *sees* is no small thing. On the contrary, the gaze can be honed into a fascinating political instrument. Far from distraction and fantasy, cinema pointedly trades in networks of power, seductively upholding and materializing patterns of racial domination. Like so many of the aforementioned theorists, I want to refrain from interpreting Black female spectatorship as a monolith. There is no common or universally shared Black female experience. Therefore, rather than construct this identity in prescriptive terms, I endeavor to speak theoretically to the position these uneven structures of looking create. Object relations theory offers a productive framework to evaluate the psychic response to trauma in substantive and simultaneously allegorical terms. The mirror, for instance, functions as a rich cinematic expression of this trauma, diegetically and materially, tied as it is to sight, the ego, and psychology. The mirror provides at once the psychoanalytic language and enduring imagery necessary to illustrate the internalized antagonistic gaze.

While in many ways cinema holds a mirror to society, many of its denizens cannot find their reflection there, and the consequences of this absence may be explained by looking to D. W. Winnicott. As noted in the introduction, the psychoanalyst approaches the mirror stage through the mother, who performs the role of mirror for her newborn: ‘What does the baby see when he or she looks at the mother’s face? I am suggesting that, ordinarily, what the baby sees is himself or herself. In other words the mother is looking at the baby and what she looks like is related to what she sees there.’¹⁰⁸ According to Winnicott, if a baby looks at his or her mother and

¹⁰⁷ Wallace, p. 91.

¹⁰⁸ D. W. Winnicott, ‘Mirror-role of the Mother and Family in Child Development in *Playing & Reality*’ (Tavistock Publications, 1971) pp. 1 - 2 <<http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/winnicott2.pdf>> [accessed 24 June 2016]

she returns the gaze supportively, the baby takes comfort from being in rapport with the mother. But if the baby looks and the mother's face is unresponsive - if her face, for example, reflects her own mood instead of what she beholds (her child) - then the baby must find some other way to connect to its environment. Consequently, the task of self-building is made all the more complicated because the mother/mirror does not engage in a helpful way; she fails as a mirror. Winnicott repeatedly warns against taking for granted a healthy mother/mirror interaction for its absence can prove detrimental. Then the infant must learn to protect itself from the mother/mirror's harmful gaze and so looking becomes about defense instead of connection. Winnicott writes:

The baby quickly learns to make a forecast: 'Just now it is safe to forget the mother's mood and to be spontaneous, but any minute the mother's face will become fixed or her mood will dominate, and my own personal needs must then be withdrawn otherwise my central self may suffer insult.'
...Perception takes the place of apperception, perception takes the place of that which might have been the beginning of a significant exchange with the world, a two-way process in which self-enrichment alternates with the discovery of meaning in the world of seen things.¹⁰⁹

Cinema - the most significant cultural mirror of this era - also begins a significant exchange with the world, a process of discovering and seeing. If one replaces the mother with cinema as the mirror, then the relationship between the Black, specifically female, viewer and the cinema/mirror can only be described as a strained one. Psychologically speaking of the infant, Winnicott explains, 'a baby so treated will grow up puzzled about mirrors and what the mirror has to offer... if the mother's face is unresponsive, then a mirror is a thing to be looked at but not to be looked into.'¹¹⁰ Again, if the screen substitutes the mother here, the cinema experience for Black viewers crucially entails a barrier; it is not responsive or open for them to 'look into,' it can only be 'looked at.'

I want to make clear here that I do not wish to infantilize Black audiences, and the spectator I refer to is the spectator composed by the film text. I am principally equating the mirror and cinema rather than infants and spectators. Furthermore, I do not mean to imply that cinema is precisely what Winnicott argues the mother's gaze is: for him, the mother's gaze crucially shapes self-development and I do not believe cinema holds that power. Certainly people get themselves reflected in multiple other ways, from their actual parents, for instance. That said, cinema undoubtedly wields huge cultural influence, and in an effort to describe the psychological blow to one (of many) specific demographic of unreflected if not distorted spectators, Winnicott's theory uses compelling language and imagery that activates the questions I want to raise here about Black female viewership

¹⁰⁹ Winnicott, p. 2.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

and the screen. What Winnicott essentially describes is the innate desire to look (for those who can) and to recognize and be recognized/reflected. When this exchange becomes compromised, the relationship with the image of the self, too, becomes compromised.

Winnicott actually encountered racial issues directly in at least one of his cases, concerning an eight-year-old Black girl called Mollie. He reports that Mollie had been adopted into what we later discover is a white English family and she tormented her younger adoptive brother - the family's biological son - so relentlessly that it was recommended she be removed from the household. Opposed to the idea, the mother consulted Winnicott. At first it seems the fact of Mollie's Blackness does not strike the psychoanalyst as especially significant. In fact, he first mentions her background as a parenthetical: '...she had come to see that she is dark skinned (her real parents being ethnologically African)...'¹¹¹ He further recounts that Mollie 'was constantly reasserting herself in relation to her mother,'¹¹² and, alarmingly, the child even says to him, "Yes, I am dark, but I like white better."¹¹³ Winnicott proceeds to give his more general assessment of the problems at play, which firmly locates these racial hang-ups in the child, rather than society or her environment, and with absolutely no historical context for these anxieties. He writes:

For her, because she is dark-skinned, white is an idealisation, but for white children white is an initial phase and quite natural, and she feels deprived of this phase, as if she had to start with a handicap. She was struggling to cope with what she had only gradually come to find out about herself. Her family entirely accepted her as she was, and in fact she was quite beautiful, appropriately for her age, with perfect skin...Mollie was trying to account for the special effect that her discovery that she had dark skin was having on her...¹¹⁴

Several troubling elements present themselves in Winnicott's ultimately myopic analysis of the situation. For one, as I have pointed out, he does not consider the way that a broader white supremacist society not only shapes this child's views of her Blackness but is reified in her intimate all-white environment. It never even seems to enter his calculus, even though at the height of his career - the 1950s and 1960s - Winnicott surely witnessed racial unrest in his native Britain and abroad. Nevertheless, to him, the child idealizes whiteness because 'she is dark-skinned,' or not white. That her environment announces her difference, making for unusual

¹¹¹ D. W. Winnicott, *The Collected Works of D. W. Winnicott Volume 9*, ed. by Lesley Caldwell and Helen Taylor Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 243.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Winnicott, p. 244.

¹¹⁴ Winnicott, pp. 244 - 245.

developmental conditions, is only implicit in his appraisal. He never quantifies her family's 'acceptance' or what their emotional support looks like, much less questions their perspectives on non-white races. Nor does he seem especially concerned with how they enforce, intentionally or otherwise, her racial discomfort: Does she have Black friends? Did she play with Black dolls? We never know from Winnicott's account. What remains clear is that a little Black girl, surrounded by white people, in particular a white mother - the closest figure to her own likeness in the family structure - would reasonably feel alienated by and within her own body.

British psychotherapist Farhad Dalal frequently confronts the limits of psychoanalysis in his scholarship where it concerns race and the effects of racism. According to Dalal in 'The Individual and the Group,' projection is at the root of most psychoanalytic explanations of social problems: '...although racism might manifest as a sociological problem in the external world, its source is to be found in some difficulty in the internal world of individuals, an internal difficulty that has been externalized.'¹¹⁵ Systemic and institutional forces - to say nothing of historical consequences - do not factor into these dominant discourses; therefore, much is lost in considering the breadth of the damage on the psyche. Consequently, it is important to recognize the shortcomings of these theories and, likewise, the minds behind them. Although Winnicott so persuasively described the urgency for self-reflection, for the child to recognize themselves in the mother's gaze, he cannot, apparently, extend the same understanding to the suffering Black girl in front of him.

Equally important and valid feminist critiques levied against the idealization of motherhood in the Winnicottian model¹¹⁶ figure less into the largely symbolic dynamic I employ here, since the screen largely subverts those particular questions of conventional gender roles. In this research, the screen, in its capacity as 'mother,' will be examined for how it performs the tasks Winnicott assigns to the mother. In other words, I want to explore the dynamic the screen produces with certain spectators: What does the spectator see when they look at the screen? Do they see themselves? The constraints present in the dynamic the psychoanalyst describes between mother and child - for instance, denying the mother autonomy and separateness from the infant, for which feminist scholarship has rightly critiqued prevalent object-relations theory¹¹⁷ - make it more suitable for unraveling the relationship between spectator and the not-human screen.

¹¹⁵ Farhad Dalal, 'The Individual and the Group: The Twin Tyrannies of Internalism and Individualism,' *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 46.2 (2016), pp. 88 - 100 (p. 91) <<https://doi.org/10.1177/0362153716631517>>.

¹¹⁶ Joyce Slochower, 'D. W. Winnicott: Holding, Playing, and Moving Toward Mutuality' in *Introduction to Contemporary Psychoanalysis Defining terms and building bridges*, ed. by Marilyn Charles (New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 97-117 (p. 109).

¹¹⁷ Jane Flax, *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p.123.

Applying Winnicott's theory will help me estimate and articulate the potential trauma of mis/non-representation. This is, naturally, far from the first application of Winnicott's theory to cinema. For example, Kenneth Newman uses the film *Ordinary People* (1980) to illuminate the psychoanalyst's concepts of development, including false self and false self bonds in his essay 'Winnicott goes to the movies: the false self in *Ordinary People*'.¹¹⁸ So, too, Annette Kuhn's volume *Little Madnesses: Winnicott, Transitional Phenomena and Cultural Experience* collects a range of essays that explores cultural texts - art and cinema among them - and traces their connection to Winnicott's conception of object-relations, specifically transitional objects and transitional phenomena.¹¹⁹ As I delve deeper into the analyses of chosen films, I will elaborate on these ideas - the false self, transitional objects, and so on - but for now, the major point I want to convey is that Winnicott's theories are naturally suited for application to the screen. The evaluations of the artists, academics, and curators composed for *Little Madnesses* demonstrate how powerfully relevant his contributions are to the way we not only experience culture, particularly visual culture, but how we navigate or otherwise cope (often through creation or art-making) with ubiquitous anxieties. That said, although race certainly comes up, it is hardly the organizing principle of the readings Kuhn gathers.

From Mulvey to hooks to Mary Ann Doane to Teresa de Lauretis, their analyses all operate from the premise that Black women are emphatically not the 'implied' spectator, and for white filmmakers, consciously, that is probably true. But the horror texts that I examine here do communicate with them, and I would argue betray a poorly hidden preoccupation with Black women. In this research, I want to draw from cinematic depictions of 'looking relations' represented by the racialized female double and incorporate the mother-mirror theory as outlined by psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott to describe the psychic splitting spectatorial engendered by racialized imagery.

We Have Always Lived in the Castle

The final component of the framework I have arranged for this study is the Female Gothic, or the cinema that broadly follows its formula. The Gothic refers to those works typically characterized by forbidding castles or mansions, oft haunted, supernaturally or metaphorically, and excitable heroines who alternately fall in love with and/or are endangered by nefarious men.

¹¹⁸ Kenneth Newman, 'Winnicott Goes to the Movies: The False Self in *Ordinary People*', *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* (1996), pp. 787 - 807.

¹¹⁹ *Little Madnesses: Winnicott, Transitional Phenomena and Cultural Experience*, ed. by Annette Kuhn (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2013).

Black authors have been writing in the Gothic nearly since its inception in the mid-18th century, and they were not writing fiction. Slave narratives were so effective in part, if not entirely, because they were tales of horror. For this reason the memoirs of Olaudah Equiano, Mary Prince, Harriet Ann Jacobs, and Frederick Douglass, among others, became invaluable weapons of the Abolitionist Movement. Moreover, these texts affirmed the potential of the genre to empower the voiceless. *The Souls of Black Folk* operates similarly. Perhaps the text does not detail the daily trials of slave life, but it exposes the lasting psychological and social effects of generations spent in captivity. For all its optimism, it remains an account of death, sorrow, and the grotesque. And Black American writers would generally continue the standard of these early writings.

Theodore L. Gross notes that Black American authors ‘instinctively adopted the gothic tradition of American literature and given its more supernatural and surrealistic characteristics a realistic basis, founded on actual lives lived in the gothic manner, that is indeed terrifying.’¹²⁰ Daphne Lamothe explains, ‘African American Gothicisms evoke experiences of absence, fragmentation, and loss, characteristic of the “black experience.”’¹²¹ The genre, of course, is defined by such themes. Therefore, the relationship between the Black writer and the Gothic seems inevitable; the presence of the genre’s conventions may be intentional or not. In any case, Black authors have apparently always honored the Gothic tradition, Black women writers especially. Toni Morrison is perhaps the most obvious example of the Black Female Gothic. *Beloved*, her largely fictionalized take on the slave narrative, directly borrows from the Gothic with its haunted houses, temperamental poltergeists, and the dreadful return of traumatic, repressed events. But *The Bluest Eye* also depicts the Black household and implicates a doubly dangerous patriarchy, one charged by both misogyny and internalized racism. In the same vein, Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) and Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* (1982) speak of trapped, battered women, and their discomfort in the roles prescribed for them by domineering husbands, not unlike (if more blatantly villainous) a Heathcliff or a Rochester.

That said, Gothic fiction has widely been viewed as a European domain. Likewise, the Female Gothic, ‘distinguished from the traditional Gothic mode as it centers its lens on a young woman’s rite of passage into womanhood,’¹²² has long been interpreted as the language of only particular victims. Since Ellen Moers first distinguished the genre as those literary works by women in the Gothic, which ‘has to do with fear,’¹²³ a steady

¹²⁰ Theodore L. Gross, *The Heroic Ideal in American Literature* (Detroit: Free Press, 1971), p. 184.

¹²¹ Daphne Lamothe, ‘Cane: Jean Toomer’s Gothic Black Modernism’ in *The Gothic Other: Racial and Social Constructions in the Literary Imagination*, ed. by Ruth Bienstock Anolik and Douglas L. Howard (Jefferson: McFarland, 2004), p. 58.

¹²² Carol Margaret Davison, ‘Haunted House/Haunted Heroine: Female Gothic Closets in “The Yellow Wallpaper,”’ *Women’s Studies*, 33 (2004), pp. 47 - 75 (p. 48).

¹²³ Ellen Moers, *Literary Women: The Great Writers* (New York: Doubleday, 1976), p. 90.

flow of scholarship on the implications of that specifically gendered fear followed. This scholarship, often psychoanalytical, necessarily feminist, fixed upon the entrapment of middle-class white women within the confines of the domestic. Historically, the Female Gothic has spoken almost exclusively to the white middle-class because it was borne out of a tradition begun and largely continued by white middle-class women writers. That these narratives frequently concern domiciliary hauntings is no coincidence. The genre knowingly addresses the anxieties of its principal consumers, consigned, as they were, to the household.

Diane Long Hoeveler conceives of what she calls ‘gothic feminism’ as a ‘species’ of double-consciousness. ‘Although it may seem frivolous to compare the situations of black slaves to white middle-class women,’ writes Hoeveler, ‘the same enabling strategies and defense mechanisms were used by both groups to survive what each experienced as alienation and objectification.’¹²⁴ It might be more accurate to say that in literature, if their experiences were not quite comparable, then both groups found that Gothic tropes could most aptly convey their distress. However, Du Bois is clear that what Hoeveler considers ‘strategy’ or a ‘defense mechanism’ is, in fact, borne of the conditions manifested by white hegemony. Although double-consciousness, for him, does give way to certain defenses, it is not so much wielded against white patriarchy as it is a position that marks the racialized.

In *Subjects of Slavery, Agents of Change*, Kari J. Winter more convincingly contends that Female Gothic novels and slave narratives by women have much in common, without equating the middle-class white female experience and that of the enslaved Black woman. Winter observes how both genres operate as sites of political struggle and locate three major sources of horror in the lives of their protagonists: 1) both genres emphasize the terrifying aspects of the patriarchal family and depict patriarchs as parasites who prey on the sexual, emotional, reproductive and economic resources of women; 2) insist that all of society from intimate family relationships to institutions are corrupted by perverse power discrepancies; and 3) dramatically portray the measures people in positions of power take to deprive subjugated peoples of the power to know.¹²⁵ Gothic novels, animated as they are by the iconography of imprisonment with themes of inheritance, possession, and corrupt family structures, naturally (witting or unwitting) engage with the slave institution.

Maisha L. Wester, too, looks at the ways Black American writers have manipulated the Gothic genre in *African American Gothic: Screams from Shadowed Places*. From slave narratives to fiction, Wester examines how

¹²⁴ Diane Long Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Press, 2010), p. 6.

¹²⁵ Kari J. Winter, *Subjects of Slavery, Agents of Change Women and Power in Gothic Novels and Slave Narratives, 1790-1865* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), p. 55.

the African-American Gothic literary tradition has powerfully conveyed the horrors and intricacies of Black life in America.¹²⁶ Her research is particularly invaluable, for she identifies thematic patterns and subversions of classic conventions that overlap with the cinematic Gothic as practiced by Black filmmakers. However, my project will be distinguished by its emphasis on film and specifically the gaze. Kinitra D. Brooks gets much closer to my ambitions in *Searching for Sycorax: Black Women's Hauntings of Contemporary Horror*, where the theorist examines the influential and complex role Black women have played in the genre as characters and authors.¹²⁷ She includes novels and cinema in her cultural case studies, but considers horror at large, where I confine my study to those films that have distinct traces of the Female Gothic. Most notably, Robin R. Means Coleman's comprehensive survey of Black artistic contribution to American horror cinema in *Horror Noir: Blacks in American Horror Films from the 1890s to Present* proves essential here given the exhaustive record it presents of these films and the historical contexts in which they emerged.¹²⁸

Debatably, the Female Gothic has sought to reconcile women (its readers and its heroines) to the patriarchy rather than dismantle it outright. Some of the genre's most famous works - Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* or Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* - have ended in resolution with male heroes who have, at the very least, carried out perilous, in some cases fatal, relationships with women. Dangerous men, emblems of an institution that commodifies and consumes female bodies, are as essential as their victims. Helene Meyers, among scores of other scholars, argues the seductive appeal of the pure, virtuous, and therefore blameless heroine, relieves readers vicariously of 'implication in structural forms in one's own oppression and that of others'.¹²⁹ Hoeveler, likewise, has critiqued the genre for promoting ideologies that she deems 'victim feminism' and 'professional femininity,'¹³⁰ which fetishize docility and submission. In other words, given their victimhood, these characters can hardly be faulted for whatever methods they might use to ensure their own survival, even when that entails collusion with the very forces, and the very men, that threaten to destroy them.

Take, for example, the new Mrs. de Winter, haunted mercilessly by the memory of her predecessor Rebecca. Later, readers discover that Rebecca was murdered by their charming, negligent, brooding husband

¹²⁶ Maisha L. Wester, *African American Gothic: Screams from Shadowed Places* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

¹²⁷ Kinitra D. Brooks, *Searching for Sycorax: Black Women's Hauntings of Contemporary Horror* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2018).

¹²⁸ Robin R. Means Coleman, *Horror Noir: Blacks in American Horror Films from the 1890s to Present* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

¹²⁹ Helene Meyers, *Femicidal Fears: Narratives of the Female Gothic Experience* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), p. 87.

¹³⁰ Diane Long Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), p. 3.

Maxim de Winter. Of course, the living Mrs. de Winter cannot be held accountable for Rebecca's death, but she does happily support her husband once he assuages her fears of being second-best. After all, didn't Rebecca, the manipulative, incestuous adulterer, deserve to be killed? In fact, du Maurier's novel goes a step further to suggest that she actually orchestrated the whole thing, an ingeniously elaborate suicide, absolving Maxim altogether. If the new Mrs. de Winter ever pauses to sympathize with Rebecca, that feeling is consistently overshadowed by her allegiance to Maxim.

In Alfred Hitchcock's 1940 film adaptation, *Rebecca* never appears on screen. She never becomes the object of the male or the spectator's gaze, so she preserves the omniscient sovereignty she wields in the novel. Instead, the awkward, shy new Mrs. de Winter (a star-making performance by Joan Fontaine) engages in battle by proxy with the stony housekeeper Mrs Danvers (Judith Anderson), whose enduring loyalty to her late mistress, beyond the widely documented homoerotic subtext, make her a rather formidable opponent.¹³¹ *Rebecca* is a cardinal text of the genre. Not only was the book hugely influenced by one of the quintessential Female Gothic fictions, *Jane Eyre*, but furthermore, Hitchcock's film would structurally and visually inspire directors of horror and melodramas for decades after. *Rebecca* is especially integral to this research because the narrative rigorously challenges accepted notions of power assigned to visibility and invisibility. In other words, *Rebecca* interrogates the conventional expectation that ties empowerment to visualization. This is not without complication. After all, it is the living characters who give Rebecca much, if not all of her power, and thus, she still falls subject to the stories told about her. She is never in charge of her own narrative. In terms of authorship, the new Mrs. de Winter emerges triumphant, even if the tale she chooses to spin is one of submission and sacrifice. But Rebecca still provides an avenue to think about the complex question of racial representation. Certainly not all representation is 'positive.' Films that propagate a racist agenda have employed Black actors, and simultaneously what is unseen may offer a far more authentic portrayal of subterranean cultural issues. What Rebecca - the woman and the film that takes her name - articulates is this layered tension between hegemony and the image.

Fontaine's early career would consist of similar roles as guileless young women, including *Jane Eyre*, the very literary character who birthed the nameless Mrs. de Winter. But she is never more naive or unassuming than she is here: nervous, and wide-eyed as Mrs. Danvers leads her to a portrait of a de Winter ancestor, decked in a glamorous floral gown, an image the camera lingers on ominously (Fig.1.2). At her suggestion Fontaine's Mrs. de Winter recreates the look and, much to her husband's chagrin, unwittingly recreates herself in the image of

¹³¹ *Rebecca*, dir. by Alfred Hitchcock (United Artists, 1940).

Rebecca, who had already had the idea and worn the gown just the year before. We, the audience, have no Rebecca to compare her to, but symbolically this portrait opens a window to a most unwelcome past. Mrs. Danvers has done her part to weaken Mrs. de Winter's newfound resolve by effectively constructing her into a mirror image of Rebecca, a feat Mrs. de Winter has been poorly attempting (with implicit encouragement from almost everyone around her) and failing at since she first arrived at the doomed house Manderley.



Figure 1.2: The new Mrs de Winter (Joan Fontaine) with Mrs Danvers (Judith Anderson) in *Rebecca*.

Mrs. de Winter only begins to thrive once she learns her husband in fact ‘hated’ Rebecca. In a confession accented by a sonorous score, Maxim frees his new wife from an impossible ideal. For better or worse, he is the only one who can liberate her. Even so, her freedom - her victory - comes at the blatant degradation of another woman. Thus, the most telling evidence of patriarchal influence reveals itself here - not in the traditional, heterosexual relationships, but in the female ones (where one can find them) - expressed through that most Gothic of tropes: the double. The only image we have of ‘Rebecca’ is the portrait of Maxim’s blonde ancestor, who closely resembles the new Mrs. de Winter and whom the latter copies, unwittingly mirroring Rebecca by proxy. Although intellectually, the audience understands this figure to be someone else, this anonymous de Winter, arguably, behaves as an intuitive stand-in for Rebecca.

As I explained earlier, Michele Wallace warns against the urge to dichotomize visibility and invisibility as respectively analogous to power and disempowerment, for structures of domination, too, can be invisible.¹³² Of

¹³² Michele Wallace, *Dark Designs and Visual Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 478.

course, in this thesis the invisible certainly exposes hegemonic forces. By theorizing mirrored and un-mirrored bodies it becomes clear to what end these metaphors for power are being deployed. However, in this case, while Rebecca wields great influence over Mrs. de Winter, at least during the film's first act, her absence leads to fascinating queries about how female doppelgänger narratives traditionally establish 'difference.'

It is revealed in both the novel and film that Rebecca was a cruel woman, but even more disastrously, she was apparently shamelessly promiscuous, in stark contrast to the naive, deferential present Mrs. de Winter. Because hypersexuality will recur time and time again in these fictions, it is important to bring in Freud, whose psychoanalytic interpretation of female sexuality has provided much fodder for feminist theory and Gothic fiction alike. In 'The Question of Lay Analysis,' he writes, 'We know less about the sexual life of little girls than of boys. But we need not feel ashamed of this distinction; after all, the sexual life of adult women is a "dark continent" for psychology.'¹³³ This gendered division curiously imbues female sexuality with not just mystery, but language that more conventionally disclosed something sinister, the kind of language usually reserved for the racialized. Indeed, Freud borrowed this term from descriptions of 'mysterious' Africa in Victorian colonialist literature, such as H. M. Stanley's 1878 explorer narrative *Through the Dark Continent; Or, The Sources of the Nile*.¹³⁴ As Mary Ann Doane further explains, 'the term is the historical trace of Freud's link to the nineteenth century colonialist imagination.'¹³⁵ Freud deliberately employs this expression as a metaphor to designate the enigma, the unknowability and potential for expedition, of women's sexuality. He immediately constructs her as Other, in the process evoking the colonial project and Africa specifically. For him, their sexuality was likely not intrinsically racialized, which is to say he did not think of white women as sexually equivalent to Black women. But, according to Doane, 'the binary opposition between the savage and the civilized in their relation to sexuality was a formative element of his thinking.'¹³⁶ Sander L. Gilman, who has written extensively on Freud's complicated reckoning with race and his own Jewish identity, notes that Sarah Bartmaan, the 25-year-old South African woman exhibited around Europe in the early nineteenth century as the 'Hottentot Venus,' exemplified hyperbolic, pathologized Black sexuality, and during the same era, 'the perception of the prostitute merged with that of the black.'¹³⁷ While the Hottentot Venus was used to establish racial and sexual difference as both

¹³³ *Encylopedia.com* [online] "Dark Continent." International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis. [cited 16 July 2019] Available From: <<https://www.encyclopedia.com>>

¹³⁴ Henry Morton Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent, Or, The Sources of the Nile Around the Great Lakes of Equatorial Africa and Down the Livingstone River to the Atlantic Ocean* (London :Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1878).

¹³⁵ Mary Ann Doane, *Femme Fatales* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 209.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 99.

physical and scientific, the white prostitute, too, found herself subject to the same medical pathology. ‘The primitive is the black,’ Gilman writes of the equation behind this dehumanization, ‘and the qualities of blackness, or at least of the black female, are those of the prostitute.’¹³⁸ But for Doane this racial kinship is decidedly limited: ‘The white woman, in her unknowability and sexual excessiveness, does indeed have a close representational affiliation with blackness. On the other hand, the “civilized” white woman, exemplar of culture, racial purity, and refinement, is situated as the polar opposite of the Hottentot.’¹³⁹ The trope, too, she finds, oversimplifies the layered relations ‘between racial and sexual difference articulated by the colonialist enterprise’ as this enterprise requires ‘as a crucially significant element the presence of the black woman (who is relegated to non-existence by the trope).’¹⁴⁰ This intricate, ideologized interconnectedness between Black women and white women in what Doane calls the ‘colonialist enterprise’ actually reveals very little of white femininity at all, or else suggests that to be a white woman is principally *not* to be Black.

Ella Shohat demonstrates how colonial conceptualizations of race and difference are deeply invested in cultural expectations of femininity and sexuality by examining Western images of ‘The Orient’:

The inaccessibility of the veiled woman, mirroring the mystery of the Orient itself, requires a process of Western unveiling for comprehension...this process of exposing the Female Other, of literally denuding her...comes to allegorize the Western masculinist power of possession: that she, as a metaphor for her land, becomes available for Western penetration and knowledge. This intersection of the epistemological and the sexual in colonial discourse echoes Freud’s metaphor of the “dark continent.” Freud speaks of female sexuality in metaphors of darkness and obscurity, often drawn from the realms of archaeology and exploration...¹⁴¹

Although Shohat outlines a regional racialized scrutiny, the larger power structures she implicates is evidenced by the treatment of Sarah Bartmaan: this archaeological, intrusively ‘scientific’ lens applied to the racialized female body, imagined as inherently sexual. However Lola Young argues that while both ‘oriental’ and African women are configured as hypersexualized, this manifests in distinctive ways that she maintains Shohat does not adequately acknowledge: ‘women of the East have a mystique, signified by the veil, black women’s alleged hypersexuality is constructed as animalistic and voracious.’¹⁴² To be sure, the veil in this project will take on a

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Doane, pp. 213-214.

¹⁴⁰ Doane, p. 212.

¹⁴¹ Ella Shohat, *Taboo Memories, Diasporic Voices* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 32.

¹⁴² Lola Young, *Fear of the Dark: 'Race', Gender and Sexuality in the Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2006)

<https://www.google.com/books/edition/Fear_of_the_Dark/yN3LAO1uyzwC?hl=en&gbpv=0> [accessed 12 February 2017]

different meaning than the one Shohat envisions, for the veil in the Du Boisian model symbolizes the social and spatial divide structured by the politics of race, and serves not to entice but to partition. However, for the present, Shohat makes a powerful comment upon Freud's conception of 'the dark continent' and the colonial gaze. Again, whiteness is validated as the norm, the standard; what is Other, specifically female, becomes immediately a location of exploration, to be dissected and, implicitly, violated.

Knowing this, the politics of representation take on a new and complex light. Engraved upon the Black female body is hypersexuality, corruption, disease; therefore she is hypervisual, unfortunate host to a barrage of colonialist fantasies. Her body unfairly represents so much more than the individual, a history beyond her own. In this sense, it becomes simpler not to visualize her and invite all these dense socio-historical implications. But visualized or not, this literature pointedly suggests that the Black feminine, the Other, is almost always required to actualize whiteness. Mary Ann Doane writes, 'the representational topography which situates the black woman in relation to the white woman is one which activates the registers of foreground and background, presence and absence. There is a certain mutuality in their cultural construction which is strongly inscribed in a number of discourse: psychoanalysis, the cinema, feminist theory.'¹⁴³ In *Performing Whiteness: Postmodern Re/Constructions in the Cinema*, Gwendolyn Audrey Foster navigates the historic and current positionality of whiteness in cinema, importantly drawing from Butlerian performance studies to analyze the tenuous bounds of categories of race. She writes, 'Bad-white women are almost always good underneath'¹⁴⁴ (see the iconic noir characters given as examples at the beginning of this chapter). Foster builds upon Richard Dyer's illuminating work *White*, where his efforts to racialize whiteness in its representations across media proves foundational to this study. Dyer spends the book deconstructing whiteness as it exists in all realms of culture - which is to say, as the default - particularly cinema, and the infinite consequences of such a structure. On the dominant constructions of white femininity, Dyer explains, 'White women thus carry - or, in many narratives, betray - the hopes, achievements and character of the race. They guarantee its reproduction, even while not succeeding to its highest heights. Yet their very whiteness, their refinement, makes of sexuality a disturbance of their racial purity.'¹⁴⁵

This certainly seems to get at some of the patriarchal ideologies driving the tale of Rebecca, a woman who squanders her 'whiteness' with unbridled and transgressive sexuality. If Mrs. de Winter is heiress to Jane

¹⁴³ Doane, p. 215.

¹⁴⁴ Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, *Performing Whiteness: Postmodern Re/Constructions in the Cinema* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), p. 117.

¹⁴⁵ Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 29.

Eyre, then Rebecca, it naturally follows, is the scion of Bertha Mason Rochester, the Creole first wife of Jane's would-be lover Edward Rochester, who imprisoned Bertha for her promiscuity and presumed 'madness.' In fact, the film's producer David O. Selznick considered *Rebecca* 'a veiled adaptation of *Jane Eyre*.'¹⁴⁶ In one of the most classic texts of feminist literary criticism *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar enumerate the feminist implications of the split psyche in nineteenth-century fiction by women writers including Mary Shelley, Jane Austen, George Eliot, and the Brontës. The title of the book famously takes its name from Bertha, not only Jane's rival but her 'monstrous' double. In *Madwoman*, Gilbert and Gubar link the troubled heroines of women's literature to stifling male-authored images of femininity that denied women complexity and humanity, and frequently punished them for their refusal to adhere to the established social order: 'both gothic and anti-gothic writers represent themselves as split like Emily Dickinson between the elected nun and the damned witch.'¹⁴⁷ A feminist reading of the fiction written by women authors who channeled their frustration with the patriarchy through these 'mad' women characters, lends these texts and characters sociohistorical depth. Gilbert and Gubar propose a distinct, definable female literary tradition and support the claim that the Female Gothic can provide a language for the disempowered.

But Julia Round challenges the entire premise of the genre as typically delineated: '...how can we arrive at a definition that isn't absurdly tautological or essentialist?...I personally find the term more problematic than useful: lacking nuance and ignoring the very different interpretations and gratifications that women may seek through their writing and reading.'¹⁴⁸ While I, too, strive to resist the genre's more essentialist tendencies, I have chosen to operate within the Female Gothic formula because, although this format historically privileges middle-class narratives and heteronormative relationships, I am curious about its exegesis of the domestic and how this space can be enlivened by the racialized female double with all the sociohistorical connotations she invites. I do not confine my cases to films directed by women. In fact, I would argue the Female Gothic already boasts a wealth of texts by men - Sheridan Le Fanu and Henry James, for example - so I necessarily diverge from the literary definition set out by Moers. More importantly, Moers points out that the significance of the Female Gothic was that 'nothing separates female experience from male experience more sharply, and more early in life, than the compulsion to visualize the self.'¹⁴⁹ If that is true, then how does the Black female spectator approach

¹⁴⁶ Thomas Schatz, *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1988), p. 327.

¹⁴⁷ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Mad Woman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979) p. 78.

¹⁴⁸ Julia Round, *Gothic for Girls: Misty and British Comics* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2019), p. 205.

¹⁴⁹ Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (New York: Doubleday, 1976), p. 107.

the effort to visualize herself when the mirror/cinema so often deprives her of her own image? Though I am not bound to gender, I emphasize Black filmmakers, not principally due to race, but because they establish a branch of the Gothic that bears a conspicuous and purposeful genealogy with *The Souls of Black Folk*. By this I mean, their films are centrally concerned not only with representation, but, like Du Bois, with the mechanics of spectatorship. While white directors have authored horror films that invite application of the Du Boisian veil and double-consciousness, or that center Black characters, these particular Black filmmakers have used the genre to reckon with the infrastructure of the gaze in the tradition of this ancestral text.

Black and White

Jack Halberstam, steeped in the theories of Michel Foucault, sees the Gothic as ‘technology of subjectivity’¹⁵⁰ where the monster evolves with historical and cultural conditions. Halberstam examines the measures the genre in its literary and cinematic forms takes to preserve various social hierarchies by charting the history of the monster and its continually changing representations of race, class, gender, and sexuality. It is not simply that these monstrous figures correspond to the cultural imagination; Halberstam posits that the Gothic framework historically attempts to configure distinctions of race, gender, and class into a biological separation: the measure of one’s character lies in one’s blood; moral failings are somehow connected then to these biological shortcomings. He writes that the Gothic becomes a space where race, gender, and sexuality can be rendered in the ‘more neutral category’ of psychology and that the ‘Gothic...tracks the transformation of struggles within the body politic to local struggles within individual bodies.’¹⁵¹ The Gothic becomes a scientific context where the historical taxonomy of its monstrous figures provides a compass to explore structural technologies of Othering. Racial, gender, and sexual difference are already mapped onto these figures that endanger the patriarchal order. The Gothic gives us the space to examine this symbolism intimately along with its broader social implications.

If Moers argues that this collection of fiction penned by women reveal their reservations about domestic life and traditional family roles, Helen Hanson, who applies the term to cinema (mainly thrillers and film noir), finds the heroines more ambiguous in their ambitions, continuing the ambivalent reading of Female Gothic women characters like Linda Badley and Barbara Creed before her. In *Hollywood Heroines: Women in Film Noir and the Female Gothic Film*, she works concretely in the Female Gothic framework, examining films such as

¹⁵⁰ Jack Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 2.

¹⁵¹ Halberstam, p. 78.

Rebecca, *The Two Mrs. Carrolls* (1947), and *What Lies Beneath* (2000). Hanson's interpretation of the double in the Gothic borrows largely from its Freudian origins, where the double is a harbinger of death. Like *Rebecca*, narratively this double is usually a woman (rival) from the past, and according to Hanson, almost always a sign of looming danger. The woman faced with her double either in portrait form or temporally, is faced with her own mortality, and if she is to survive she must somehow triumph over/destroy her Other self.¹⁵² Of course, the feminine Gothic double from its earliest iterations also blatantly makes use of black/white symbolism to communicate a didactic vision of good and evil (which often translates to chastity versus promiscuity for women), e.g. *The Dark Mirror* (1946). Such is the dual nature of the Gothic, a space where women are alternately victims and monsters, heroines and villains.

The racialized double in cinema has garnered far less scholarly attention, most likely because Gothic doubles tend to be white. In 'The Whiteness of Film Noir,' Eric Lott contends that the Gothic's cinematic cousin film noir is a profoundly racially charged genre, calling it 'the refuge of whiteness,'¹⁵³ but Kelly Oliver and Benigno Trigo take issue with Lott's findings, insisting that, 'for Lott, racial ambiguity itself becomes associated with blackness, darkness, and evil. Racial undecidability becomes black, and black becomes bad and thereby absolves whiteness so that it can continue to be good.'¹⁵⁴ If Lott operates largely within a racial binary, it remains true that race is almost never outwardly central to the narrative or conflict. Even more telling, Black people are curiously absent much of the time.

Two classic doppelgänger narratives in the Female Gothic formula, or that recycle elements from the literary tradition - *Single White Female* (1992) and *Black Swan* (2010) - plainly allude to the genre's shadowy history with race, all the while pointedly refusing to explore it diegetically. Instead, these films co-opt symbols and language of race to tell stories that betray an old conventional, importantly disguised fear of the racialized Other. *Single White Female* (1992) easily remains one of the most memorable female doppelgänger cinema fictions. When her fiancé Sam cheats on her, Allie (Bridget Fonda) kicks him out of her apartment and finds herself in need of a roommate. Her advertisement for someone she can relate to, someone just like herself, a 'Single White Female,' backfires terribly when that roommate Hedy (Jennifer Jason Leigh) attempts to steal her identity by re-making herself in Allie's image. The characters' cinematic preoccupation with their appearance,

¹⁵² Helen Hanson, *Hollywood Heroines: Women in Film Noir and the Female Gothic Film* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), pp. 92-93.

¹⁵³ Eric Lott, 'The Whiteness of Film Noir,' in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader* ed. by Mike Hill (New York: New York University Press, 1997), pp. 81-101 (p. 85).

¹⁵⁴ Kelly Oliver and Benigno Trigo, *Noir Anxiety* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp. 4 - 5.

particularly their reflection in mirrors, make the film ripe for psychoanalytical readings that, among other things, commonly maintain that this image love suggests muffled narcissistic impulses and repressed lesbian desire.¹⁵⁵ Of course Hedy should want to consume, embody, ultimately become Allie, for throughout the film Allie represents the standard of modern womanhood; she possesses all at once a career, beauty, confidence, and, significantly, heteronormative marriage prospects. Hedy, meanwhile, as Clare Whatling reads her, is ‘demonized’ as a ‘boyfriendless, solitary masturbator with no dress sense and thus, within cinematic terms, as inevitably lesbian.’¹⁵⁶ Her sexuality, explicitly and implicitly, threatens, not least because she removes men and their desire from the equation. And she effectively delivers on that threat when she kills Sam after performing oral sex on him.

Stella Bruzzi takes a somewhat different approach to the image-based relationship between the two women. She writes, ‘the loss of identity and the appropriation of the Other that occurs throughout *Single White Female* is not simply the return of a repressed homoeroticism as has been proposed, it is a more confused (and confusing) smudging of the lines between appearance and personality.’¹⁵⁷ Bruzzi concludes that the real horror lies not in the pathology that motivates the pursuit of someone’s identity - a commonplace cinematic scenario - but the success of Hedy’s mimicry, ‘the ease with which one character can pass for another.’¹⁵⁸ Perhaps this ‘passing’ would seem less suspicious, or less racially loaded, if, as Sianne Ngai argues, the detail of whiteness had not been foregrounded only for the issue of race to be conspicuously removed from the film:

Why does Allie oddly describe herself as white - “SWF seeks female to share apartment in west 70s” - in an advertisement not for a sexual or romantic partner (where the specification of race has become a convention) but for a roommate? Allie’s specification of her own race seems all the more gratuitous, given that in yet another telling departure from Lutz’s *SWF Seeks Same, Single White Female* is careful to present Allie as ‘color-blind,’ indifferent to the race (if not the gender) of the roommate she seeks.¹⁵⁹

Race, Ngai further argues, is dropped from the story once Allie chooses Hedy over the other candidates (including one woman of color), meanwhile relatively minor class differences are easily masked with the acquisition of the right female commodities.¹⁶⁰ Naming whiteness is especially unusual considering that, as Dyer and several other race theorists have argued, the power of whiteness is its invisibility, its implicitness, that it is

¹⁵⁵ Catherine Spooner, *Fashioning Gothic Bodies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 131.

¹⁵⁶ Clare Whatling, *Screen Dreams: Fantasising Lesbians in Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 94.

¹⁵⁷ Stella Bruzzi, *Undressing Cinema: Clothing and Identity in the Movies* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 142.

¹⁵⁸ Bruzzi, p. 143.

¹⁵⁹ Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 170.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

considered default. The use of race here then is ultimately baffling, unless we return to the idea of ‘passing.’ In ‘Whiteness as Property,’ Cheryl L. Harris recounts how her grandmother racially passed as white in the 1930s. Harris writes, ‘Becoming white increased the possibility of controlling critical aspects of one’s life rather than being the object of others’ domination.’¹⁶¹ Ngai proposes thinking of Hedy as performing a kind of ‘dark-face’ in reverse, or as a woman of color in whiteface, cogently deducing that “‘race’ names the struggle in which it is most taken for granted that no degree of acquiring what the envied other has - money, education, phallus, or in the case of *Single White Female*...the right hairstyle and shoes - will ever culminate in the other and one becoming indistinguishable.’¹⁶² In other words, whiteness is generally presumed an unattainable class: you either are white or you are not. But as this research hopes to explore, white is the most tenuous category of all, not least because many ethnic groups who were once considered not white (e.g. Irish, Italian) later *became* white.

This question of racial passing brings us to the slippage between color and race, one of the prominent queries of Dyer’s *White*. Consider how Frantz Fanon describes color as it functions on a social level in a manner that seems inextricable from race:

Darkness, obscurity, shadows, gloom, night, the labyrinth of the underworld, the murky depths, blackening someone’s reputation; and on the other side, the bright look of innocence, the white dove of peace, magical heavenly light. A beautiful blond child - how much peace there is in that phrase, how much joy, and above all how much hope! No comparison with a beautiful black child: the adjectives literally don’t go together...in Europe, i. e., in all the civilized and civilizing countries, the black man symbolizes sin. The archetype of inferior values is represented by the black man.¹⁶³

Language, certainly English, condemns blackness and simultaneously adorns whiteness, enveloping it in language that denotes the spiritual and divine. Black Americans speak a language fundamentally armed against them. Recalling Du Bois’s concerns, what must this do to the psyche as one learns to speak? To read any classical text, one must first grapple with repeated reference to the purity of whiteness and the moral depravity tacit in blackness. Of course, this speaks to color not, necessarily, race. Dyer uses examples from William Shakespeare to Edith Wharton and even the Oxford English Dictionary to ‘illustrate the slippage between white as hue, skin, and symbol’¹⁶⁴ in literature. Initially the author hesitates to map the three onto one another, especially regarding film:

¹⁶¹ Cheryl L. Harris, ‘Whiteness as Property’ in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, ed. by Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller and Kendall Thomas (New York: New Press, 1995), pp. 276-291 (p. 277).

¹⁶² Ngai, p. 173.

¹⁶³ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 2008), p. 166.

¹⁶⁴ Dyer, p. 64.

White people are far from being always represented as good, for instance. Yet I am now persuaded that the slippage between the three is more pervasive than I thought at first, to the extent that it probably does underlie all representation of white people...However profoundly mixed up and various the actual representations of black and white people are, the underlying regime of dualism is still in play.¹⁶⁵

So while, of course, white characters tend to be far more dimensional than simply good or evil (depth not often bestowed upon Black characters), this lurking racial binary still scaffolds the central conflict in a lot of fiction, especially horror, where questions of morality - good and evil - frequently drive the plot. White as color and symbol, and therefore as skin, generally carries far more goodwill or leeway from the spectator because of these more wholesome, ingrained cultural connotations. For the same reason, black - 'shadows, gloom, night,' as Fanon writes - stirs the exact opposite.

Another cinematic example of this mappable racial dualism occurs in Darren Aronofsky's 2010 film *Black Swan*. The film follows timid ballet dancer Nina (Natalie Portman), desperate to dance the lead role in her New York-based company's production of Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*. A dedicated perfectionist, Nina performs the white swan flawlessly, but the company director Thomas Leroy (Vincent Cassel) doubts she can convincingly portray her monstrous twin: the sensuous, uninhibited black swan. Despite his reservations, Thomas casts Nina whose anxieties around her ability are further exacerbated by the arrival of Lily (Mila Kunis), whom Thomas admires for the natural, free-spirited quality she brings to the choreography.

Black Swan features a predominantly female cast of white brunettes. In addition to Portman and Kunis, Barbara Hershey plays Nina's single mother, a retired dancer who gave up her career to raise her daughter. Winona Ryder plays Nina's idol, an older dancer called Beth, who grows increasingly unhinged as she is forced into retirement and replaced by Nina as Leroy's favorite. The women all relate to each other primarily as competitors. *Film Quarterly* published a debate about *Black Swan* in which Amber Jacobs argues, 'Here again another tired binary mapping the limited terrain of femininity under patriarchy: the white/black, virgin/whore split which the film makes no attempt to disrupt.'¹⁶⁶ The correlation between whiteness and purity necessitates the correlation between blackness and impurity, which in many cases, as I have argued, implicates unchecked sexuality. This theme reappears in *Black Swan*.

Perhaps the key to uncovering the basis of this dichotomy lies in the popular imagery (itself a direct consequence of European expansionism) of that most famous virgin, so explained by Dyer:

¹⁶⁵ Dyer, pp. 63 - 64.

¹⁶⁶ Mark Fisher and Amber Jacobs, 'Debating *Black Swan*: Gender and Horror', *Film Quarterly*, 65 (2011), 58 - 62 (p. 59).

The Virgin Mary's whiteness is that of all truly feminine - womanly, motherly, ladylike - white women. Such hue and skin whitening of the appearance of the indubitable exemplars of white as moral symbol constitutes a slippage that also encapsulates the alluring, culturally intrinsic instabilities of white hue and flesh. Christ and Mary are both human and holy, present and non-existent, which is to say, hue white and uncoloured, skin white and universal.¹⁶⁷

This is interesting given the way Black women have historically been represented on screen. Norma Manatu explains that images of Black female sexuality have roots in an equally ancient belief: the 'oversexed black female Jezebel'¹⁶⁸ symbol. The Jezebel symbol can also be traced back to a Biblical context and has long been associated with Black women in America, first culturally and then cinematically. Manatu describes the effect of linking Black women to a widely detested Biblical figure, particularly in a chiefly Christian nation:

...thus applying their definition to images of the black female body laid the foundation for belief in black women as amoral. Depictions of their supposed sexual nakedness and exaggerated sexual organs then came to serve as public markings of black women's sinfulness. In turn society came to expect black women to depart from cultural norms of female modesty and virtue. Consequently, black women's bodies - their very essence - became linked to the profane.¹⁶⁹

This is borne out in the treatment of Saartjie Baartman, whose body became a public spectacle of heightened racial and gendered difference. The protections that 'modesty and virtue' ensured for white womanhood did not apply to her because it was already assumed that she diverged from standard European conceptions of feminine purity.

That said, the women in *Black Swan* are not entirely uncomplicated. Nina coincides with the Spanish word niña, which means 'little girl' and Lily comes from the flower, a symbol of purity, both of which evoke notions of innocence and value closely associated with whiteness as a symbol of chastity. But neither of them are innocent, even before conflict arises between them. Nina steals lipstick from Beth and, in her desperation, she resorts, albeit halfheartedly, to using her sexuality to procure the role of white/black swan. Meanwhile Lily does casually covet the role of the white/black swan but not nearly so cunningly nor strategically as Nina suspects. Caroline Ruddell explains, 'for Nina, Lily (though innocent) is the perfect person on whom to project the black swan persona, which is a darker, more freewheeling entity, and ultimately a monster pitted against Nina's white

¹⁶⁷ Dyer, p. 68.

¹⁶⁸ Norma Manatu, *African American Women and Sexuality in the Cinema* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 2003), p. 17.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

swan purity and innocence.¹⁷⁰ To underscore their divide, color - on a literal level - effectively performs the ‘color line’ in place of skin. Lily appears almost always in dark, often black clothes while Nina wears pastel pinks or white, like her strikingly girlish bedroom. Furthermore, the film makes clear through the sexually liberal Lily, how pitifully frigid Nina is by contrast.



Figure 1.3: Nina (Natalie Portman) discovers her antagonistic reflection in *Black Swan* (Aronofsky, 2010).

True to cinematic tradition, the mirror in *Black Swan* symbolizes duplicity, multiplicity even. Mirrors are everywhere in the film, in part because mirrors are central to ballet life. Lily doubles Nina, but Nina also frequently finds herself looking into mirrors and being frightened by what she sees there. Forced to watch herself literally transform into the black swan, her fascination turns quickly to horror as the mirror begins to reflect an independent image. In one scene, she sees herself reflected multiple times in the mirrors placed before and behind her. She tilts to the side to see the image behind scratching its shoulder before suddenly turning to glare at her. This happens again in the ensuing rehearsal scene when her reflection stops mirroring her movements (Fig.1.3). Nina raises her arm to no avail; her reflection remains still, glowering back at her from the mirror. She is no longer in control of her own image. In a sense she performs the cinematic exchange of the unhealthy mirror relationship as Winnicott warns: a mirror has become a thing only to be ‘looked at’ and her own image blatantly threatens her. When she returns home, her body has begun to take on the physical characteristics of the black swan. Again she witnesses the changes through a mirror. Her eyes turn a demonic red and she plucks a black

¹⁷⁰ Caroline Ruddell, *The Besieged Ego: Doppelgangers and Split Identity Onscreen* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 63.

feather from the scratch marks on her back. Nina's metamorphosis culminates after the intermission during opening night when she returns to her dressing room to find Lily sitting before the mirror dressed as the black swan. 'How about I dance the black swan for you?' Lily says as she turns from the mirror, her face and voice morphing into Nina's. In a fit of rage, Nina thrusts Lily/Nina against the wall mirror, which shatters. 'Nina' begins to strangle Nina, still dressed as the white swan. Visually, the film evokes the clash between the black and white swan, or the light (good) and the dark (evil). But their images begin to blur when the real Nina mutates into the black swan: scales creep over her skin, her neck elongates, and her eyes glow red. When she stabs 'Nina' with a broken shard of mirror, it seems that she has, at least nominally, defeated the black swan. 'Nina' transforms back into Lily, blood spilling from her mouth as Nina shouts, 'It's *my* turn!'

But her victory comes at a price. By killing Lily, the 'light' has not won out over the 'dark.' The light has become the dark. Nina fully transforms into the black swan. Her skin texture changes and she sprouts feathers along her arms. On stage, she spins until her arms become majestic full-length black wings. The next shot reveals we have been in Nina's head again: she poses on stage without wings, her arms outstretched behind her, before she floats off stage to kiss Thomas passionately, a thing timid, sexually repressed Nina would have never done. The triumph is short-lived, for when Nina returns to her dressing room and inhabits the white swan again, Lily appears at the door to congratulate her. Clint Mansell's take on Tchaikovsky's score thunders as Nina removes a broken mirror shard from her own abdomen.¹⁷¹ The mirror has literally become the death of her. Her obsession with her reflection, with that image in the eyes of others, makes a monster out of her; except that monster, and indeed her most monstrous acts, were veiled in black.

If a study in hegemony, ultimately *Black Swan* reproduces hierarchical gendered structures without question. The characters reenact a paternal dynamic where women are rivals and men the unchallenged arbiters of success, liberation, and acceptance. Du Bois might read the film as one that exemplifies the shortsightedness of those on the other side of the veil, with its 'erasure of any relational apprehension of power,'¹⁷² for the film seems unaware of how easily these racialized connections are made. In the adherence to problematic, admittedly pervasive colored symbolism, the painful racialized histories attached to those symbols are overlooked. Meanwhile all other signs of diversity are removed. It would appear, according to the film, that people of color do not exist in the ballet industry (perhaps to an extent this inequity merely reflects real life), nor apparently on the streets of present-day New York. The purposeful eradication of nonwhite bodies suggests that the film's

¹⁷¹ *Black Swan*, dir. Darren Aronofsky (Fox Searchlight, 2010).

¹⁷² *Race and Racism*, p. 5.

racial undertones are not incidental, but part of a broader subterranean project to mute the history of racialization that American society is woefully, inescapably mired in.

CONCLUSION

I want to look at films where the racialized female double signifies ‘monstrousness’ and consider how Black filmmakers have used domestic horror to foreground her, defining her fears and her methods of resistance. My research principally emphasizes the racialized, gendered double to illuminate the ways that Black femininity is rendered not only threatening, but illegible, and describe how she emerges still, despite efforts to contain her. By mapping the genealogy between classic Female Gothic texts to contemporary domestic horrors, I hope to use the racialized female double to unravel traumatic Black feminine looking relations, and trace some measure of Black women’s interiority, their anxieties and methods of resistance through these characters. The double here will cinematically image the psychological fragmentation incurred at the intersection of race and gender, providing a language for a long overlooked violence.

I have assembled a selection of films in the Female Gothic formula to establish that for women doubles in horror cinema, a racial slippage repeatedly occurs even in the absence of a visibly racialized character. The next chapter will examine these more traditional Female Gothic texts. It is important to note that these films, though conventionally of the genre, are not all created equal. This is to say, some of these films do offer complex and thorough depictions of the racialized feminine. Once again, in an effort to resist essentialism, the point is not to suggest that white filmmakers are incapable of telling powerful stories about the nature of Black femininity. In fact, at least one film in chapter 2 has the capacity to be considered among the Black Female Gothic films covered in the final three chapters. The primary aim is to move from those films where she is largely disguised or approximates whiteness to films where she becomes visualized. Indeed, the following chapter concerns itself with the ‘mirror’ as perpetuated by classical Female Gothic fictions which either obscure the Black feminine or distort her image. This is to establish the conventions of the genre which provides a necessary foundation to read the films that would later use the form to subvert the prevalent imagining of the Black feminine. In this way, I hope to explore the Gothic, like several before me, as a site of power and resistance, to examine the ways it has been adopted to enforce structures of power and, alternately, reclaimed for the Othered.

two

FOUR WOMEN

“You’d think my own face would know me.”

- Shirley Jackson, ‘The Daemon Lover,’ 1949¹⁷³

In *The Sexual Metaphor*, feminist researcher Helen Haste describes four major cultural depictions of female sexuality: woman as wife/Madonna (crucially sexless), woman as waif (childlike, also sexless), woman as witch (embodying power through magic, sexuality, and social position, which is why she must be destroyed), and woman as whore (sexual threat).¹⁷⁴ Theorist Norma Manatu argues that the first three images of womanhood cannot be applied to Black women, although the ‘witch’ proves trickier ground: ‘Symbolically speaking, black women, like witches, possess sexual power because they are believed to be highly sexual creatures; black women may even be perceived as having magical powers...but they lack real social power.’¹⁷⁵ She hesitates to concede that Black women can lay claim to ‘witch’ given what the identification telegraphs about a woman’s social currency. Instead, Manatu insists that it is under the image of ‘whore’ that Black women fall because this category ‘feeds into perception of black women as sexual temptresses through the ethos of sinfulness.’¹⁷⁶ The conception of Black women as sexually immoral - not sexless like the mother/wife, and too ‘strong’ and threatening to be waifish - made possible their physical and sexual exploitation throughout slavery and beyond. What Manatu really exposes here is the way that Black women are traditionally excluded from the category of womanhood altogether.

¹⁷³ Shirley Jackson, ‘The Daemon Lover’ in *The Lottery and Other Stories* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Co., 1949; London: Penguin Books, 2009)

¹⁷⁴ Helen Haste, *The Sexual Metaphor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 172 - 173.

¹⁷⁵ Norma Manatu, *African American Women and Sexuality in the Cinema* (Jefferson: McFarland and Co., 2003), p. 76.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

My research joins a formidable body of scholarship that confronts how Black femininity has been hypersexualized, racialized, and pathologized for mass consumption. So long and dominant is this history, that the four major images of Black femininity have their own names (and, as Manatu points out, barely coincide with the tiers Haste identifies): the Mammy, Jezebel, Sapphire, and the Tragic Mulatto. We begin to see what Black women are up against: archetypes that purposefully render them aggressive (Mammy, Sapphire) or lascivious (Jezebel), ultimately more animal than human. It is not simply a muting of their complexity, but a distortion of their humanity and denial of their dignity.

Although Black women continually resist and challenge these tropes, these constructions have endured and shaped even their vision of themselves. In ‘Four Women,’ one of the most baldly political songs of the sixties and arguably her discography, Nina Simone does not so much revise these figures as she redirects the gaze, inward rather than outward. She renames the women - Aunt Sarah, Saffronia, Sweet Thing, and Peaches - and sings each verse from each woman’s perspective in first-person. The last verse begins thus:

My skin is brown/My manner is tough/I'll kill the first mother I see/ My life has been rough.

Always before their naming, Simone sings, ‘What do *they* call me?’ With such a detached and distant emphasis on the pronoun, it is hard to imagine who these characters might possibly be addressing beyond themselves. In other words, it is a song about the mirror. Simone’s efforts to reclaim the mirror - to rescue the image from its colonial past and violent consequences - attends to the full weight of the dilemma: it is a complete malformation, an un-mirroring and a silencing that keeps Black women relegated to the shadows.

I am not the first to consider the historical representation of Black women as ‘un-mirroring.’ In ‘Olympia’s Maid: Reclaiming Black Female Subjectivity,’ artist and theorist Lorraine O’Grady notably writes, ‘To name ourselves rather than be named we must first see ourselves. For some of us this will not be easy. So long unmirrored in our true selves, we may have forgotten how we look.’¹⁷⁷ Scholars such as Janell Hobson and Evelyn Hammonds, among others, also borrow this language. Hammonds, in particular, writes that, Black feminist criticism generally positions Black women’s sexuality from the vantage of hegemonic discourses as an ‘absence,’ describing it in metaphors of ‘speechlessness’ or else ‘void.’ But she demands more than visualizing the unrepresented, or what Hortense Spillers calls the ‘misseen’,¹⁷⁸:

¹⁷⁷ Lorraine O’Grady, ‘Olympia’s maid: Reclaiming black female subjectivity,’ in *After-image* Vol. 20, 1(1992), pp. 14-20.

¹⁷⁸ Hortense, ‘Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,’ *Diacritics*, 17.2 (Summer 1987), pp. 64-81.

...in overturning the “politics of silence” the goal cannot be merely to be seen: visibility in and of itself does not erase a history of silence nor does it challenge the structure of power and domination, symbolic and material, that determines what can and cannot be seen. The goal should be to develop a “politics of articulation.” This politics would build on the interrogation of what makes it possible for black women to speak and act.¹⁷⁹

Racial representation does not guarantee structural resistance. In many cases discussed here, Black bodies on screen are frequently harnessed for stereotypical and racist ends. Simultaneously, the dense scholarship available on the unseen Black feminine serves as a testament to her existence in literature and film. Hobson further argues that ‘the discourse on black female sexuality is less about the unseen presence of blackness and more about its impact on its surroundings.’¹⁸⁰ Even when invisible, she still wreaks havoc on these paranoid colonial fictions. Hobson ultimately contends, ‘Nonetheless, this full and dense “void” must be visualized in some way.’¹⁸¹ With that said, I hope to visualize her in these films where she is not explicitly realized.

First, it will be important to outline the systematic forces she faces. I situate myself in the broader discourse by exploring how racially coded performances of femininity in horror/Female Gothic films both symbolize and animate a gendered, racialized spectatorial split. O’Grady further writes:

The female body in the West is not a unitary sign. Rather, like a coin, it has an obverse and a reverse: on the one side, it is white; on the other, not-white or, prototypically, black. The two bodies cannot be separated, nor can one body be understood in isolation from the other in the West’s metaphoric construction of “woman.” White is what woman is; not-white (and the stereotypes not-white gathers in) is what she had better not be.¹⁸²

Womanhood is white, but crucially cannot be defined without Black womanhood. This presents an interesting paradox, which grants an avenue to think about the stifling conditions in which Black womanhood emerges.

The previous chapter established the theoretical framework in which I operate and the chief aim of this project: to map the genealogy of the racialized female double from early, genre-defining films to present-day features where she is fantastically realized. Applying Winnicott’s object-relations theory to the dynamic between screen and spectator, and loosely using Du Bois’s theory of ‘double consciousness’ to interpret the racialized

¹⁷⁹ Evelynn Hammonds, ‘Black (W)holes and the geometry of Black female sexuality’ in *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 6.2-3 (Summer-Fall 1994)

<<http://sites.middlebury.edu/soan191/files/2013/08/HammondsBlackWholes.docx>>

¹⁸⁰ Janell Hobson, *Venus in the Dark: Blackness and Beauty in Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 15.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² O’Grady, p. 14.

female double's cinematic expression in horror, I hope to illuminate the ways the psychic Black feminine experience is made illegible and to construct a language for their interiority.

Cinema is a great cultural mirror; premised upon reflecting the world around us, it also significantly shapes how we see the world. Winnicott, too, frames the looking relationship between mother and child as fundamentally cyclical: ‘...ordinarily, what the baby sees is himself or herself. In other words the mother is looking at the baby and what she looks like is related to what she sees there.’¹⁸³ If we acknowledge that American cinema produces flawed imagery of Black women - one that in turn emulates and shapes the country’s cultural anxieties - then we can consider Winnicott’s subsequent contemplation as the driving force of this chapter: ‘the case of the baby whose mother reflects her own mood or, worse still, the *rigidity of her own defences* [emphasis added].’¹⁸⁴ He continues, ‘In such a case what does the baby see?’¹⁸⁵ So the purpose of this chapter is to explore what Black female-identifying spectators find when they look to the screen/mother-mirror. It will be equally important to determine how we might define the ‘rigidity of [her] own defences’ for cinema. I want to look at a handful of Gothic melodramas where the racialized female double appears and examine certain patterns that flank her presence. To contain the number of films surveyed, I will prioritize those cases that depict ambivalent racial representation. These case studies are not exhaustive. This sampling of films either reproduces or interrogates the colonial agenda, maintaining power through the distinction between white (colonizer) and racialized Other (colonized). Each film in some way illustrates the fragmented psyche engendered by white supremacy, while using white bodies to convey racial shorthand.

I will organize the racialized female double (RFD) into four monster narratives/sections: 1) as she first presents in the racialized zombie texts of the 1930s and 1940s, given the roots of the zombie’s introduction to Western audiences; 2) in the original Jacques Tourneur and Val Lewton production of *Cat People* (1942) compared to Paul Schrader’s 1982 ‘loose’ adaptation of the film; 3) in ghost narratives, conducive to a host of historical implications, specifically in *Curse of the Cat People* (1944), sequel to the aforementioned Lewton-Tourneur collaboration and *Candyman* (1992); and finally 4) as the witch/conjure woman, where the formerly disavowed racialized dimension becomes fantastically realized in *The Skeleton Key* (2005) and how its version of the conjure woman is in dialogue with other cinematic iterations throughout the years. There are, of course, many more monstrous forms - vampires, mummies, aliens, the demon-possessed, etc. - and the films here are not evenly dispersed across the years because there exist huge gaps between the films that allow me to

¹⁸³ Winnicott, pp. 1-2.

¹⁸⁴ Winnicott, p. 2.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

develop my argument. But all the subsequent case studies apply the Female Gothic model to varying degrees and centralize the racialized female double.

White Zombies

The zombie narrative makes for a particularly rich starting point. This framework would yield some of the most significant cinematic cases of racialized horror, even where Black bodies were physically absent from the screen. I begin with zombies because this figure in fiction exemplifies a specifically Black condition, historically and dramatically. Although most scholars agree the zombie as popularized in mainstream media scarcely resembles the zombi (throughout this section I will distinguish ‘zombie,’ the American cultural phenomenon, from its progenitor ‘zombi’) of diasporic African religious practices, the zombie is deeply entangled if not profoundly possessed with Blackness. In part, this kinship is inescapable due to the zombie’s connections to Haitian Vodou. In fact, sensationalized voodoo (likewise to be distinguished here from Vodou) had long been purloined for Western consumption - in films such as *Voodoo Fires* (1913), *Unconquered* (1917), and *The Witching Eyes* (1929) - before my first case study *White Zombie* (1932) graced the big screen.

In cinema, the zombie has been particularly adept at articulating a horror distinctly steeped in the politics of the Black body. This section will not delve deeply into the history of the Western zombie or the Haitian zombi because my research concerns how these figures are portrayed cinematically and as Bruce Kawin admits, ‘movies have shown little interest in anthropologically rigorous approaches to Haitian culture or religion.’¹⁸⁶ Nor do I make any attempt to substantively categorize the zombie film. This project means to focus on the RFD and this section concerns only a modest few zombie films where she is present. The zombie framework (so, too, the following categories) serves as a lens to deconstruct how these specific ‘monstrous’ characters denote racialized anxieties and how these symbols respectively may be used to read the RFD’s expression in the following films. Presented as case studies are *White Zombie* (1932), *Ouanga* (1936) and *I Walked With a Zombie* (1943), formative examples of how zombie fictions offered a rich space for the interweaving of race, gender, and horror. These films overlap in structure and general theme: the rescue of white women from the symbolic, sometimes literal threat of miscegenation. The racist themes driving these films and the zombie’s cinematic origins have been well-theorized, but this section principally emphasizes the racial bifurcation channeled by the RFD. Through her performance of the mirror I aim to uncover what can be attributed to the phantasmic racial allegories the RFD creates.

¹⁸⁶ Bruce F. Kawin, *Horror and the Horror Film* (London: Anthem Press, 2012), p. 118.

With that explanation, a brief and not at all thorough history lesson: it was to be expected that some of the enslaved people of African descent carried with them to the Americas elements of religions they practiced in their homelands - central and west Africa - and combined these aspects with indigenuous rituals and European folk tradition ‘to create the uniquely American religion called Voodoo,’¹⁸⁷ which would go on to have a lasting impact upon horror cinema. ‘In many ways, the Haitian zombie displayed many of the stereotypical characteristics of antebellum African American slaves,’ writes Ann Kordas, who continues:

Accounts of zombies authored by Americans or appearing in American newspapers emphasized the zombie’s lack of intellect just as racist descriptions of African Americans commonly described them as limited in intelligence or possessing the minds of children...Zombies could presumably be beaten so easily because they did not possess the same ability to feel pain as did living beings. In the nineteenth century, many whites had believed that African Americans were less sensitive to pain than were people of European ancestry...Zombies did not, however, resemble *free* African American laborers. Zombies did not complain about their pay or working conditions and did not abandon their employers in search of better conditions.¹⁸⁸

As I pointed out, the mystery surrounding voodoo and the Black communities practicing it had gripped American audiences even before the notable success of *The Magic Island* (1929), William Seabrook’s best-selling account of Haitian Vodou rituals. Significantly, his travelogue seized upon ‘the zombi’ and influenced scores of texts and films to follow.¹⁸⁹ He couches his initial encounter with a zombie in familiar dehumanizing language - ‘Obediently, like an animal, he slowly stood erect’ - and focuses specifically on the eyes of the zombified man: ‘They were in truth like the eyes of a dead man, not blind, but staring, unfocused, unseeing. The whole face, for that matter, was bad enough. It was vacant, as if there was nothing behind it.’¹⁹⁰ Seabrook’s description of the figure, particularly the lifeless eyes, would become an enduring template for the zombie narrative.

The gaze is a fundamental fixture of this project, as it deeply informs the theories underpinning my thesis. Between Du Bois, with his cogent imagining of the veil, and Winnicott, who pins the development of the self on the Mother’s capacity to mirror her infant, it is important to flag that despite Seabrook’s equivocating,

¹⁸⁷ Ann Kordas, ‘New South, New Immigrants, New Women, New Zombies: The Historical Development of the Zombie in American Popular Culture’ in *Race, Oppression and the Zombie: Essays on Cross-Cultural Appropriations of the Caribbean Tradition* edited by Christopher M. Moreman, Cory James Rushton, ed. by Christopher M. Moreman and Cory James Rushton (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 2011), pp. 15 - 30 (p. 15).

¹⁸⁸ Kordas, p. 20.

¹⁸⁹ Chera Kee, *Not Your Average Zombie: Rehumanizing the Undead from Voodoo to Zombie Walks* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017), p. 38.

¹⁹⁰ William Seabrook, *The Magic Island* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1929)

the zombie *is* effectively blind, ‘unseeing.’ Interestingly enough, Winnicott is similarly elusive where it concerns blind infants who must simply ‘get themselves reflected through other senses than that of sight.’¹⁹¹ In many ways, this describes, rather economically, the predicament of Black female spectatorship - to ‘get themselves reflected through other senses,’ since they so rarely see themselves on screen - and must also be the strategy of this project.

Steven Pokornowski interprets the interaction recounted by Seabrook with the zombie’s connections to the Black body plainly in mind. He writes, ‘The deadness of the zombie’s eyes mark a symbolic closure of the ethical and in this man’s face Seabrook at first sees nothing human with which to sympathize.’¹⁹² This lack of sympathy, he argues, is part of what makes the Black body so disposable and vulnerable to American social and political forces. The zombie and the Black body are broadly understood to be linked. Roger Luckhurst’s sweeping history of the zombie in popular culture and visual media reveals that no matter how far the zombie has migrated in present-day entertainment, the figure can never outrun its racialized origins. The zombie is forever ‘branded’ by a ‘murderous history of slavery and colonial dispossession.’¹⁹³

In 1932, during the American occupation of Haiti and directly inspired by *The Magic Island*, Edward and Victor Halperin released *White Zombie*, widely considered the first feature-length zombie film. Fresh from his star-making role as Count Dracula in the 1931 film adaptation, Bela Lugosi stars as zombie master ‘Murder’ Legendre opposite Madge Bellamy, playing Madeleine Short, the unassuming damsel upon whom Legendre sets his nefarious designs. Madeleine is traveling to marry Neil Parker (John Harron), stationed in Port-au-Prince, when she meets aristocratic planter Beaumont (Robert Frazer). Beaumont falls in love with her and plots to break up the marriage by enlisting the aid of the pointedly racialized voodoo priest Legendre (Lugosi was Hungarian, and he may or may not be intended to read as Creole here). Legendre eventually drugs and hypnotizes Madeleine, turning her into a zombie on her wedding night, so he might have her for himself.¹⁹⁴

Several scholars have noted the Freudian role the gaze plays in the film and Madeleine’s transformation. Several scenes depict Legendre staring into the camera lens. Sometimes the recipients are characters and sometimes, tacitly, the viewer, in a move that Gary D. Rhodes argues ‘moves the viewer from a more traditional and...passive role as spectator to a more active role as a participant/character.’¹⁹⁵ But rather unlike Winnicottian

¹⁹¹ *Playing & Reality*, p. 2.

¹⁹² Pokornowski, p. 8.

¹⁹³ Roger Luckhurst, *Zombies: A Cultural History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2015)

¹⁹⁴ *White Zombie*, dir. by Victor Halperin (United Artists, 1932).

¹⁹⁵ Gary D. Rhodes, *White Zombie: Anatomy of a Horror Film* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2015), p. 55.

reflection, this gaze disconcerts and even terrorizes. Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, not unlike Pokornowski, considers the racialized biomedical underpinnings of this look: ‘The gaze of the bad white is routinely associated with mastery over others...the trope of the destructive, sexually controlling, white, male gaze is often a medical gaze.’¹⁹⁶ This medical gaze pathologizes its subject and echoes Seabrook’s appraisal of the zombie. In *White Zombie* we see the beginnings of the psychological peril the ‘medical’ gaze entails, especially in horror, where ‘evil white doctors’¹⁹⁷ abound. However, his racialized sexuality eclipses his insidious ‘bad white’ eye.

Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert traces certain commonalities through various accounts of the zombified woman delivered by Seabrook, Zora Neale Hurston, Harry Franck and others, which suggests they draw on the same basic tale: ‘...the coveting of a beautiful, light-skinned or white upper-class girl by an older, dark-skinned man who is of lower class and is adept at sorcery; the intimations of necromantic sexuality with a girl who has lost her volition; the wedding night...as the preferred setting for the administration of the zombie poison...’¹⁹⁸ These persistent elements would influence subsequent fictional retellings. Her findings, which includes *White Zombie* and *I Walked With a Zombie* in addition to several literary sources, indicate peculiar ‘racially determined attitudes toward sexuality’ that Paravisini-Gebert asserts are ‘intrinsic’ to zombie films.¹⁹⁹ Put another way, the zombie framework seems largely premised on the racialized, sexual threat Black masculine sexuality poses to white women. In *White Zombie*, the zombies are white, but we learn that Legendre owes his wealth to these zombie servants who toil away without rest in his mills. The correlation is easily drawn between a helpless labour force exploited by the wealthy and the island’s African slaves. However, Legendre himself exists in an expressly Other-ed space, an unambiguous symbol of miscegenation. For while he is a wealthy landowner, he is excluded from the white middle class that lives on the island thanks to his voodoo (racialized) operations. He is feared among Haiti’s white European social elite as well as the island’s Black population and straddles both societies while belonging to neither.

Gyllian Phillips writes that Madeleine signifies ‘innocent White Womanhood,’ and her explicitly racialized victimhood makes a hero out of her husband, who, upon discovering her supernatural affliction, laments, ‘Not alive...in the hands of natives...better dead than that!’ Phillips argues, ‘The couple’s reunion restores white supremacist optimism in a racially pure society as Madeleine is freed from the threat of

¹⁹⁶ Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, *Performing Whiteness: Postmodern Re/Constructions in the Cinema* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), p. 129.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, ‘Women Possessed: Eroticism and Exoticism in the Representation of Woman as Zombie’ pp. 37-58 (p.40).

¹⁹⁹ Paravisini-Gebert, p. 50.

miscegenation.²⁰⁰ Meaning, with Legendre's death, Madeline is free from his sexual advances, and more racial mixing - the possibility of more 'monsters' like Legendre himself - is disrupted.

I Walked With a Zombie, the most visually and narratively sophisticated of this section's films, likewise makes the tale of the zombified woman - thematically at least - contingent on these familiar racialized sexual dynamics. More specifically, a white woman's zombie (racialized) state is linked to sexual transgression and comes to embody the 'tragedy' of miscegenation. Perhaps the most famous collaboration between French director Jacques Tourneur and producer Val Lewton, the film also bears the most obvious marks of the Female Gothic, for Tourneur and Lewton borrow openly from *Jane Eyre*. Canadian nurse Betsy Connell (Frances Dee) is the Jane to Paul Holland's (B-movie horror fixture Tom Conway) Rochester, and his Bertha - Betsy's new charge - is Jessica Holland (Christine Gordon), struck suddenly with a mysterious walking illness. Betsy quickly falls in love with Holland and selflessly commits herself to restoring Jessica, whose lifeless sunken eyes reveal her to the audience - by now versed in the cinematic living dead - as a zombie. Betsy takes more convincing.

To emphasize this haunted connection, the film makes poignant use of the statue of Saint Sebastian, for whom the island is named. Situated in the Holland family courtyard, the effigy, pierced through with arrows, is dubbed 'Ti-Misery' by the Black locals. The statue, a Black driver tells Betsy, was originally the figurehead of the very slave ship that brought slaves to the island and the Hollands were the ones who first brought them there. Later, Holland, with Betsy as his audience, reflects in more detail on the harrowing history emblematised by this figure: 'That's where our people came from, from the misery and pain of slavery. For generations they found life a burden. That's why they still weep when a child is born and make merry at a burial.' Even those born after the original sin cannot escape the grasp of its curse. Ti-Misery, now a fountain in Fort Holland, becomes an unwavering reminder of the two communities' inextricably woven past and present.

Jessica is soon established as the 'living' embodiment of this mournful kinship. After insulin shock treatment fails to wake her from her catatonic state, the Holland's maid Alma (Theresa Harris) sends Betsy and Jessica to the houmfort (Fig.2.1), where voodoo practitioners congregate and worship. To protect them along their journey, Alma pins a white scrap of cloth to Betsy's dress and a black one to Jessica's. Betsy wears a white dress and a black cloak, while Jessica 'wears a gray gown that symbolizes her liminal state: she is neither alive nor dead,' writes Kyle Bishop, 'even white or black - instead, she has become something of both, linked to local heritage because her zombiism makes her more of a slave than the blacks ever were.'²⁰¹ When they arrive at the

²⁰⁰ Phillips, p. 36.

²⁰¹ Kyle William Bishop, *American Zombie Gothic: The Rise and Fall (and Rise) of the Walking Dead in Popular Culture* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2010), p. 88.

houmfort, the Black locals, like Jessica, don the same black voodoo patches on their clothes. In an undeniably phallic ceremony ritual to determine whether Jessica is a zombie, the Black voodoo priest stabs her in the arm



Figure 2.1: Jessica (left) in a symbolically rich gray gown and Betsy, wearing white and black, make their way to the houmfort in *I Walked With a Zombie* (Tourneur, 1943).

with a saber, an emphatically sexual move, visually aligning her with Ti-Misery. When she does not bleed, the locals confirm her as a zombie and insist she stay with them.²⁰²

Clothes become essential to encoding power, racial and gendered, in *I Walked With a Zombie*. Jessica's state of racial in-between manifests in obvious white/black visual binaries that vividly connects her to the slave class on the island. But the scrap of white cloth that Alma pins to Betsy's cloak equally performs racial symbolism. The white cloth which distinguishes Betsy as 'white' - or perhaps 'pure' - from Jessica and the Black locals, wearing black patches on their clothes, stands out on a canvas of black (Betsy's cloak). Unlike Jessica's liminality, expressed in gray and black, this particular juxtaposition of white on black recalls Lorraine O'Grady's argument: 'White is what woman is; not-white...is what she had better not be.'²⁰³ White femininity requires - indeed, is inextricable from - its not-white counterpart.

²⁰² *I Walked With a Zombie*, dir. by Jacques Tourneur (RKO Pictures, 1943).

²⁰³ O'Grady, p. 14.

Crucially, *I Walked With a Zombie* makes another white woman directly responsible for Jessica's zombification. Mrs. Rand - mother to Paul and his half-brother Wesley, and Jessica's mother-in-law - confesses she pretended to be possessed by voodoo gods to make leeway with the locals: 'When my husband died I was helpless,' she explains to Betsy. 'They disobeyed me. Then accidentally I discovered the secret of how to deal with them...' Up until this moment, Mrs. Rand, a missionary, has been presented as a benevolent figure, but by her own admission declares her true objective is control. She is perhaps among the earliest iterations of what would become an enduring trope, particularly in the slasher film, the Gothic's critically despised scion: the murderous mother. For all the violent male villains, there is on occasion an equally vicious female predator - typically middle-aged and sexless - or, if not, a man so psychologically haunted by her that he reshapes himself in her grotesque image (e.g. Norman Bates in Hitchcock's *Psycho*). Toni Pressley-Sanon observes, 'Although [Rand] is a woman who is, in many ways, also to be controlled and contained, her wardrobe of tailored suits renders her a sexually ambiguous figure, with power over both the physical and spiritual world of the blacks.'²⁰⁴ Between her widowhood and gender instability, Rand outwardly opposes the patriarchal order, but she begins to internalize its violence in other ways. She immerses herself in the culture of the island's Black community not out of altruism, but self-interest. Only the Black community has even less access to power than she has. Exploiting them becomes the only way for Rand to gain any agency.²⁰⁵ As such, she - not her sons - becomes the symbol of colonial violation in the narrative.

For her recklessness, Mrs. Rand pays a terrible price. She reveals that when she discovered that Jessica and Wesley were having an affair and planned to run away together, she felt herself really possessed and asked the houngan (male priest in Haitian Vodou) to turn her daughter-in-law into a zombie. In her comprehensive survey of the Black presence in American horror cinema, Robin R. Means Coleman concludes that in the film Blackness 'is so infectious that it imperils Whites, particularly White women, who are weakened by their brush with it.'²⁰⁶ Mrs. Rand is an agent of destruction, but as a woman simultaneously vulnerable to 'defilement.' Furthermore, Jessica's zombification can be traced back to this familiar racialized, sexual order: together the Black male houngan and the white upper-class Mrs. Rand conspire to produce Jessica, the walking symbol of miscegenation, an 'unnatural' locus of horror.

²⁰⁴ Toni Pressley-Sanon, *Zombifying a Nation: Race, Gender and the Haitian Loas on Screen* (Jefferson: Mcfarland, 2016), p. 42.

²⁰⁵ Kee, p. 103.

²⁰⁶ Robin R. Means Coleman, *Horror Noire: Blacks in American Horror Films from the 1890s to Present* (New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 68.

The gaze is somewhat displaced here, but in one crucial scene, Jessica and Betsy perform the mirror. From the start, Betsy is Jessica's racial/moral foil. On her first night at Fort Holland, the nurse investigates the sound of distant weeping and follows a woman into the nearby tower. When the woman starts toward her, the shot prioritizes Betsy's reaction. The mysterious stranger, revealed to be Jessica, backs her into a corner until Betsy shrieks. The response to the racialized figure in the genre has always been terror. Notably, this encounter cinematically realizes Seabrook's account, the fright of confronting that which seems both human and not, that un-human-ness marked by 'dead' eyes, and the empathic distance this incurs. But the choreography of the scene not only induces dread in the audience, but connects the spectator to Betsy. Jessica, however, is grotesquely marked, even though the audience cannot visibly discern her difference. For a pregnant moment, the spectator can only imagine what Betsy sees in Jessica's visage. Finally, we see it is her uncanniness, her listless expression and lifeless, unseeing eyes. This scene initiates the mirror dynamic between the two women. Thereafter, Betsy begins to replace Jessica: at the Holland dinner table, as Paul Holland's confidante, and, in her relationship with Alma, as mistress of the house.

While Madeleine and Jessica are symbolically racialized (zombified), traditionally the principal role of the Black woman in film is to confer power onto her white counterpart. Here, that character is Theresa Harris, who would spend much of her career playing maids (she also makes a fleeting appearance as a waitress in *Cat People*). Harris is an interesting example. She had, by now, already appeared as Chico, not a maid but a close companion to Barbara Stanwyck's lead character, in the pre-Code film *Baby Face* (1933). While most Mammy or maid characters are necessarily de-sexualized and deferential, it was always difficult to hide Harris's beauty and striking presence, even when she was not playing characters as quietly subversive as Chico. In *I Walked With a Zombie*, she plays a small, important role, but remains peripheral to the drama. She is the only Black woman with speaking lines in a film that concerns itself with the wake of slavery but can only gesture to her experience, and even then leaves its interiority unexplored. In large part that is because the film is, not unreasonably, preoccupied with the psychological decay wrought by the imperialist project, the most chaotic variables seemingly the sexuality of Black men and white women. Black women do not seem to pose quite the same danger; race and gender preclude them from conventional avenues of power (patriarchal or racial) within this structure.

At the same time, their sexuality remains somehow too fearsome even to be visualized. Its absence is glaring. The anxious correlation between fear of Black men's mythical sexual appetite - insatiable and surely vengeful - and the systematic rape of Black women cannot be overstated. To reiterate the import of O'Grady's

coin, the presence of one guarantees the presence of the other. Just as white womanhood is constructed upon (as seen in the examples above) her chastity and visibility - leaving a kaleidoscope of not-white female bodies to play a host of distinct roles in Western sexual hierarchy - ‘it is the African female who, by virtue of color and feature and the extreme metaphors of enslavement, is at the outermost reaches of “otherness.”’²⁰⁷ In that case, it is not at all far-fetched when she concludes that, ‘[the Black woman] is the chaos that must be excised, and it is her excision that stabilizes the West’s construct of the female body, for the “femininity” of the white female body is ensured by assigning the not-white to a chaos safely removed from sight.’²⁰⁸ It is necessary then, even in a film that so directly confronts the social and psychological consequences of slavery, that Alma be paired narratively and visually as an embellishment first to Jessica and then Betsy, in an effort to accentuate their position and femininity, rather than be seen alone with Paul Holland because of the violent sexual history that dynamic elicits.

One scholar essential to intersectional readings of zombie fictions is Joan Dayan, who famously navigates Haiti’s complicated history largely through Vodou religious practices, its rituals, its ceremonies, and especially its loas, or gods. Erzulie, the spirit/loa of love, is especially important, for through her, Dayan and several other scholars have been able to reference a Black feminine expression that illuminates Black women’s experience. For Dayan, Vodou is a ‘locus of feminine strength’ and Erzulie ‘tells a story of women’s lives that has not been told.’²⁰⁹ Dayan elaborates:

[Erzulie is] the most contradictory [god]: a spirit of love who forbids love, a woman who is the most beloved yet feels herself the most betrayed. She can be generous and loving, or implacable and cruel. As mystery of love, assistance, and beauty, she appears at night to her devotees in the form of a pale virgin. As spirit of vengeance, she is fiercely jealous and sometimes punishes wayward devotees with death, impotence, or frigidity if they dare drink or have sex on those days devoted to her.²¹⁰

Erzulie is indeed a complex force: she bears many names, appears in many incarnations, of various ages and complexions, is attracted to both sexes, and is fascinating for what she represents not only to men, but also to the Haitian elite, young virgins, and the queer community.²¹¹ Toni Pressley-Sanon writes that colonial

²⁰⁷ O’Grady, p. 1.

²⁰⁸ O’Grady, p. 3.

²⁰⁹ Joan Dayan, ‘Erzulie: A Women’s History of Haiti’ in *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (1994), pp. 5-31 (p.6).

²¹⁰ Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 59.

²¹¹ Ibid.

interpretations of what Erzulie emblematises - sexuality, reproduction, and her association with the Virgin Mary - can be found in *White Zombie* and *I Walked With a Zombie*, where the loas 'of the filmmakers' imaginations are malicious, corrupted, and corrupting on one hand, and ineffectual on the other.²¹² Her symbol, the heart or the heart pierced with a dagger, recalls Ti-Misery; Jessica and Madeleine are usually cloaked in the white dresses associated with Erzulie's followers, and linked to her also by the devotion they inspire in men. But Erzulie, fundamentally versatile, defies definition, and it is clear that what she principally inflicts upon these white women in the colonial imagination is unwieldy sexuality. Thus, these depictions are woefully myopic. Erzulie's influence does not clarify or develop these characters, she simply marks their difference.

Ironically, the zombie film that gets closest to a Black female experience, one imbued, certainly, with some of Erzulie's more dimensional traits, does so unwittingly and with deeply racist aims. In *Ouanga* (1936), also credited as *The Love Wanga* or *Drums of the Jungle*, a light-skinned plantation owner called Clelie exacts revenge on her white lover Adam, who has rejected her to marry a white woman called Eve. Unbeknownst to Adam, Clelie is a powerful student of voodoo, and when she realizes he will not take her back, she plots to turn his fiancé into a zombie. Clelie, as a character, might equally fit comfortably in the section here on witches, but her narrative is immersed in the lore of the zombie and it is the zombie, more than her role as a conjurer, that underscores her performance of the mirror with fear.

Clelie is played by the Black actress Fredi Washington, best known at the time for her performance as Peola Johnson in *Imitation of Life* (1934) where she played another, if not the quintessential, cinematic Tragic Mulatto. She plays a similar role here, a Black woman ashamed of her ancestry, to her great downfall, not because she should be proud of her heritage, but because she refuses to accept her place in the established racial hierarchy. This becomes especially fascinating because Clelie has actually achieved the social status of white manhood. We know, for instance, that far from subservient to her white lover she, like him, is a plantation owner, governing the property that neighbors his. The Female Gothic, as a rule, is very concerned with female inheritance (of property and trauma). In *Female Gothic Histories: Gender, History and the Gothic*, Diana Wallace argues that the Gothic is a 'mode of history,'²¹³ and how 'matrilineal genealogies'²¹⁴ recur thematically in these women-authored texts. These genealogies are more often psychological and thus private, but in Clelie's case this inheritance is public and unexplained. Clelie, as motherless as any Gothic heroine, seems to emerge out of nowhere a woman of means, a property owner. She lives as a single woman, travels independently, and flaunts

²¹² Pressley-Sanon, p. 36.

²¹³ Diana Wallace, *Female Gothic Histories: Gender, History and the Gothic* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), p. 5.

²¹⁴ Wallace, p. 135.

her self-made wealth with glamorous clothes and jewelry. Although she is Black, and the film rarely lets us forget, she is clearly distinguished not just from the dark-skinned servants in the film - who speak in stilted dialect and are deeply superstitious and suspicious of voodoo - but from the white women, who are never left alone; they are always chaperoned by men.



Figure 2.2: Clelie (Fredi Washington) in *Ouanga* (Terwilliger 1936).

We never learn much about Eve Langley, Clelie's rival and mirror, except that she has, in Clelie's mind, usurped her place in Adam's life and must be removed. But audiences surely know that Adam and Eve belong together, their union as 'natural' as their Biblical namesakes. The two women are immediately set up as mirror reflections. In the first scene where they appear on screen together, Clelie stealthily observes the happy pair on a boat. She and Eve wear similar outfits with the colors reversed. Clelie wears a long black dress with a white fur stole (Fig.2.2), while Eve wears a long white dress with a black fur stole. They also don the same, admittedly standard 1930s hairstyle, a finger-waved bob: Eve's blonde, Clelie's brunette.

Here I want to briefly emphasize *Ouanga*'s connection to the Female Gothic, specifically its similarities to the novels *Jane Eyre* and even *Rebecca* (although Du Maurier's novel was published two years after the film). The double in *Ouanga* operates in a way analogous to these works, except from the perspective of the 'other' racialized woman, cementing Eve more significantly as Clelie's double. Verena-Susanna Nungesser writes that 'both Bertha and Rebecca embody sexuality and represent the dark double of the young protagonists.'²¹⁵ Clelie, like Bertha and Rebecca, precedes her rival. Adam makes clear he never intended to marry Clelie, so their

²¹⁵ Verena-Susanna Nungesser, 'From Thornfield Hall to Manderley and Beyond: *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca* as Transformations of the Fairy Tale, the Novel of Development and the Gothic Novel' in *A Breath of Fresh Eyre: Intertextual and Intermedial Reworkings of Jane Eyre* (Amsterdam: Brill, 2007), pp. 209 - 226 (p. 209).

relationship for him was exclusively sexual. Bertha, furthermore, is Creole - not Black - but like Clelie, racially hybrid. Gilbert and Gubar, who penned arguably the definitive work on *Jane Eyre*, contest in that seminal text that 'the madwoman in literature by women is not merely, as she might be in male literature, an antagonist or foil to the heroine. Rather, she is usually in some sense the author's double, an image of her anxiety and rage.'²¹⁶ Much of the feminist scholarship on the novel consider Bertha to be the symbolic embodiment of Jane's (narrator) passion and resentment of her social limits. But Clelie's 'anxiety and rage' are foregrounded (rather than repressed), sealing her tragic fate - like Bertha/Rebecca - while the 'proper' expression of femininity in the demure, white Eve taunts her in its unattainability.

I would argue that Eve resembles a phantasm of Clelie's idealized self. Winnicott theorized that an infant unable to find itself reflected in its mother's gaze might 'atrophy,' and one of those consequences he speculated was a division between the 'True Self' and the 'False Self.' Gilbert Bond explains, 'Winnicott associates empathic mirroring, unconditional acceptance, and adequate responsiveness to the needs and spontaneous gestures of the child's omnipotence with the True Self. The failure of primary self-objects to meet the empathic needs of the child results in the creation of a False Self, the result of an exposed and injured self.'²¹⁷ Importantly, the 'False Self' hides and/or protects the 'True Self.' In other words, 'the False Self forms as a defense against the environment.'²¹⁸ The False Self is a mask but also a shield. For the first half of the film, Clelie refuses to identify as Black. In one scene, she asserts, 'I'm white, too, as white as she [Eve] is!' and, touching first her cheeks and then extending her hands, 'Is this Black? Are these?' It is interesting that Clelie not only proclaims herself white, but positions Eve as a comparison, a barometer to reflect back her own 'whiteness.' When we consider Eve as the physical manifestation of Clelie's anxieties, as the 'False Self' that protects her 'True Self,' the shallowness of her characterization makes her easier to read.

Like Madeleine before her, Eve is principally symbolic. *Ouanga* appears to ignore the more complicated, ambivalent connotations of Eve's Christian forebear so that here white womanhood categorically functions as an emblem of purity, virtue, and, implicitly, motherhood; she must be protected at all costs. Clelie occupies a liminal space similar to Legendre, both master and 'Other,' a violent specter of miscegenation. Kameelah L. Martin writes, in *Ouanga*, 'Voodoo replaces the imagined black rapist, but is less threatening than a black penis

²¹⁶ Gilbert and Gubar, p. 78.

²¹⁷ Gilbert I. Bond, *Paul And The Religious Experience Of Reconciliation: Diasporic Community and Creole Consciousness* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), p. 29.

²¹⁸ Guy Allen, 'The "Good Enough" Teacher and the Authentic Student' in *A Pedagogy of Becoming* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), pp. 141 - 176, (p. 152).

which has the potential to defile whiteness for generations.²¹⁹ I would argue that voodoo in this case is precisely as threatening as the Black phallus, only wielded by a Black woman, who does not merely threaten to defile whiteness, but is herself an omen - a ‘dark’ double - of miscegenation’s ‘horrors.’

When Adam rejects Clelie for the last time, she finally embraces her identity as a Black woman in unambiguous terms, crying, ‘I’ll show him what a Black girl can do!’ This exclamation precipitates her disastrous plot to ‘turn’ Eve. If we understand the zombie to symbolize racialized identity given its behavior, its history, the foundation laid by *White Zombie* - and in *Ouanga*, especially, where all the zombies are Black - Clelie plots to turn Eve ‘Black,’ to extricate her from ‘whiteness,’ and thus make her union with Adam impossible. Clelie represents what has been characterized by Winnicott as a specifically maternal violence - the power to split another - not unlike Mrs. Rand, but all the more direct because Clelie and Eve are graphically composite.

Clelie has positioned herself as a threat to Eve’s well-being, but, as Martin continues, ‘because she is not black and brutish, the white men in the narrative are not to be troubled with ending Clelie’s life.’²²⁰ I contend that although Clelie inevitably meets a horrible death at the hands of Adam’s Creole overseer Le Strange (actor Sheldon Leonard in blackface), the murder itself is chillingly racialized. Earlier, one character explains to Eve that the voodoo practitioners can place a curse on someone by clothing a corpse in the marked victim’s garments. At the climax of the film, Eve is rescued thanks to the two Black servants, Le Strange, and Adam. Clelie staggers through the woods, all but defeated. The shot, effectively, first captures her horror as she looks up. Before the spectator sees what alarms her, she shrieks and the next shot reveals a frightening doubled image: from the neck down, a closeup of a corpse clothed in a dress Clelie wore earlier. A cut to a wide shot reveals the corpse hanging from a tree. Le Strange, ignoring her pleas for her life, then strangles Clelie.²²¹ That this doubling precipitates her murder harkens back to Rank’s earliest reading of the double as the harbinger of death.

Tony Fonseca grapples with how the double has become such a commodious symbol in the Gothic form:

Horror in particular is filled with doubles because the genre is based on the idea of Otherness, where the Other comes to represent those parts of the self that society, and perhaps the individual as well, find unacceptable. When certain aspects of the self are disavowed, often so violently that they must be

²¹⁹ Kameelah L. Martin, *Envisioning Black Feminist Voodoo Aesthetics: African Spirituality in American Cinema* (New York: Lexington Books, 2016), p. 28.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ *Ouanga*, dir. George Terwilliger (J. H. Hoffberg Company, 1936).

projected onto another, often a scapegoat, in order to be purged from the consciousness, they are sometimes concretized by being amalgamated into one identifiable, often physical being.²²²

Audiences might easily be forgiven for mistaking the aforementioned scene as some kind of dream sequence, in which Clelie envisions her own demise, given its jarring, blunt editing. It cannot be overstated the extent to which the ‘double’ acts as a tool of dread, for Clelie and the audience. In a sense, she does bear witness to a lived out premonition. It is an undeniably racialized violence, one that blatantly invokes images of lynchings, still practiced widely throughout the American South at the time of the film’s production. Visually, this sequence captures Clelie’s psychic turmoil as well. The violently disavowed racialized self - her Otherness, deemed ‘unacceptable’ by society and by Clelie herself - takes the form of the faceless hanging figure, which strikes Clelie (and is framed to the audience) as both familiar and horrific: unheimlich or, uncanny, Freud would say. The violence she and her ‘environment’ together have psychologically performed on her ‘racialized’ self, casting it off, suffocating it, becomes all at once a metaphorically actualized scene and subsequently literal, when this destruction is visited upon her body.

Originally, *Ouanga* was meant to shoot in Haiti but endured a famously fraught production there. According to Bryan Senn, Terwilliger befriended some of the locals but provoked the anger of religious leaders when he asked to film their ceremonies and apparently found an ouanga in his own car.²²³ He quickly moved production to Jamaica, and the opening title card of the film proudly reads, ‘Filmed in its entirety in the West Indies.’ The filmmakers seemed to feel this lent the film authenticity, and arguably both Terwilliger and Victor Halperin populate *Ouanga* and *White Zombie* respectively with Black actors in minor roles (whilst also employing blackface for more significant parts) in pursuit of this same ‘authenticity.’ Otherwise, Terwilliger and Halperin harbor little, if any curiosity, about the actual settings of their films.

Space is perhaps the single most significant feature to the unfolding of the horror narrative. Kirsti Bohata argues, ‘Castles, houses, and ruins are paradigmatic tropes of Gothic writing...family, “race” and nation are evoked by the sense of the word “house” meaning lineage, making houses emblematic of nation.’²²⁴ The physical house will become increasingly central to the Gothic filmic cases explored later in this project. *White*

²²² Tony Fonseca, ‘The Doppelganger,’ in *Icons of Horror and the Supernatural: An Encyclopedia of Our Worst Nightmares*, Volume 1 ed. by S. T. Joshi (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007), p. 190.

²²³ Bryan Senn, *Drums of Terror: Voodoo in the Cinema* (Albany: BearManor Media, 2018), <<https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=bRxLDwAAQBAJ&pg=PT70&dq=ouanga+film&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjJuMnur-rdAhXHD8AKHWjWAH0Q6AEILzAB#v=onepage&q=ouanga%20film&f=false>> [accessed 2 May 2018]

²²⁴ Kirsti Bohata, ‘Unhomely Moments: Reading and Writing Nation in Welsh Female Gothic’ in *The Female Gothic: New Directions* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), pp. 180 - 195 (p. 180).

Zombie and *Ouanga* largely take place outside the ‘conventional’ Gothic setting. These narratives swap haunted houses for haunted grounds, the labyrinthine terrain of lands forged into being by the monstrosity of slavery. Haiti has come to be seen as ‘the land of the zombie,’ thanks, no doubt, in part to Seaport, but its history as a nation illuminates this trope. Sarah Lauro elaborates in her notes, ‘Although, the surrounding island nations share similar cultural heritages and there were slave revolts of various degrees in Jamaica, Guadeloupe, and elsewhere, only Haiti achieved independence as a result of slave rebellion.’²²⁵ Haiti is a Black nation. To do away with the decaying physical structure and replace it with sprawling, unknowable terrain, invites questions of colonialism, expedition, and lineage. Consider that the motherless Clelie’s rival/double is another motherless woman called Eve, a name which, certainly religiously if not culturally, telegraphs progeniture. Clelie, in that same historic public consciousness, was identified as a ‘mulatto,’ a term which may derive from ‘mule,’ and, alternately, signifies infertility. Christina Sharpe writes, ‘the status of mother itself was often unsustainable or not allowed for the black woman within slavery, through desegregation, and after emancipation.’²²⁶

Motherhood, or rather, Wallace’s ‘matrilineal genealogies’ haunt the Female Gothic and also this project.

The specter of the Black maternal will recur throughout the films discussed in this chapter. For now, let me emphasize that if we say entangled in the ‘haunted house,’ or in this case ‘land,’ are questions of history, heredity and, if I can use such a loaded word, ‘tribe,’ from Clelie to Jessica and Madeleine before her, we find that these filmmakers firmly anchor the future of nationhood to whiteness. We begin to see the integral role unblemished white femininity plays in this ideology. At the same time, if Clelie’s tale is anything to go by, such efforts crudely betray an insecurity in the sturdiness of whiteness itself or what it means to be white, since the film itself claims complexion alone is no indicator.

Black Panther

Before *I Walked With a Zombie*, Tourneur and Lewton collaborated on *Cat People* (1942). The film - and, to varying degrees, its follow-up *Curse of the Cat People* (1944) and subsequent retellings which include the British film *Cat Girl* (1957) and Paul Schrader’s loose 1982 adaptation of the same name - has been thoroughly mined for its historical and gendered connotations. Its racial overtones have not been ignored, but more obvious themes such as national identity and female sexuality take precedence. In this section, I want to draw out how the RFD articulates a curious preoccupation with racialized sexuality that aims to regulate white female sexuality.

²²⁵ Lauro, p. 205.

²²⁶ Christina Sharpe, *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), p. 18.

The original *Cat People*, based on Lewton's short story 'The Bagheeta,' finds Serbian immigrant Irena Dubrovna (Simone Simon) in New York City where she marries Oliver Reed (Kent Smith). Irena, however, will not sleep with her husband because she believes herself related to an ethnic group in Serbia who turned to witchcraft and satanic worship after a long enslavement by the Mamluks. These 'cat people' transform into panthers when sexually aroused or impassioned. E. Ann Kaplan argues that 'Irena's cross between a white woman and a dark black animal refers to unconscious fears about white/African-American relations, and specifically, fears of the black *woman*',²²⁷ explaining that this references historical animalizing of Africans. She argues the film betrays its preoccupation with the disavowed Black feminine through its emphasis on black symbols, black leather, etc. At one point, Irena even confesses, 'I like the dark; it's friendly.'²²⁸

Of course, women (without racial overtones) and monsters have long been aligned in horror. Linda Williams contends in her essay 'When the Woman Looks' that there is enduring identification between the two, for each in their way threatens male dominance.²²⁹ But both versions of *Cat People* make use of African iconography and symbolism to construct the heroine as racialized (monstrous) Other. In her apartment, Irena keeps a small statue of King John of Serbia impaling a panther. King John, she explains, freed her people from the Mamluks and restored Christian law and order to the village. Two things stand out about Irena's account of her mysterious heritage. First, she reveals her proximity to 'brown-ness' and metaphorically to 'darkness' when she speaks of the Mamluks, an Arabic term for 'property' although reserved for 'white slaves' and distinguished from Black people.²³⁰ Secondly, this lore strongly elicits comparison to the trajectory of certain factions within the African diaspora in America, as cinematically portrayed in the very zombie films discussed here: a race of people who turn from Christian practices under colonial rule.

In this scene, the rather phallic statue is noticeably positioned between them (Fig.2.4). Irena also compares King John to George Washington or Abraham Lincoln to convey its significance to Oliver. But since she believes herself descended from the witches, some of whom King John 'put to the sword,' she is fundamentally in tension with this icon. History and nationhood mean a lot here. Several scholars have pointed out the strains of nationalism permeating the film. Alexander Doty and Patricia Clare Ingham see Irena as 'a woman who seeks to escape what she understands to be the savagery of her cultural history...[and] hopes that

²²⁷ E. Ann Kaplan, *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film and the Imperial Gaze* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 114.

²²⁸ *Cat People*, dir. by Jacques Tourneur (RKO Pictures, 1942).

²²⁹ Linda Williams, 'When a Woman Looks,' *Film Genres* (1984), pp. 561 - 577

<<http://academic.uprm.edu/mleonard/theorydocs/readings/WilliamsWomanLook.pdf>>

²³⁰ Bernard Lewis, *Race and Slavery in the Middle East: An Historical Enquiry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 56.

her assimilation to modern U. S. culture through her marriage to [Reed], a self-proclaimed “good ol’ Americano” will effect her escape from this horrifying medieval past.²³¹



Figure 2.4: Irena and Oliver in her apartment with a statue of King John of Serbia in *Cat People* (Tourneur, 1942).

One sequence pointedly highlights the distinction between two lands as embodied by the three main characters. When Irena joins Oliver and his colleague Alice (Jane Randolph) - in whom Oliver finds a socially acceptable romantic outlet by the film’s conclusion - the trio stop before a miniature replica of a boat in a museum. Oliver claims that he doesn’t want Irena to be ‘bored’ and sends his bride sulking away, while he and Alice together admire a painting of another ship, a symbol of conquest and a lineage in which they are discernibly joined. Like Eve, little is known about Alice beyond that she is in love with Oliver and fears Irena. But primarily she reflects what Irena is not: meaning, she is not a white American like Oliver. Meanwhile, Irena

²³¹ Alexander Doty and Patricia Clare Ingham, “The “Evil Medieval”: Gender, Sexuality, Miscegenation and Assimilation in *Cat People*” in *Bad: Infamy, Darkness, Evil, and Slime on Screen* ed. by Murray Pomerance (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), pp. 225 - 238 (p. 226).

pauses on the stairs next to a statue of Egyptian origin, the goddess of cats Bastet, with a feline head erected upon a human body (Fig.2.5). Irena lifts her head so that she stands in a similar pose. This enunciates both Irena's distance from Alice and Oliver, and her own hybridity, which cements her racialized Otherness with African aesthetics. Her presence is announced by shadows and she increasingly wears only black as she grows further alienated from her husband, while Alice appears in light colors. No matter how hard she tries to extricate herself from her history and lineage, ultimately Irena, like Clelie, cannot overcome the circumstances of her 'blood.'



Figure 2.5: Irena stands next to a statue of the Egyptian goddess Bastet in *Cat People* (Tourneur, 1942).

Kelly Oliver and Benigno Trigo argue that racial ambiguity provokes Kristeva's theory of the abject, the loss of boundaries between the races that threatens proper racial identity.²³² I would contend that Irena's racial complex is not ambiguous at all, but pointedly suggests Blackness, between the historical parallels in her background and the geographically African imagery associated with her character. E. Ann Kaplan, drawing from

²³² Oliver and Trigo, p. 5.

Eric Lott's argument that film noir metonymically applies tropes of Blackness to the moral failings of white characters, explains that Africa was 'dark' not only because its inhabitants had dark skin, but because the Western imaginary then linked savagery, immorality, cannibalism, to this literal darkness.²³³ Irena embodies the inheritance of these Western conceptions of 'darkness' which carry intense racial implications. But really it is her capacity to racially pass (diegetically as a human woman, symbolically as white) that makes her so fearsome. What Lott and Kaplan also suggest is that, while it may not be possible for the racialized to become white - for Irena ultimately fails at this project - it may be easier for whites to 'become' Black. Irena's duality (her capacity to look human/white while harboring a 'dark' heritage) endangers whiteness because she exposes its tenuousness, the mere threat of infiltration by disguise. Equally, Oliver cannot be allowed to remain married to Irena because her 'Blackness' by proximity threatens his whiteness.

One scene more than any other exemplifies Irena's racial quandary and ethnic isolation, constructed through the gaze. After Irena and Oliver are married, the couple hold a large reception dinner in a restaurant. Irena sits between Oliver and Alice at a table largely comprised of men. One man whispers to Alice that he has heard that Irena is a 'bit odd' and his source is even 'worried about the marriage.' Meanwhile, Irena must correct one guest who recklessly, and incorrectly, spoke in Serbian. At another table sits a woman dressed in black, her chignon adorned with a black bow that resembles cat ears. The scene intercuts between the celebration (from which Irena is ironically shut out) and this woman sitting alone, watching them. The men immediately sexualize and dehumanize her. 'Isn't she something?' remarks one, while the other responds, '[She] Looks like a cat!' Soon this woman rises and crosses to the newlyweds' table. 'Moja sestra,' she says. Irena's smile drops and her eyes widen. The camera cuts back to the nameless woman who repeats, almost as a question, 'Moja sestra?' *My sister.* Irena looks up at the unknown woman with horror and performs the Sign of the Cross.

The narrative's major themes merge in this scene - race, difference, national identity - all of which coalesce through the theme of looking. Looking becomes a performance of power. The gaze endows the spectator with authority over his/her subject, and implicates a dynamic wherein that subject is created by the spectator. 'The quality of mirroring given by mother to infant is regarded by Winnicott...as crucial to personality development. Faulty or inadequate mirroring, therefore, may be a key factor in the formation of a split into "True Self" and "False Self,"' explains Val Richards.²³⁴ We have already discerned that the False Self protects the True Self. In this moment, as Irena and her 'sister' perform the mirror, Irena's mask/protection vividly drops,

²³³ E. Ann Kaplan, 'The "Dark Continent" of Film Noir: Race, Displacement, and Metaphor in Tourneur's *Cat People* (1942) and Welles's *The Lady from Shanghai* (1948)' in *Women in Film Noir* (Bloomsbury: 2019), pp. 183 - 201 (p. 185).

²³⁴ Val Richards, 'Mothers, Mirrors, and Masks' in *Winnicott Studies*, Vol. 9 (London: Karnac Books, 1994), pp. 35 - (p. 36).

and a glimpse of her True Self - the one she desperately hides from Oliver and the Americans - symbolically emerges, with this woman as its physical manifestation. This confrontation with the racialized self not only accommodates the mother-mirror dynamic, but cements Irena as racialized, ensuring her break with Oliver and the broader white American culture he represents.

Already, the film suggests that Irena's racialized identity has a maternal link. Psychoanalysis plays a significant role in the film, largely channeled through Dr. Louis Judd (played by Conway, of *I Walked With a Zombie*), to whom Oliver sends Irena to fix their marital problems. In his attempts to navigate what he believes is psycho-sexual repression, Judd gets Irena to disclose that her father died in a mysterious accident before her birth. The only other cat person we see is the tall, glamorous woman from the restaurant, which leaves room to argue for, if not a matriarchal society, certainly a matrilineal one, especially if cat people kill when sexually aroused. Irena cannot outrun the nature bequeathed to her from the *mother*-land. George Ochoa calls the film 'overtly Freudian,'²³⁵ while Steve Dillon insists that, 'since the men in the film...refuse to believe in the cat people legend, it is implied that the wild beast of female desire appears because men cannot understand female desire or have no interest in doing so.'²³⁶ Through Judd, *Cat People* establishes its Freudian view of female sexuality as a shadowy 'dark region,' unknowable and enigmatic. Mary Ann Doane finds both Freud's perspective and its realization through Irena fundamentally racialized:

The dark continent trope indicates the existence of an intricate historical articulation of the categories of racial difference and sexual difference. In it, there is an extraordinary condensation of motifs linking the white woman and the colonialist's notion of "blackness." Just as Africa was considered to be the continent without a history, European femininity represented a pure presence and timelessness...[t]he trope, however, reduces and oversimplifies the extremely complex relations between racial and sexual difference articulated by the colonialist enterprise. For that enterprise required as a crucially significant element the presence of the black woman (who is relegated to non-existence by the trope).²³⁷

Doane elaborates on Kaplan's analysis of Western conceptions of 'darkness' and how profoundly immorality is linked to literal blackness. While the Black woman is relegated to 'non-existence,' Irena clearly stands in for her. Irena's threatening, animalistic sexuality cannot be divorced from her racialization. What makes her so

²³⁵ George Ochoa, *Deformed and Destructive Beings: The Purpose of Horror Films* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 2017), p. 126.

²³⁶ Steve Dillon, *Wolf-Women and Phantom Ladies: Female Desire in 1940s US Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015), p. 84.

²³⁷ Mary Ann Doane, 'Dark Continents: Epistemologies of Racial and Sexual Difference in Psychoanalysis and the Cinema' in *Visual Culture: The Reader* ed. by Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall (London: Sage Publications, 1999), pp. 448 - 456 (pp. 448-449).

frightening, what drives the film, is fear of the racialized, untamable, murderous sexuality she embodies. For Kaplan, *Cat People* posits that Irena's difference has no place in 'good, plain Americano' civilization and betrays deep anxieties about Black femininity. I would further argue that the film's juxtaposition of symbolic white sexuality (Alice) with Black sexuality (Irena), not only disparages the disavowed Black feminine, but makes its existence untenable. Consider what the spectator gleans from the conclusion of *Cat People*: Alice marries Oliver and Irena is destroyed. There is space for Alice to exist, albeit in subjection, while Irena is unable to exist at all. She cannot effectively racially 'pass' - she is not rewarded for her efforts to assimilate and operate within the confines of white patriarchy - but nor can she live authentically and free as a panther-woman. According to the film, there is no place for her in society nor even at its margins.

Paul Schrader's 1982 adaptation does not feature the RFD as straightforwardly as previous cases. Instead, its Irena, played by Natassja Kinski, is repeatedly linked in a mirror performance with the black leopard and the Mammy character Female (pronounced Feh-Mah-Lay), played by actress Ruby Dee. The film functions as a curious racial double itself, considering how, with forty years between them, this version manages to be more racially regressive than its predecessor. In an extended prologue set in an unknown desert, a black panther roars beneath a barren tree upon jagged, rocky terrain. Visibly 'brown' men in loincloths, their bodies marked in indecipherable tribal tattoos, tie a resistant young woman to a tree. In the night a panther frees her. She locks eyes with the panther in an elongated sequence that emphasizes the animal's gaze and hers, until her eyes morph into the eyes of Irena Gallier (Kinski) in the present.²³⁸ The connotations here are inescapably racial: evident in this dry region with allusions to poverty and scarcity; the contrast between this racially ambiguous woman and the darker clan around her; and her - decidedly maternal, for the purposes of this research - connection with the panther. Because Schrader's film preserves the basic racialized context and implications of its forebear, here, I primarily focus on the mirror dynamics that Irena fosters with the feline icon and the Black housekeeper.

In this edition, Irena and her long lost brother Paul (Malcolm McDowell) are the last descendants of an ancient tribe of shapeshifters. Their transformation into panthers is precipitated by sexual arousal, but according to Paul, they are an 'incestuous race' who can only safely have sex with each other (only murder returns them to human form). The film takes place in New Orleans, but little is made of the history of racial fluidity and intermixing these surroundings offer. Paul lives in an antebellum house with his housekeeper Female, her Creole ancestry a symbol of interracial sex the narrative is set up to repudiate. She operates in the way older Black women typically do in this sphere: feeding and emotionally nurturing the white characters. But interestingly, the

²³⁸ *Cat People* dir. by Paul Schrader (Universal Pictures, 1982).

first time Irena and Female meet, the scene ends with them mirroring each other. Female immediately establishes herself as a warm, motherly presence, her arm wrapped warmly around Irena as she leads her to the entrance of another room. They both lean against the frame, each with their arms folded across their chests, in a mirrored pose.

After Paul is discovered to be a serial killer (in panther form), Female is taken into police custody. When Irena visits her, they sit on opposite sides of a chain link partition, but the symbolic implications could not be



Figure 2.6: Irena visits Female in prison; the scene visually invokes her symbolic imprisonment in *Cat People* (Schrader, 1982).

more plain. Linda Rohrer Paige and Karen Hollinger liken Female's literal imprisonment to Irena's, but broadly confine that argument to a sexual realm that does not make space for how race defines Female's position.²³⁹ Irena does end the film as a panther in a cage; however, Female's incarceration evokes very real, ongoing conflicts between Black people and the justice system, while Irena's diegetic imprisonment is largely poetic. George

²³⁹ Linda Rohrer Paige, "The Transformation of Woman: The 'Curse' of the Cat Woman in Val Lewton/Jacques Tourneur's 'Cat People', Its Sequel, and Remake," in *Literature/Film Quarterly*, vol. 25, no. 4, 1997, pp. 291–299 (p. 297) <www.jstor.org/stable/43796809> [accessed 19 June 2018].

Kouvaros argues that all the characters grapple with some sort of symbolic imprisonment,²⁴⁰ but Female's confinement has robust roots in contemporaneous social conditions. However, the film clearly aligns the two characters.

The racialized doubling with Female, sealed through their repeated performance of the mirror, is eclipsed by Irena's central affinity with the black panther. In a scene where Paul recounts their ancestral history, he and Irena admire the black panthers lounging about the branches of the fruitless tree from the prologue, a literal family tree, for Irena stares up at the panther and utters, 'Mother,' before the camera cuts away. This Winnicottian gaze establishes their kinship and indicates the distinction between the 'maternally driven mirror stage' and 'the paternalistically driven law of the father.'²⁴¹ Like so many Gothic heroines before her, Irena, another orphan trapped by a domineering male figure, is forced to come to terms with her secret origins and reckon with her brother/Gothic Father's will.

But even as she rebuffs the arrangement Paul offers, she is almost totally defined by what she represents sexually for the male characters on screen. Jonathan Romney argues that Irena's acceptable love interest, local zoologist Oliver (John Heard), wants 'to penetrate' Irena, 'to cut through the black skin and expose the insides,'²⁴² referencing a scene in which he literally dissects a black panther. Romney couches Oliver's curiosity in racialized biomedical terms that encapsulate how the film intertwines Irena's racial difference with hypersexuality, which absolves the voyeuristic, white Western imaginary in the name of science. Eventually, Irena has sex with Oliver, which maintains racial hegemony. If incest has been avoided, so has sex between two pointedly racialized characters, the continuation of their line thwarted. Ultimately, the remake brings the same feverish obsession with race and blood purity into a presumably more progressive decade. More importantly, like Clelie and the original Irena before her, Kinski's Irena finds it impossible to find a space for herself due to her inescapable lineage.

Thus far, the cases studied in this chapter have used doubling and the mirrored gaze to identify its racialized characters. Their Otherness becomes clear through these looking relations, which reveal them, otherwise visibly white, to be covert figures of racial hybridity. If Du Bois describes double-consciousness as looking at oneself through another's eyes,²⁴³ these films narratively and spectatorially position these racialized women as objects of a horrified gaze. Their characters are not only constructed as monstrous but, even more

²⁴⁰ George Kouvaros, *Paul Schrader* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), p. 51.

²⁴¹ Angela Wright, *Gothic Fiction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 120.

²⁴² Jonathan Romney, 'New Ways to Skin a Cat. Paul Schrader's Cat People,' in *Endritic* 8.1-2 (1984), pp. 148-155.

²⁴³ Du Bois, p. 3.

chilling, as destructive forces that must be destroyed, rendered non-existent. In both films, Irena personifies this risky racial Otherness, disguised by the ‘mystery’ of female sexuality, onto which race has historically and emphatically been mapped. She not only represents racialized femininity, she reveals the flimsy contours of white femininity, formulated on ‘purity.’ Doane writes, ‘What the representational affinity seems to indicate is a strong fear that white women are always on the verge of “slipping back” into a blackness...the white woman would be the weak point in the system, the signifier of the always too tenuous hold of civilization.’²⁴⁴ It makes sense that if the future of white supremacy hinges on ‘proper’ expression of white female sexuality - the ‘biological’ safeguarding of whiteness - these films would necessarily conceive women in this way: white femininity would be contingent on its chastity and undefilement, while all traces of Black femininity, in all its chaotic history, must urgently be excised.

Ghost in the Machine

The ghost who is female is especially prone to articulating the horror and violence that plague the female experience. Given its frequent connection to physical space, the ghost as a symbol is well suited to communicate truths at the intersection of the political, historical, and psychological. In *Ghostly Matters*, Avery F. Gordon writes about ghosts, ghost fictions, and hauntings from a sociological perspective:

If haunting describes how that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence...the ghost is just the sign, or the empirical evidence if you like, that tells you a haunting is taking place. The ghost is not simply a dead or a missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life.²⁴⁵

In other words, the ghost is the domestic sign of social horrors taking place. Their haunting affirms the experiences of the still living. Throughout her analysis of the ghost in literature, Gordon reminds us that hauntings are material, which is to say, seen or unseen, the presence of a haunting disturbs, with real, tangible effects and consequences. While the RFD of previous films yields lurking maternal implications, the following cases blatantly position the gendered, racialized ghost as warped Madonna/Mother figure. Like all women in the Female Gothic, she is confined to the house, and thus the domestic, but the ghost’s imprisonment is twofold: she is trapped in the house and in another realm, unreachable to the living. This predicament historically resembles the condition of Black women in cinema: elusive or unreachable, and nevertheless destructive. Given

²⁴⁴ Doane, p. 214.

²⁴⁵ Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 8.

the patterns emerging in previously discussed films, one might naturally expect the already disavowed racialized feminine to be doubly disavowed as specter.

The mere presence of a female ghost does not alone signify racialized femininity. It simply does not have the same racial connotations as the zombie nor the same racial associations as the beast. Indeed, several films that adopt the Female Gothic formula, particularly from the 1940s onward, draw from Hitchcock's *Rebecca*, which had been both a critical and commercial success. *Rebecca*, as a character, quintessentially exposes the psychological dimensions of the social horror the ghost symbolically represents. By that I mean, *Rebecca* has been cast out, essentially disappeared, because she personifies what women should not be or do. From the grave she torments her successor, the new Mrs. de Winter, because the ghost, like the double, foretells death. Generally women in the Female Gothic are relegated to the domestic, but the house itself often functions as a symbol of the maternal body.²⁴⁶ Emma Liggins writes, 'the ghost story plays on the contradictions and tensions about the constricted movement of women and the domestic rules that help to confine them.'²⁴⁷ The woman as specter, usually an ancestor, innately functions as a double, for she, too, becomes a volatile harbinger of what awaits the woman who does not observe social precepts.

Consider the film *The Uninvited* (1944), which, although set in England, is an American production. Adapted from Dorothy Macardle's 1941 novel *Uneasy Freehold*, siblings Pamela (Ruth Hussey) and Roderick Fitzgerald (Ray Milland) purchase a seaside mansion called Windward. They befriend Stella (Gail Russell), the granddaughter of their landlord, who grew up in the house and finds herself mysteriously lured to Windward as an adult. The Fitzgeralds witness several strange incidents such as weeping in the night, the prevailing scent of mimosa, and deathly chill. Soon we discover the house is haunted by two women ghosts: Mary, wife of Stella's artist father, and Carmel, his Spanish 'gypsy' muse, who, the film eventually reveals, is Stella's biological mother.²⁴⁸ Here again, we find *Rebecca*'s influence (which the film's marketing campaign happily exploited). Thematically the film revolves around a young heroine hopelessly in thrall to a dead woman and the house she powerfully inhabits, even after death. Many classic and contemporary Female Gothic themes can be found here, among them abject motherhood and homoerotic underpinnings, which can also be found in Robert Wise's 1963 film *The Haunting*, based on Shirley Jackson's novel *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959), and which echo

²⁴⁶ Claire Kahane, 'Gothic Mirrors and Feminine Identity,' *The Centennial Review*, 24.1 (1980), pp. 43–64 (p. 50). <www.jstor.org/stable/23740372> [accessed 28 June 2020]

²⁴⁷ Emma Liggins, *The Haunted House in Women's Ghost Stories: Gender, Space and Modernity, 1850–1945* (Manchester: Palgrave, 2020), p. 8.

²⁴⁸ Patricia White, *Uninvited: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Lesbian Representability* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. 68.

throughout female double narratives from *Single White Female* (1992) to *Black Swan* (2010). Besides the sexual overtones that Patricia White, among other scholars, have theorized, the spectral encounter in the Female Gothic comments on women's relationships with other women.²⁴⁹ The genre already centralizes a generational reckoning with socialized femininity, but women ghosts further literalize this tension and intimacy. Above all these figures address a muted class who must somehow decode their stolen or corrupted histories in the hopes that the heroine might restore their legacy and escape the ghost's fate.

For most of the film, Mary is framed as the 'good' mother figure, by all accounts virtuous and kind. The mystery unearthed by the Fitzgeralds and Stella reveals that after Carmel had her baby abroad, Mary took the child back to Windward and was apparently trying to kill the baby when Carmel returned and pushed her off a cliff. Shortly thereafter, Carmel succumbs to illness, exacerbated by Mary's close friend and presumed lover Miss Holloway. It is Carmel's ghostly sobs the living hear at night, and she is merely trying to protect her daughter from Mary's insidious designs. Comparatively little - either in scholarship and in the film - is made of Carmel's background, perhaps because in addition to the film's more obvious lesbian subtext, she ultimately emerges as a hero. But for most of the film she has been portrayed, true to Hollywood tradition, as a villainess, a woman whose sexuality became her undoing. In the film she has double diasporic origins. She is both Spanish and Romani, neither fully of Spain and not at all of England; she encapsulates a layered Otherness. Most fascinating of all is that while Mary appears in portraits or as a glimmer of light, Carmel is never imaged at all, despite being a painter's muse. The house replicates Carmel's displacement as specter: forced to carve out space for herself in a home that principally belongs to another and striving to communicate in a hostile environment. Her racialized maternal doubling with Mary furthermore makes the house, the maternal symbol, a hybrid space. Intriguingly, it is the white woman who is made monstrous, largely because she rejects the mother role. Like *Rebecca*, Mary's sexual transgression, her queerness, makes her a sexual threat. Meanwhile, Carmel, already Other, inherently sexual, but at least heterosexual, becomes the 'good' mother. In other words, good mothering seems to provide an avenue for the racialized woman to be recognized as an acceptable embodiment of femininity. The 'Madonna' category, defined by Helen Haste as sexless, neutralizes the racialized female's danger.

This certainly seems to be true for *The Curse of the Cat People* (1944). Directed by Robert Wise (of the aforementioned *The Haunting*) and significantly authored again by Val Lewton, the sequel to Tourneur's *Cat People* focuses on Amy (Ann Carter), the daughter of Oliver and Alice (Kent Smith and Jane Randolph). In yet more *Rebecca* parallels, the family is still very much haunted by Irena (reprised by Simone Simon) even before

²⁴⁹ Liggins, p. 81.

the fanciful young Amy summons her. Oliver, ever the rigid paternalist, is anxiously reminded of his dead first wife by his daughter, who is alienated by her classmates. The child profoundly internalizes her difference, thanks to the overbearing pressure from her father to assimilate. Here, difference is not inherited, instead, as Tony Williams notes, ‘a family may create “monsters” out of sensitive individuals.’²⁵⁰ Just as Oliver failed to foster a safe environment for Irena’s racial difference, he stifles his daughter too. When he prevails upon her to be ‘normal,’ he pushes her toward the ghost realm of silence, repression, and secrets. As we are learning from earlier examples, this is frequently maternal terrain. Ultimately, Lewton allows for Amy to remain true to her instinctive self; it is her father who must learn to accept her. However, she only comes into her own once she encounters quietly racialized matrilineal legacies, from which her biological mother is largely excluded. First, there are the Farrens: Julia (Julia Dean), a retired, elderly actress, and her cold daughter Barbara (Elizabeth Russell, who played the mysterious cat woman at Irena’s wedding party in the first film). Julia and Barbara have a tense relationship. In the wake of a mysterious accident, Julia cannot recognize her daughter. However, she takes an interest in Amy and gives her the ring on which the child wishes for a ‘friend,’ who mystically appears in the celestial form of Irena. Irena plays with the child, helps her study, and generally dotes on her in the absence of her preoccupied parents.

The film is only peripherally related to its predecessor. There is, for instance, no mention of the ‘cat people’ and it remains unclear whether Barbara is diegetically the cat woman (and thus Irena’s RFD) from the previous film. That said, the title (which Lewton admittedly despised)²⁵¹ announces this legacy, and the film hints at this tragic lineage as a ‘curse’ for Irena, Barbara, and Julia. *Cat People* implies the panther tribe from which Irena hails is matrilineal, substantiated by the relationships between the women and Amy. Most revealingly, these characters are flanked by the same visual darkness that set Irena apart in the original. Irena arrives in the shadows, and explains ‘I come from great darkness and peace.’ Amy is first formally introduced to Julia in a dark, secluded room of her Gothic mansion. Julia also says, curiously, to Amy: ‘I’ve been watching you. You couldn’t see me, but I could see you.’²⁵² This recalls Du Bois’s description of the veil, ‘born with the veil, gifted with second sight’ and ‘shut out from their world by a vast veil.’²⁵³ Of course, Julia merely speaks to her literal capacity to be observed from the yard. In any case, as I established in the previous chapter, the veil not

²⁵⁰ Tony Williams, *Hearths of Darkness: The Family in the American Horror Film* (London: Associated University Presses, 1996), p. 56.

²⁵¹ Edmund G. Bansak, *Fearing the Dark: The Val Lewton Career* (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2003), p. 222.

²⁵² *The Curse of the Cat People*, dir. by Robert Wise (RKO, 1944).

²⁵³ *Souls of Black Folk*, p. 8.

only distorts the image of the racialized self, it crucially, as Lawrence Richard Rodgers explains, operates as a 'kind of two-way mirror' that allows Black people to see out without being seen in return by the myopic colonial gaze.²⁵⁴ Essentially, Julia's statement indicates a woman consigned to the margins, to the category of the unseen. In another moment influenced by *Rebecca*, when she discovers photographs of Irena, Alice demands her husband destroy the pictures and rid the house of all traces of his former wife. Julia's comment to Amy, alongside what we know of Irena's past and now her condition as ghost, suggests these characters have not merely been exiled from society, but urgently banished to the realm of the unseen. These looking dynamics equally dominate the relationship between Julia and Barbara, who doubles Amy in her alienation by the family. In one scene, she begs her mother, 'Look at me! I'm your daughter!' Barbara desperately longs to be recognized and reflected by Julia, in true Winnicottian fashion, but she never is, for Julia later dies trying to help Amy. Somehow Amy benefits more from Julia's gaze than Julia's own daughter.

One major reason Du Maurier's tale recurs in these Female Gothic ghost fictions is because, as a framework, it responds effectively to questions of visibility and invisibility, power and powerlessness. But as Hammonds warns, visibility in and of itself is no promise of empowerment: 'Mirroring as a way of negating a legacy of silence needs to be explored in much greater depth...An appeal to the visual is not uncomplicated or innocent.'²⁵⁵ Indeed, one of the main questions an 'appeal to the visual' raises is who is doing the looking and, implicitly, what forces influence their gaze. Consider, for example, the scene in Tourneur's *Cat People* when Elizabeth Russell's cat woman is first observed by the onlookers in Irena's wedding party. As I established earlier, that scene reveals how looking becomes a performance of power when the men objectify Russell's character. In other words, they determine her sexual difference, and potentially racial difference, when one man compares her to a cat. Far from simply being subjected to their intrusive gaze, this woman falls prey to their image-making. But equally, her recognition of Irena in the same scene, naming her as a fellow cat woman - 'my sister' - does not resolve Irena's longing for assimilation. She remains disconnected from herself because she internalizes her Otherness. Drawing from Donna Haraway, Hammonds continues, 'As theorists we have to ask how vision is structured...how difference is established, how it operates, how and in what ways it constitutes subjects who see and speak in the world.'²⁵⁶ So when examining the significance of reflection, it must be understood as a complex question, and mirroring alone does not adequately address the psyche fragmented by the prevailing constructions of Black femininity in dominant society. Furthermore, *The Curse of the Cat People* demonstrates

²⁵⁴ Rodgers, p. 48.

²⁵⁵ Hammonds, p. 312.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

that racialized women are not necessarily empowered by looking, especially when their gaze is not, as bell hooks would say, ‘oppositional,’ or in conflict with hegemonic forces. The film concerns itself principally with gendered looking relations defined by generational gaps, but the racialized women as characters do not get themselves reflected and they are not in solidarity with each other. They are organized around Amy’s psychological needs, not their own.

Racial looking dynamics surface in the rivalry between Barbara and Amy for Julia’s maternal affections, and in the relationship Irena forges with Amy. Tony Williams notes that in the sequel Irena poses no danger for she is no longer monstrous, and conceives of her kinship with Amy as follows: ‘Monsters emerge from the unconscious. They may be dangerous. Alternatively, they may embody aspects of human experience society denies.’²⁵⁷ True, Irena is now more sympathetic than she is threatening. Although the first film, too, laments her demise and the tragedy of her liminality, which cannot survive in repressive American society, it becomes more clear than ever in the sequel that Irena epitomizes stifled womanhood, the result of this very culture’s onerous homogeneity. In keeping with Female Gothic tradition more generally, the family as an institution in *The Curse of the Cat People* is framed as broadly antagonistic to daughters, so that Amy becomes the (crucially unveiled) double to both Barbara and Irena. The racial origins of the tale cannot be discounted. While Williams views these themes in psychological terms of repression, historically Irena and Julia, as subtextually racialized women, can also be read as Mammy figures. The Mammy is generally characterized by her devoted relationship to white children or her nurturing labor, in other words. Her appearance - traditionally overweight and dark skinned - is fundamental to this cultural depiction, but as I have argued, films often signal Blackness without explicitly racialized actors.

Consider that Amy’s difference, as I have stated, is not inherited, whereas Barbara’s is; Amy gains confidence through nurturing from Julia and specifically Irena, who creates an environment in which she can play. For Winnicott ‘playing’ (or creativity) is an important facet of childhood development, which arises in what he calls the transitional space, ‘an intermediate area of “experiencing” between inner and outer realities,’²⁵⁸ importantly fostered by the mother. In this area between the child’s imagination and the outside world, objects become separate and real to the child. The transitional object replaces the mother-child dynamic and the child can recognize it as ‘not-me.’²⁵⁹ E. Ann Kaplan has persuasively argued that, narratively, the Mammy functions as a ‘Winnicottian “holding” environment or “transitional object” for white children and even white female

²⁵⁷ Williams, p. 56.

²⁵⁸ Dalley, Rifkind and Terry, p. 12.

²⁵⁹ D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London: Routledge, 1971; repr. New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 2.

adults.²⁶⁰ Certainly the Mammy in cinema functions as a nurturing and ultimately nourishing force (e.g. Schrader's *Cat People* adaptation), in contrast to the absent or distracted white mother. Physically, she offsets mother and child, which distinguishes her as 'not-me.' But revealingly, in her investigation of the cultural representation of the Mammy, Kimberly Wallace-Sanders notes, 'the mammy emerges as a mother who frequently displaces white mothers and has ambiguous relationships with her own children.'²⁶¹ While the Mammy becomes a refuge for white children/women, the Mammy's own children regard her with ambivalence. She displaces the white mother and the white children displace them for her affection, a dynamic played out between Barbara, Julia, and Amy.



Figure 2.7: Irena watches from the shadows (spectral realm) as Amy reconciles with her father in *The Curse of the Cat People* (Wise 1944).

Amy's relationships with her adopted, Othered mothers eventually become the bridge to her reconciliation with her father. Irena disappears immediately, her emotional labor having served its purpose; Julia

²⁶⁰ E. Ann Kaplan, 'Film and History: Spectatorship, Transference and Race,' in *History And...: Histories Within the Human Sciences*, ed. by Ralph Coen and Michael S. Roth (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1995), pp. 179 - 208 (p. 198).

²⁶¹ Kimberly Wallace-Sanders, *Mammy: A Century of Race, Gender, and Southern Memory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), p. 8.

dies, leaving her relationship with her own daughter unresolved. In the scene where Barbara discovers that her mother is dead, she sneers at Amy, ‘Even my mother’s last moments you’ve stolen from me! Come here!’ Amy stares up at her, frozen on the stairs, and calls for help. Irena’s face is superimposed over Barbara’s, linking them, like the first film, as doubles. If Irena performs the good mother, Barbara is bad, but there remains potential for her yet. Amy descends the stairs into Barbara’s arms, thinking them Irena’s. The love-starved, lonely Barbara makes as if to strangle the child, but embraces her instead. All the racialized women in this film find themselves ‘redeemed’ through motherhood, though it is hardly a restorative prize.

Unlike previous conventional ghost cases *Rebecca* or *The Uninvited*, Amy never discovers the truth of Irena’s tragic life. Her past and Amy’s parents’ role in it is never revealed, at least not to Amy. Irena merely becomes the racialized Other mother that graduates the child to the next stage of development. At the end, she watches Amy return to the nuclear family. The scene switches between Irena’s perspective in the shadow of a huge tree and the porch where Oliver promises to be Amy’s ‘friend’ (Fig.2.7). In solidarity with his daughter Oliver claims that he can see Irena too, but he never looks into the yard. She waves after they have entered the house and finally fades away. Her history remains unspoken, forever lost. She returns to the shadowy spectral realm, eternally silenced. Of the conclusion, Williams writes that ‘Irena disappears from the frame, and normality is restored.’²⁶² I would add that it is the character’s second death. She beholds the quaint portrait of the idyllic family that was denied her, knowing she has labored in service of its preservation, with neither her image nor her story surviving. Barbara, meanwhile, is alone. What becomes clear is that, while the Black female spectator should not expect to be reflected herself (like Barbara), her gaze is still produced for the white child/female adult. The racialized Barbara, like Carmel, is ‘redeemed’ when she submits to her maternal impulse. This substantiates Kaplan’s claim that ‘the black “Mammy” function is the only viable one for the “good” black woman.’²⁶³ The racialized gaze these white filmmakers diegetically compose necessarily establishes whiteness. The racial spectatorship that transpires on screen bespeaks the one in the audience, where Black feminine viewership is channeled through Irena, always privy to (but never seen by) this nuclear white family structure.

To elaborate on how the Mammy functions as a ‘transitional environment’ and Winnicottian mirror for white children and women, I will examine Bernard Rose’s 1992 film *Candyman*. Based on the short story ‘The Forbidden’ by Clive Barker, the film follows Chicago academic Helen Lyle (Virginia Madsen), whose research project on urban legends with her friend Bernie (Kasi Lemmons) leads her to Candyman (Tony Todd), a

²⁶² Williams, p. 61.

²⁶³ E. Ann Kaplan, *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film and the Imperial Gaze* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 231.

hook-handed ghost, summoned when his name is recited five times in a mirror. Eventually it becomes clear that the film is not about Candyman at all. It is Helen's origin story, but as in the zombie fictions, he threatens to infect her with his racialized monstrosity.²⁶⁴

Helen and Bernie discover he was born Daniel Robitaille, the son of a prosperous slave, and grew up educated. When he fell in love and fathered a child with a white woman, he endured a brutal fate. A lynch mob led by her father sawed off his hand, stripped him naked, and smeared his body with honey so that he was stung to death by bees. The circumstances of this death by lynching is significant because it telegraphs a specifically racialized and gendered violence; historically, Black men and teenagers/children were frequently lynched on mere suspicion of sexually desiring white women. In any other horror film, a character who dies such a horrible, unjust death, would typically return to exact vengeance on his perpetrators, their kin, or those of their ilk. But when Candyman returns from the grave, he preys not (as might be reasonable) upon white men, but principally on the poor, predominantly Black residents of Chicago's Cabrini-Green housing project.

Initially, he appears just as likely to intrude upon white suburban spaces. At the start of the film, the audience sees a reenactment of one of his murders. A blonde babysitter prepares to have sex with a man who is not her boyfriend. She stands with her back to the mirror as she tells her would-be lover the lore of Candyman. Her partner defiantly says his name into the mirror four times before heading downstairs. But she utters his name one final time and, as she switches out the light, Candyman's image flashes behind her. Her lover escapes, a student tells Helen back in the present, but the babysitter and the baby are killed. With this early scene the film establishes two critical elements of the narrative's gender-based preoccupations: 1) white female sexuality and 2) the abject maternal. Notably, this excursion proves an exception for Candyman, for the genesis of his legend is revealed to be 'spatially linked'²⁶⁵ to Cabrini-Green.

This story of white female victimhood is contrasted by two Black women janitors, who bear their own anecdote for Helen. They recount the death of a Black woman named Ruthie Jean, who called the police twice to report someone smashing through her walls, only to be ignored. Her death is not visualized. This might be understandable, except she is also not envisaged or given a glimmer of individuality like the first victim. In other words, we cannot really empathize with her; she remains curiously flattened in this perfunctory report from two neighbors. Ruthie Jean's death only demonstrates basic awareness of how Black bodies are disregarded by the state. In other ways, the film replicates this gendered and racial hierarchy. For example, all working-class Black

²⁶⁴ *Candyman*, dir. by Bernard Rose (TriStar Pictures, 1992).

²⁶⁵ Kirsten Moana Thompson, *Apocalyptic Dread: American Film at the Turn of the Millennium* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), p. 60.

women characters in the film are dark complexioned. Anne-Marie (Vanessa A. Williams), a young single mother who lives in Cabrini-Green, is dark-skinned and speaks in such forced, slang-ridden dialect, it distracts. She presents an interesting foil to Bernie, who is light-skinned with light brown hair. More specifically, Bernie is ‘acceptably’ Black, an academic, and reads for the audience as middle-class. Anne-Marie repeatedly conflates and dismisses both Helen and Bernie as ‘white folks.’ In fact, Bernie is more afraid than Helen to enter Cabrini-Green, distanced from the residents’ poverty and their Blackness. The distinction between the two Black women characters seems at first indicative of class, but the film also visually and racially (or ‘colorfully’) codes their difference, in a narrative that, for all its claims of compassion, is ultimately incurious about them.

The sequence where Helen and Bernie explore the housing project provides an interesting opportunity to read the three women in relationship to the mirror. Helen and Bernie enter Ruthie Jean’s old rundown apartment and stand in the bathroom where she died. The mirror becomes a doorway into the depths of Cabrini-Green where Helen discovers Candyman’s lair. Bernie waits in the bathroom and glimpses a destroyed doll (giving yet more dimension to the scene’s figurative infantile overtones) when Helen suddenly returns, poking her head through the open bathroom mirror-window. As they face each other, they perform the mirror even in the absence of a transparent surface. This shot seems to align Helen and Bernie, if briefly. They are friends, partners, socioeconomically kin, and, to some degree, engaged in a mother-child dynamic: Bernie chastises Helen when she wants to go back - ‘No way, Helen! We’re out of here!’ - performing the mother. When thinking about the role the Mammy has played in cinema, this interaction becomes immediately complicated, especially because later Bernie will be sacrificed - killed by Candyman to frame Helen - for the plot and Helen’s character development.

Even more interesting is what happens when Bernie shuts the mirror in this scene. Anne-Marie appears behind them in a jump scare moment, and Bernie is not reflected in the mirror. Helen’s face takes up one half and the other half, largely covered in debris, obscures the face but not the body of Anne-Marie, standing slightly hunched a few feet away. It is curious, particularly in light of Winnicott’s mother-mirror theories - ‘which emphasizes the fundamental importance of the look the infant receives’²⁶⁶ - that Helen receives the gaze, receives affirmation of identity, through the image of her face meanwhile Anne-Marie is subtly framed as monstrous. Her presence is all at once uninvited and a fright. Furthermore, Bernie’s absence (much like Ruthie Jean) from the mirror strikes as both incomprehensible and compelling in its implications - also ultimately monstrous -

²⁶⁶ Victor Burgin, *The Remembered Film* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2004), p. 48.

which do nothing to dispel Du Bois's suspicions of the strength of the veil, behind which Black people can never truly see themselves (and where the unveiled cannot see them either).²⁶⁷

Like Bernie and Anne-Marie, the building also takes on a racialized maternal/Mammy role. As established here, the 'house' in the Female Gothic already operates as the symbolic mother. TreaAndrea M. Russworm invokes Melanie Klein when she writes the following:

The mammy is unique for being the only depiction of preoedipal black mothers that dominant American culture celebrates. To her white employers, the mammy is all "good breast" - she is a perfect fantasy of maternity who, as magical all things to everyone, never fails to solve the family's relational problems as she deftly, selflessly anticipates the needs of others. To her own children she is historically represented as all "bad breast," a maternal figure who can alternately be overbearing and domineering or indifferent, ineffectual, and out of touch.²⁶⁸

This allows us to understand how Cabrini-Green proceeds, fittingly, in the Female Gothic tradition as the haunted 'castle,' a maternal body that accommodates Helen and Candyman alike. Candyman was 'born' of her naturally, but feels no protectiveness toward her, even resents her and her ilk. Consider that, with one exception, most of his victims are Black women. Of the film Jack Halberstam writes, 'ultimately the horror stabilizes in the ghastly body of the black man whose monstrosity turns upon his desire for the white woman and his murderous intentions upon black women.'²⁶⁹ The Black residents of Cabrini-Green, too, live in fear for she has been an ineffectual refuge. Helen, meanwhile, returns to Cabrini-Green often, exploring her with familiarity and intimacy. Where Bernie and Anne-Marie see themselves reflected grotesquely, Helen only feels *seen* there. As in *Curse of the Cat People*, the racialized maternal gaze - from Anne-Marie, Bernie, and Cabrini-Green - transforms, even develops the white heroine who, in Helen's case, ultimately becomes an avenging ghost.

Barker's tale has been relocated from its Liverpool housing estate, and Rose shot on location in the actual, since demolished Cabrini-Green project. The opening credit sequence grounds the film in the urban cityscape: Philip Glass's organ-driven score - in the middle of which, a conceivably Black man exclaims, 'They don't give a damn what happens to us!' - ushers in a sense of dread and foreboding as a sweeping overhead shot

²⁶⁷ *Candyman*.

²⁶⁸ TreaAndrea M. Russworm, *Blackness Is Burning: Civil Rights, Popular Culture, and the Problem of Recognition* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2016), <<https://www.google.com/search?tbm=bks&q=Blackness+Is+Burnning%3A+Civil+Rights%2C+Popular+Culture%2C+and+the+Problem+of+Recognition>> [accessed 12 Nov 2018]

²⁶⁹ Jack Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 5.

tracks the Chicago expressway. As such, *Candyman* consciously courts broad contemporary political readings, mainly to do with the inner-city and all its strife. Given this, the film takes on interesting overtones in the Female Gothic framework where the haunted house and the female (maternal) body are often bonded. Kahane writes, ‘the heroine’s active exploration of the Gothic house in which she is trapped is also an exploration of her relation to the maternal body which she shares, with all its connotations of power over and vulnerability to forces within and without.’²⁷⁰ Helen’s subtextually loaded expeditions of Cabrini-Green, certainly lend themselves to psychoanalytic readings that would paint the building as a kind of mother figure. Motherhood weaves its way thematically throughout *Candyman* in sometimes overbearing ways. The climax of the film sees Helen rescue a baby from a burning pyre, correcting Candyman’s crime against the infant and babysitter in the prologue. Barbara Creed has written that ‘the symbolization of the womb as house/room/cellar or any other enclosed space is central to the iconography of the horror film,’²⁷¹ and so Cabrini-Green’s real-life connotations must be acknowledged.

Kirsten Thompson writes that Rose’s choice to shoot on location in Cabrini-Green projects, ‘foregrounded the contemporary intersections of race, poverty, and violence implicit in the film’s historical myth by addressing extradiegetic spectatorial awareness of the notoriety of the real space.’²⁷² American audiences coming to watch the film in 1992 were no doubt aware of its high profile reputation for violence. The film, however, does not very deeply consider questions to do with inner-city living conditions, or how and why the people there have been so thoroughly abandoned. It only knows that their lives are tragic. Cabrini-Green becomes, as the formerly detailed sequence reveals, a mirror to reflect upon Helen. It gives her purpose; she is drawn to Candyman and the project he haunts because, as the film seems to believe, it provides a haven from her sense of dispossession. She is *like* them. At the same time, Bernie bears an unstated proximity to the Black folk tradition that Helen has made her research. On another level, her ‘body’ drives the plot. Bernie’s murder becomes integral to Candyman’s strategy to frame Helen and destroy her earthly attachments, leaving her no choice but to join him in his hauntings. The Black female body is repeatedly pressed into service for Helen.

The house as female body symbol gains further currency after Helen learns that her apartment in the city was originally meant to serve as a public housing project, until developers realized the location was desirable.

²⁷⁰ Kahane, p. 338.

²⁷¹ Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 55.

²⁷² Kirsten Moana Thompson, *Apocalyptic Dread: American Film at the Turn of the Millennium* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), p. 67.

When Helen punches through the back of her medicine cabinet, she uncovers that her flat follows a design identical to Cabrini-Green. This twin portal metonymically suggests a correlation between her frustrations as a woman academic (she is not taken seriously by her colleagues, including her romantic partner, who cheats on her) and the oppression of the people who live in the inner-city. The film thus unveils its own shallow understanding of the racial disparities in which it steeps its tale by likening their experience to that of white middle-class womanhood. The filmmakers do not understand how it might appear to have Helen take precedence over the Black women in this narrative and the implications of setting her up as a deified hero, avenging the residents of the projects, to Candyman's unambiguous monster, terrorizing them.



Figure 2.8: Helen exits through the mouth of Candyman graffitied on the basement walls of Cabrini-Green, *Candyman* (Rose, 1992).

The process by which it accomplishes the canonization of Helen is peculiar. Leslie Fiedler writes, 'Beneath the haunted castle lies the dungeon keep: the womb from whose darkness the ego first emerged...beneath the crumbling shell of paternal authority, lies a maternal blackness, imagined by the gothic writer as a prison, a torture chamber...'²⁷³ The dungeon or basement in narratives of fear has historically

²⁷³ Leslie A. Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel (Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 1960; repr 2003), p. 132.

subsumed these maternal inferences, not least because this space mimics her own gendered confinement. Andrew Hock-soon Ng interprets the passage in this way: ‘Fiedler’s symbolism unconsciously implies a racist nuance as well. Maternity is conflated with “blackness,” suggesting that the threat is not only female, but non-white.’²⁷⁴ We return to Kahane, who writes of the Female Gothic heroine’s exploration of the haunted house as a metaphorical exploration of her relation to the maternal body. If that is so, consider that Helen roams the buried ‘dungeons’ of Cabrini-Green and exits at one point through the mouth of Candyman, graffitied on the walls (Fig.2.8), before returning to the world above. She has, in a sense, been reborn of a racialized maternal body.

For Halberstam, the image of Helen stepping through a Black man’s face calls to mind other questions: ‘Is Helen contained by the oral history of the Candyman or is she the articulate voice of the academy that disrupts its transmission and brings violence to the surface?’²⁷⁵ Certainly, this image visualizes her racial project: a white academic inserting herself as translator of Black oral history. But although she exits through Candyman’s mouth, in a Female Gothic framework this does not change the feminine symbolism of the space. The domestic remains the place where women are trapped and where men, like Candyman, violently reign. Candyman, neither imprisoned nor oppressed here, haunts this maternal space and he becomes part of the patriarchal force that Helen resists.

Exploring the tombs, the womb, of Cabrini-Green, seems to, in this allegory, remake Helen as an avenger for the Black residents of Cabrini-Green, sealed in the film at the climax when she dies rescuing Ann-Marie’s baby and destroys Candyman. Robin R. Means Coleman, in her comprehensive survey of Black actors and directors of horror cinema, writes ‘this is a movie about celebrating White womanhood.’²⁷⁶ I would argue that it does not celebrate white womanhood so much as it stays true to the subgenre’s conventions, in what Diane Long Hoeveler would deem ‘hyperbolic staging of female suffering and victimization.’²⁷⁷ In its attempts to communicate Helen’s reasonable frustrations with the institution and the men in her life, the troubles of white womanhood eclipse all else (including poverty and racial, gendered violence) in the film. At Helen’s funeral, Anne-Marie leads a procession of Black Cabrini-Green residents to mourn her; they far

²⁷⁴ Andrew Hock-soon Ng, *Interrogating Interstices: Gothic Aesthetics in Postcolonial Asian and Asian American Literature* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 112.

²⁷⁵ Halberstam, p. 5.

²⁷⁶ Robin R. Means Coleman, *Horror Noire: Blacks in American Horror Films from the 1890s to Present* (New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 190.

²⁷⁷ Diane Long Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Press, 2010), p. 4.

outnumber her white mourners. They bury her with Candyman's hook, elevating her, like him, to the stuff of legend. Except where he is feared, she is venerated.

The Mammy innately and enduringly embodies the American domestic, where the Female Gothic is principally located. Perhaps naturally, the Black maternal, in all its incarnations, imaged or otherwise, haunts this space. The aforementioned films suggest that she, at least in the white cinematic imagination, operates as a refuge that affirms the preeminence of whiteness. In *Candyman*, specifically, her body becomes an inanimate 'not-me' mirror, contrived to establish white femininity. But in every case Black women as dimensional characters and as intentional spectators are precluded from this arrangement where their psychological needs might be met.

Black Magic

Although Norma Manatu contends that the 'witch' archetype largely excludes Black women because they 'lack real social power,'²⁷⁸ in horror, this category is where you are most likely to find them. For example, in the American Pre-Code film *Chloe, Love is Calling You* (1934), the main heroine, who believes herself to be biracial, learns she is actually a white woman, kidnapped as an infant by a voodoo priestess (Georgette Harvey) who raises the girl as her own. Debate persists among historians as to whether Tituba, of the Salem witch trials, was of indigenous or African ancestry, but in fiction she is frequently depicted as Black: in *The Crucible* (1996) she is played by Charlaine Woodard; in the WGN television series *Salem* (2013) by Ashley Madekwe; and in 1986, French author Maryse Condé published *I, Tituba: Black Witch of Salem* in which Tituba is born to a slave woman raped by an English sailor. The tradition of the Black mystic in all her iconography continues in contemporary films such as Clint Eastwood's *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* (1997), where the conjure woman Minerva (Irma P. Hall) plays a significant role in the murder trial of the main character; in *Jeepers Creepers* (2001), Jezelle (Patricia Belcher) is not quite a witch but a psychic determined to rescue two white teenagers she has never met at great risk to her own life; in the *Pirates of the Caribbean* series, Naomie Harris is Tia Dalma, a voodoo priestess later revealed to be the mythological goddess Calypso. The 'voodoo priestess' or some manifestation of her also appears in films such as *The Leech Woman* (1960), *Sugar Hill* (1974), and *Tales from the Hood* (1995), among countless other features.

It is interesting to consider how many of these texts engage in, as theorist Kameelah Martin writes, a 'juxtaposition of black and white females in cinema [that] enables erroneous perceptions about the differences

²⁷⁸ Manatu, p. 76.

between these women.²⁷⁹ For instance, Martin draws attention to the distinction between how Tia Dalma and Elizabeth Swann (Keira Knightley) are treated in the *Pirates* trilogy. Swann exemplifies conceptions of white womanhood, continually represented as a desirable sexual object whose ‘virtue’ remains unblemished thanks to the pirates, heroes and villains alike, who respect her privilege. Even when it seems (in a scene that carries layered racial connotations of its own regarding East Asian men) she may be sexually assaulted by Pirate Lord Sao Feng (Chow Yun-Fat), ‘his language is poetic, reverent, and unthreatening though his actions are not.’²⁸⁰ And this matters, because Tia Dalma is manhandled, imprisoned, bound in ropes, extended not protection but resentment, even from those who know her true divine identity and, furthermore, demand her power and protection behind them.

A quintessential example of all the themes being discussed here - doubling, coded Black femininity, and the monstrous Black maternal - is *Black Moon* (1934), starring Fay Wray, who just the year before had famously appeared in *King Kong* as the object of Kong’s affection. In *Black Moon*, Juanita Perez Lane (Dorothy Burgess) feels compelled to return to the Caribbean island where she was born and where her parents were killed in a ritual sacrifice. Eventually she returns with her husband Stephen (Jack Holt), their young daughter, and his secretary Gail (Wray). Juanita’s uncle (Arnold Korff) reveals that Juanita had participated in voodoo rituals since she was a child until her adolescence, at the behest of her beloved nanny Ruva (Madame Sul-Te-Wan). Ruva is a rather dangerous Black mother figure, quietly powerful and threatening. She links Juanita to the voodoo community on the island. One servant (played by Black film star Clarence Muse, who also appeared in *White Zombie*, among several other films of the era) fears for the life of his girlfriend, who has gotten ‘mixed up’ with Ruva. This woman is ultimately sacrificed to the whims of this community’s ‘savage’ practices. One night, Stephen spies his wife in the midst of a voodoo ceremony and discovers that they regard her as a kind of priestess. The voodoo worshippers here are frenzied and bloodthirsty: first, they demand the sacrifice of Juanita’s uncle, as recompense for his oppression of them and his attempt on their priest’s life; when denied, they demand Juanita’s daughter, a request to which she reacts in horror. It is Ruva who finally persuades her to perform the sacrifice.²⁸¹

Black Moon is a rather conventional case by now in this project. Juanita and Gail are set up against each other as romantic rivals and opposing models of motherhood. While Juanita is preoccupied with voodoo and the Black islanders, to the increasing neglect of her daughter and husband, Gail is deeply in love with Stephen

²⁷⁹ Kameelah L. Martin, *Envisioning Black Feminist Voodoo Aesthetics: African Spirituality in American Cinema* (New York: Lexington Books, 2016), p. 144.

²⁸⁰ Martin, p. 149.

²⁸¹ *Black Moon*, dir. by Roy William Neill (Columbia Pictures, 1934).

and a more attentive mother figure to her employer's daughter (who already has a nanny). It is clear how the film wants to establish the already racialized Juanita, with her ambiguously ethnic name and Caribbean origins, as 'dark' in ways directly stemming from the Black maternal. Unlike Irena and Julia in *The Curse of the Cat People*, Ruva is a shadowy Mammy who occupies a fearsome place in the organization of this sect. Meanwhile, Juanita, a highly racialized symbol of intermixing much like Jessica Holland, chooses her adopted Black family over her biological white one. Stephen kills his wife just as she is about to sacrifice their young daughter, and Gail appropriately replaces her as wife and mother. I use *Black Moon* as a classic example of threatening, supernatural Black femininity. Unlike previously discussed Mammy figures, Ruva unites the maternal and sexual with menacing implications in the film. Although middle-aged and presumably sexless in the bourgeoisie cultural imaginary, her danger is still wrapped up in transgressive sexuality. The sacrifice rituals resemble an orgy, and the sexual component to these rituals, at which a scantily dressed Juanita is the centre, contribute to Ruva's 'darkness,' symbolically and racially.

Iain Softley's *The Skeleton Key* (2005) upends several of the Gothic conventions analyzed here by toppling the traditional order of looking relations. On one hand, the film is classically Southern Gothic and draws heavily from the genre's British origins. Hospice aide Caroline Ellis (Kate Hudson) leaves her job at a New Orleans hospital to care for Ben Devereaux (John Hurt), who has recently suffered a stroke. Ben and his wife Violet (Gena Rowlands) live in a secluded old plantation house overlooking the bayou.²⁸² At the outset, the film premises itself on the conflict between two middle-class white women: a war between the generations, between modernity and tradition, the conservative and the progressive, mysticism and cynicism. It subverts 'the female competition seemingly endemic to the Gothic romance'²⁸³ by positioning this battle between two unconventional rivals for the soul rather than the heart of Ben, or the man we think is Ben. The film excises the 'dangerous' sexuality that typically permeates the Gothic melodrama and decisively explores the (racialized) female condition from a principally psychological and sociohistorical standpoint.

Martin finds parallels to Charles W. Chesnutt's 1899 collection of short stories *The Conjure Woman*,²⁸⁴ and interprets the film through the Africanist themes it adopts to direct its story. Violet tells Caroline the history of two servants who lived in the house ninety years ago: Hoodoo (folk magic) practitioners Mama Cecile and Papa Justify, celebrated around the bayou, worked for the wealthy Thorpe family, but when they are caught

²⁸² *The Skeleton Key*, dir. by Iain Softley (Universal Pictures, 2005).

²⁸³ Helene Meyers, *Femicidal Fears: Narratives of the Female Gothic Experience* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), p. 32.

²⁸⁴ Martin, p. 118.

practicing spells with the children, they are hanged and their bodies set on fire. The conclusion reveals that, in fact, all along Caroline had set herself up, rather impossibly (though she could not know it) against an old Black conjure woman. Thanks to a spell known as the ‘Conjure of Sacrifice,’ Mama Cecile and Papa Justify first narrowly evade death by acquiring the bodies of the Thorpe children just before their brutal lynching, exposing the horrifying revelation that Thorpe actually lynched his own children, trapped in the bodies of his servants. Subsequently, the Devereauxes became their victims, and their latest attempt at reincarnation requires Caroline become the ‘sacrifice.’ Papa Justify already inhabits the body of the lawyer Luke (whose soul has been transferred to the body of Ben) and it is actually Mama Cecile in Violet’s body.

Martin argues that the filmmakers ‘feign a centering of whiteness for the majority of the film in order to ultimately *de-centre* whiteness and the white male gaze altogether by pulling the proverbial rug from under the audience...whiteness is *not* the privileged position of viewership.’²⁸⁵ In a film about Black people populated, almost deceptively, by white people, the film objectifies those white bodies and renders them as nothing more than skin. One might easily dismiss the film as yet another in an age-old tradition of films that centralize - to the exclusion of all others - a Eurocentric perspective, by showcasing primarily white characters with barely a handful of Black characters, who appear to have only a tangential bearing on the narrative. However, Martin insists that the film successfully dislodges whiteness by employing African American folk tradition, specifically African American trickster lore, ‘shifting from the traditional position of understanding events in the film as they relate to white characters and viewers to an understanding and acknowledgement of how such events relate to the unseen black characters and the often unacknowledged black spectator.’²⁸⁶ Indeed, the film flips several well established horror tropes. First, Black characters do not save the white heroine/protagonist; on the contrary, white bodies are sacrificed in service of Black characters. Most importantly, the film creatively develops a fascinating framework in which to contemplate racial passing.

Body snatching in *The Skeleton Key* possesses both a cinematic and cultural currency. Frequently, imaging the Black body in cinema has often entailed violence, usually the destruction of that racialized/Black body or revising it as grotesque, as I have sought to catalogue in this chapter. To render that body invisible is just as often a violation. In that way, the film interacts with a cinematic heritage that has long premised itself, as I have detailed here, on the unseen Black Other. To return again to Evelyn Hammonds, the goal cannot merely be to be seen, but to develop a ‘politics of articulation.’²⁸⁷ If we are thinking about what makes it possible for

²⁸⁵ Martin, p. 119.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Hammonds, p. 312.

Black women to speak and act, historically, passing as white was a defiant, rebellious, incredibly dangerous act that betrayed the tenuous stratification upon which race and white supremacy are formed. The necessity of a new body for Mama Cecile is supremely beneficial for many reasons. In ‘Whiteness as Property,’ Cheryl Harris writes that white racial domination and economic exploitation invests ‘passing with a certain economic logic’ because ‘[b]ecoming white increased the possibility of controlling critical aspects of one’s life rather than being the object of others’ domination.’²⁸⁸ Racial passing not only promises autonomy but protection, and emphasizes the lack of protection that characterizes Black life. When Violet tells Caroline the story of Papa Justify and Mama Cecile, she describes Thorpe as a ‘cruel man.’ Not only does he steal from the poor, he also ‘worked [his employees] to the bone’ and ‘abused’ them. Curiously, an aspect that is thoroughly explored in most slave narratives - the rape of enslaved women - is often ignored in films set in the post-Reconstruction era that explore Black women’s experiences as maids. Black maids had little more protection as servants than they did as enslaved women, and many maids, unprotected by the law, found themselves the victims of sexual assault. While Violet/Cecile does not elaborate on Thorpe’s abuse, it is necessary to keep in mind the traditional methods of violating Black women and what that abuse might entail.

James A. Crank writes, ‘*The Skeleton Key* expresses a white anxiety about the inability to know the other, racialized self that could only have been set in one place, the cartoonish and caricatured of South-sploitation cinema.’²⁸⁹ This assessment privileges the white spectator, which I would argue the film is only interested in to the degree that its gaze may be deceived. Unlike the cases explored previously in this chapter, ‘white anxieties’ do not really take precedence in *The Skeleton Key*. Instead the narrative prioritizes Caroline’s expedition of the house, which yields, not revelations about her interiority - or, as has come to be expected, an encounter with Caroline’s own origins - but the historical horrors that have plagued the Black people who lived there and made their racial transformation necessary. Caroline is a proxy, a double who ultimately exposes the true Female Gothic heroine, Mama Cecile, once conscripted to the house in servitude, now triumphant as its proprietor.

That said, Caroline does personify white myopia. She is an outsider (she hails from New Jersey), an orphan, like so many Gothic heroines before her, trapped in a house of history, one she feels compelled to investigate. Her outside-ness, not just to Hoodoo culture/community but to the South/Southerners as well, is

²⁸⁸ Cheryl L. Harris, ‘Whiteness as Property’ in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, ed. by Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller and Kendall Thomas (New York: New Press, 1995), pp. 276 - 291 (p. 277).

²⁸⁹ James A. Crank, ‘An Aesthetic of Play: A Contemporary Cinema of South-Sploitation’ in *Southerners on Film: Essays on Hollywood Portrayals Since the 1970s* ed. by Andrew B. Leiter (Jefferson: McFarland and Co., 2011), pp. 204 - 216 (p. 212).

essential to her victimhood. The Black Southern women she encounters reflect the dearth of her understanding and experience. Caroline's friend Jill (Joy Bryant), who meets all the genre requirements for the Black Best Friend trope, seems to continue a tradition of imparting essential 'Black' knowledge to the endangered white heroine. It is Jill who tells Caroline, after the latter discovers a room in the attic full of magical paraphernalia, 'You found yourself a Hoodoo room.' And it is Jill who distinguishes Voodoo (the religion) from Hoodoo (folk magic). She ends up leading Caroline to a Hoodoo shop but refuses to go in herself. Caroline also visits her predecessor, a Black nurse called Hallie, who advises her to leave the Devereaux house before something terrible happens. Both interactions hint at a culturally inherited vigilance over the Black [female] body, a hyper-consciousness that one's body could potentially be at risk, substantiated by the history of Mama Cecile and Papa Justify revealed within the text.

Importantly, the couple does not covet whiteness so much as they prize survival. Heretofore, the films covered in this chapter have fallen short of the 'politics of articulation' that Hammonds calls for. Not only has the Black feminine been expunged, her voice has largely been silenced. She is neither the author nor the hero of the story told about her. *The Skeleton Key* grapples fascinatingly with the tension between visibility and silence. Mama Cecile is only visualized on screen very briefly, and Jeryl Prescott, the Black actress playing her, never speaks. Yet, narratively, Mama Cecile is the film's main character, and by the conclusion, it is Caroline who emerges as the antagonist. When Mama Cecile recounts the violent lynching of the servants, she authors her own story for Caroline. Moreover, as 'Violet,' she speaks strangely out of time, saying things such as 'Fiddlesticks,' and then to Caroline, 'I bet you're all marked up, aren't you?' (referring to tattoos) and to Ben/Papa Justify, who reaches out to touch her, 'Remove your perspirations.' No matter the era nor the body, Mama Cecile preserves her language and way of speaking. In the attic, Caroline finds a phonograph record with a recording of Papa Justify performing the 'Conjure of Sacrifice' (Fig.2.9). Later in the film, she learns more of these records exist, kept by their followers. Their bodies may not survive but their practices do. Here we have Black people who have cheated death several times over. Their 'appeal to the visual' is not a plea for acceptance or, like Irena and Clelie, an attempt to hide from their true selves; it is a trick, a deception, that communicates their power in the face of racial hegemony.

Apropos, the psychoanalytic project permeates the film. At every turn, Caroline is warned that the magic doesn't work if you 'don't believe.' In her efforts to save Ben - who reminds her of her own father who died before she could properly say good-bye - Caroline begins to investigate the folk magic around her. The attic, where she discovers the Hoodoo Room, holds a special place in Female Gothic scholarship, thanks first to

Charlotte Brontë and then Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. Gena Rowlands, an actress who made her name playing troubled women in films directed by her husband John Cassavetes, adds yet more layers to the ‘Madwoman in the Attic’ trope. If the attic in Victorian, specifically Female Gothic, literature, is a prison,



Figure 2.9: Caroline finds ‘The Conjure of Sacrifice’ record in the Hoodoo Room/attic, *The Skeleton Key* (Softley, 2005).

a space of rage, where the stifled, thwarted woman must retreat,²⁹⁰ then fittingly it becomes a place where Mama Cecile (and Papa Justify) exacts vengeance. The racial dimension, however, cannot be muted, for the mask the conjurers wear exposes the limits of Caroline’s capacity to understand them as a white woman, who has never had to employ an interrogating or dual gaze because she does not exist in the realm of unseen. She trusts only in the material world where her image remains intact and representation has never eluded her. Mysteriously, Mama Cecile/Violet locks all the mirrors away because, she claims, they can ‘see the ghosts’ in them. Ben (Luke trapped in Ben’s body) writhes in pain whenever Caroline shows him a mirror. The way mirrors operate in the film is largely left up for interpretation, and as objects/symbols, they appear to function differently from what

²⁹⁰ Sandra M. Gilbert, Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979, repr. 2000).

audiences have come to expect from the woman-mirror dynamic. Barbara Creed, who has called witches one of the ‘ancient figures of abjection,’ may be helpful here, for she explains, ‘one of [the witch’s] many crimes was that she used corpses for her rites of magic.’²⁹¹ Subsequently, we see that mirrors play an important role in the sacrifice ritual. In the climactic showdown, when a dazed, hexed Caroline has trapped herself in the attic, Mama Cecile pushes a mirror toward her and there Caroline sees flashing images of the young Thorpe daughter, Violet, and finally, a smirking Mama Cecile, before the mirror crashes into Caroline and the body-switching is complete. If the mirror metaphorically comes to represent the mothering Gaze, here again it demonstrates the breadth of its power: the potential to destroy identity, to split the self.

There is room to read this moment as a symbolic split between Winnicott’s True and False Self, as the bodies Mama Cecile inhabits are defenses, but within the diegesis of the film, the mirror more cogently shares the characteristics of the Du Boisian veil. Stephanie Jo Shaw writes, ‘In the African American folk tradition, one who is born with a veil is alleged to have the ability to see, feel, and understand things that ordinary people cannot.’²⁹² Du Bois categorized the veil as both a gift and a burden, an ‘awful shadow,’²⁹³ but as a metaphor it does suit a fantastic or otherwise supernatural framework (as future chapters will reveal). To Du Bois, the veil also operated as a barrier of sorts. Those outside the veil, the white world, could not see within it, but the veiled, the Black world, could see out. Importantly, Black people could not see themselves clearly, for the veil distorts their self-image, generated by their two-ness. We do not know for sure what Mama Cecile sees when she looks in the mirror. But allegorically it does become a dual symbol of the power ingrained in looking relations. Hitherto the conclusion, Caroline can look into a mirror and only see her reflection. It is only after she ‘believes’ and steeps herself in folk magic, that the mirror begins to hold complex, hidden meaning for her. Lastly, the mirror casts Caroline as the racialized double to Mama Cecile, for it is Caroline who finds herself Othered when the mirror functions as an extension of Mama Cecile’s supernatural gaze. As if to further emphasize this, a wry scene follows the body-switching where Mama Cecile complains that she wants a ‘Black body’ to which Papa Justify responds, ‘The Black ones never stay.’

The Skeleton Key is a compelling response to the films that do not visualize the Black body because of how it implicates America’s racial past. On the contrary, the film depicts the realistic, socio-historical

²⁹¹ Barbara Creed, ‘Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection’ in *Horror Film, The Reader*, ed. by Mark Jancovich (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 67-76 (p. 70).

²⁹² Stephanie Jo Shaw, *W.E.B. Du Bois and The Souls of Black Folk* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), p. 17.

²⁹³ Du Bois, p. 211.

circumstances that make it difficult to exist within the Black female body, for it is a body in a state of constant risk. Of course, the threat to the Black body will be explored in similar, inverse body-switching terms in Jordan Peele's film *Get Out* (2017), to be discussed in subsequent chapters. Clearly the body can significantly articulate the complex relationship between visibility, silence, and power. *The Skeleton Key* demonstrates that mirroring is not the only way to 'negate a legacy of silence'²⁹⁴ and, like *Rebecca*, invisibility is not equivalent to powerlessness. Whereas previous texts like *Cat People* and *Ouanga* posit 'racial passing' as a threat from inherently tragic racially hybrid figures, always doomed to fail, *The Skeleton Key* deems passing a method of survival by centering the Black gaze rather than a colonial one. Moreover, as established here, the house is a maternal symbol that often represents the silenced feminine. If the most enduringly popular icon of Black femininity is the Mammy then, naturally, it is the Black maternal that truly haunts the American domestic. What *The Skeleton Key* manages to communicate using the Female Gothic model and the deceptive looking relations inherited from Black folk tradition is a most American ghost story - with a conjure woman at the center - where the Black feminine not only survives, but dominates the space that once confined her.

Conclusion

The majority of films explored in this chapter have presented traumatized, racialized looking relations, which consequently gesture to Black feminine viewers who find the conditions of their spectatorship replicated on screen. When white characters encounter the racialized feminine and react with horror, the Black feminine is called to witness itself as Du Bois promises, 'through the eyes of others.'²⁹⁵ Therefore, these films construct Black feminine spectatorship, even as they overlook her to center white audiences and their anxieties. In *Performing Whiteness: Postmodern Re/Constructions in the Cinema*, Gwendolyn Foster describes whiteness as 'an unattainable phantom construct.'²⁹⁶ Even white women, as demonstrated by the cases covered in this chapter, barely achieve it. Revealingly, what emerges is the great threat Black femininity poses, so great it can hardly be visualized. Nonetheless her specter pervades these films. While these texts are overly, gracelessly conscious of miscegenation, they equally rely upon Black femininity to establish whiteness.

I argue that horror is especially suited to communicate the psychic fears and condition of the socially and/or spatially limited classes. The domestic, where Black and white women alike historically found themselves confined, is a classically haunted space. So I have situated the racialized female double in the Female Gothic,

²⁹⁴ Hammonds, p. 312.

²⁹⁵ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, p. 3.

²⁹⁶ Foster, p. 50.

concerned as it is with the domestic, which reveals enduring reservations about the intimacy between white and Black people. The films analyzed in this chapter betray a lurking fear in the tenuousness of whiteness, threatened by its very proximity to Blackness. From the zombie films and both versions of *Cat People*, it would seem that whiteness is impossible for the racialized to penetrate. It must be, for these tales hope to fortify racial hegemony by suggesting that whiteness is inherited or biological, rather than a system of power premised on arbitrarily defined parameters. Neither Clelie nor Irena can overcome their ‘bad blood’ no matter how white their skin is, but Jessica and Madeleine can become ‘Black’ through some sexual transgression or violation. The only pathway to acceptability for racialized women is to disavow their destabilizing sexuality and submit to the sexless category of motherhood; not to their own children, of course, but to the white patriarchal family, where their role as caretaker neutralizes their sexual threat and binds them in servitude.

These texts valuably depict the cinematic conditions that Black women must resist and protest. The repudiation of the Black feminine, her conception as monstrous, destructive, in urgent need of quashing, builds a compass toward how the following filmmakers rescue her image and progressively revise genre conventions. I have evidenced here that lack of visibility is not inherently disempowering and, likewise, mirroring is not always productive. We have seen explicitly Black characters at the center of these films (e.g. *Ouanga*) and as supporting characters, but the film that gets closest to empowering a Black woman, *The Skeleton Key*, does so by disguising her as white. This same film is also the one case that is committed not only to her voice, but her posterity. With the exception of Mama Cecile, these racialized women are all necessarily destroyed to preserve white patriarchy. Some of them, like the zombified Jessica and ghost Carmel, literally cannot communicate and virtually all of them are denied authorship and the language, verbal and visual, to convey their sense of displacement in human, rather than purposefully grotesque, terms. It is not simply that they are all in some way ‘monsters’ or Other, but that their gendered racialization is narratively cemented by the looking relations performed in the film. When Betsy encounters Jessica, when the mysterious cat woman confronts Irena in the diner, when Clelie’s self-hate is frighteningly materialized in a faceless lynching victim, they are made figures of horror, not only to audiences but to themselves. And ultimately, like Irena, their bodies and histories are banished to an unreachable realm. If the memory of these disavowed women later trouble the white families who overcame them, it is not textual; for each film ends with either their ‘righteous’ expulsion to the shadows. Certainly, one of the points I hope to make here is that these films where Black women are not explicitly imaged, are just as productive and in some ways, communicate more powerfully and more compassionately (consider the difference between Irena and Clelie) the condition of the racialized feminine. But consider, too, that although these racialized white women are

condemned and ultimately vanquished, the Black women in *Ouanga*, *Candyman*, and *The Skeleton Key* endure the most brutal violence on screen.

The traumatic dynamic Du Bois identified between Black and white racial identity, as it develops in the American context, powerfully persists in cinema. By her very presence, the racialized female double conveys all the horror and catharsis wrapped up in the mirror, complex as it is, and the gaze. It is fitting, then, that these psychic anxieties revolve so frequently around the maternal body, in the Gothic framework and in psychoanalysis. Given the lasting cultural legacy of the Black maternal, as caregivers for white children and producers of more enslaved peoples, no matter how deep she is buried, it seems that to speak of America's racialized hauntings means inevitably to speak of the Black feminine.

The next three chapters, each devoted to respective close analyses of *Eve's Bayou* (1997), *Get Out* (2017), and *Us* (2019) - films in the Female Gothic formula from Black American directors - draw from precisely this legacy. Not only do these texts speak of Black maternal hauntings, but each film in some way concerns itself with the colonized gaze. Spectatorship becomes part of the diegesis. There, we begin to see what role racial looking relations and these classic Female Gothic fictions play in Black American cultural formation.

three

THREE FACES OF EVE

Maybe they'd say, 'Why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn't do bad things in front of those pretty eyes.'

- Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*²⁹⁷

The first clear shot of *Eve's Bayou* (1997), the directorial debut from nineties horror mainstay Kasi Lemmons, is a close-up of a pair of dark eyes: the eyes of Eve Batiste, the film's young protagonist (Jurnee Smollett). Within her irises, one discerns the blurred black-and-white movements of a man and a woman, before a pronounced gasp shatters the silence. Before a word is ever spoken, the film establishes the gaze as its principal terrain.

In voiceover, the adult Eve (Tamara Tunie) delivers a striking confession: 'The summer I killed my father I was ten-years-old,' she narrates coolly, recalling the early 1960s in Eve's Bayou, Louisiana. She explains how the town was named for a slave who once cured a wealthy white general afflicted with cholera. In return, the general repaid this woman with a sprawling stretch of land on the bayou. 'Perhaps in gratitude,' Eve scoffs, 'she bore him sixteen children. We are the descendants of Eve and Jean-Paul Batiste. I was named for her.'

With that, the film begins to unravel the events of that tragic summer. This prologue announces the film's core interconnected themes: history, inheritance, identity and, most importantly, the gaze. Shortly thereafter, we learn that Eve and her aunt Mozelle (Debbi Morgan) share the 'gift of Sight,' or clairvoyance. The film - classically Southern Gothic and thus linked to its European progenitor - foregrounds the matters that have traditionally defined the Female Gothic quest: illicit looking, secret family histories that require the female heroine to investigate, and genealogy, particularly matrilineal genealogy. In the previous two chapters, I have

²⁹⁷ Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970; repr. New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 24 Jul 2007)

tried to map how the instruments (the mirror, the double, the house) and central themes of the genre uniquely convey an anxiety that, in an American framework, can usually be traced to a racialized fear of a predatory, malignant Other which threatens to expose the tenuous bounds of power predicated upon race. Essentially, the American domestic is haunted by the spectral Black feminine, who may not always be seen but inevitably emerges in the Female Gothic mode where these domestic neuroses animate the narrative. The double, specifically, is innately disposed to render reflexive looking relations that literalize Winnicott's mirror stage. Lemmons's film provides a fascinating case for this through the character of Eve, thrice doubled with three different mother figures: her aunt Mozelle, her ancestor and namesake Eve, and the vengeful conjure woman Elzora (Diahann Carroll). As established in chapter 2, the gaze in Female Gothic cinema is often racialized and fragmented, characterized by horror and a repression of the shadowy self. When these films diegetically portray racialized looking relations, they produce the otherwise ignored Black feminine spectatorship within the narrative. *Eve's Bayou*, however, reworks this classic gaze and, with it, the position of the (ideal) spectator.

In fact, *Eve's Bayou* concerns itself almost entirely with the Black feminine gaze and de-Othering the racialized gendered double. Much of its initial acclaim is a testament to the success of this 'de-Othering.' The film's capacity to preserve its racial specificity without centering racial difference would give the film an 'accessibility' that, as Dan Flory and Mia L. Mask note, several critics praised, unwittingly revealing a common reluctance to consider Black art accessible to begin with.²⁹⁸ ²⁹⁹ 'To hail Ms. Lemmons' *Eve's Bayou* as the best African-American film ever...would be to underestimate its universal accessibility to anyone on the planet with the slightest involvement in the painful experience of family life,' wrote Andrew Sarris in his review for *The New York Observer*.³⁰⁰ This pervasive reception, an inability or unwillingness to approach the work outside racialized terms, betrays the widespread alienation of Black art by critics and scholars, and furthermore, overlooks how inextricably the story of the Batistes is linked to their heritage. Lemmons neither mutes nor disguises the race of her characters, certainly not for the sake of 'relatability.'

The 'accessibility' that non-Black critics found is a direct result of Lemmons and cinematographer Amy Vincent subverting the dominant cinematic gaze and depicting Black life through a reflexive lens, as they see and experience life themselves, not as Other. The gaze engineered by Lemmons and Vincent purposefully replicates the doubled looking dynamics Black women spectators engage in at the cinema. Recall bell hooks's argument: 'Identifying with neither the phallocentric gaze nor the construction of white womanhood as lack, critical black

²⁹⁸ Dan Flory, *Philosophy, Black Film, Film Noir* (Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 2008), p. 225.

²⁹⁹ Mia L. Mask, 'Eve's Bayou: Too Good to be a "Black" Film?' *Cineaste* 23, no. 4 (1998): 26.

³⁰⁰ Andrew Sarris, 'A Ten-Year-Old Murderer Propels a Nervy Debut Film,' in *New York Observer*, 17 November 1997, 37.

female spectators construct a theory of looking relations where cinematic visual delight is the pleasure of interrogation.³⁰¹ This project has premised itself upon the ‘pleasure of interrogation,’ interrogating seemingly innocuous images, thinly veiled iconography, and carving out space for that which seems to be absent. Black women, hooks proposes, discover the limitations of the screen early, neither explicitly visualized nor directly addressed by it. Satisfaction is found, then, not in the images themselves, but in their deconstruction, in resisting an ultimately violent seduction. Lemmons’s film builds richly upon this legacy of the radical disjunction between looking and seeing for Black women. While, in transparent ways, she seeks to remedy this labor and historical ‘negation’³⁰² by giving them clear representations of themselves, she also makes the question of perception the central driving conflict of Eve’s coming-of-age, thus emphasizing the significance (and reward) of an independent, interrogating gaze in the development of Black women’s autonomy.

It is worth noting that Lemmons famously appeared in Jonathan Demme’s *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) and *Candyman* (1992), two horror films that exemplify the era’s mainstream racial and gender politics, where Black women, whose experience guaranteed unique consequences under white patriarchal domination, were routinely overlooked and obscured. In both films, Lemmons fulfills the familiar function of the Black Best Friend. While this trope possesses currency across genres (e.g. the romantic comedy), notably she portrays middle class-coded women (an FBI academy trainee and PhD candidate respectively) in close proximity to white female protagonists on a trajectory of empowerment in narratives of fear. Due to this juxtaposition, her Otherness must be, in some ways, subdued so that she might inhabit a space where her racial difference commendably provides diversity without drawing attention away from the white heroine.

Perhaps the biggest hindrance to Black women in an industry that worships imaged whiteness is complexion. Norma Manatu explains, ‘Like white skin, light skin color tends to confer upon women some degree of inherent “goodness” not attributed to dark-skin women.’ As a light-skinned Black woman, Lemmons embodies a visually acceptable Blackness, for she must avoid being conflated with the monstrous Other in a genre where, historically, her body had operated as an emblem of horror. Consider the strenuous efforts to avoid race in *The Silence of the Lambs* although its premise relies on the audiences’ sympathies with the heroine as the only (white) woman in a male dominated field, all the while disparaging unstable gender in the character of the serial killer Buffalo Bill. Notice, too, how inadequately *Candyman* addresses Black womanhood in its efforts to telegraph similar feminist themes via the experience of its white protagonist, as explored in the previous chapter.

³⁰¹ *Oppositional Gaze*, p. 175.

³⁰² Ibid.

The most important thing I want to identify is the subservient status Lemmons occupies in these films, both narratively and thematically. In one film she dies unceremoniously; in another she barely speaks. Her experience as a Black woman in both texts is all at once hyper-visualized and marginal. Visually, Lemmons signals the more ‘progressive,’ integrated society in which these modern films take place. In that way, these films profit from the illusion of racial inclusivity without acknowledging the history of its framework and evade seriously reckoning with the complexity that proceeds from the inclusion of racialized, gendered bodies.

It does not strike me as unrelated that Lemmons’s first foray into directing does not feature any white actors, uncommon even compared to other projects from Black directors at the time. Studio executives would continually contest and pressure Lemmons to reverse her decision to work with an all-Black cast.³⁰³ Instead, she assembled a credible troupe of African-American film stars: Samuel L. Jackson (also a producer on the film), fresh from the success of *Pulp Fiction* (1994); Lynn Whitfield, who had won an Emmy for her lead role in the HBO film *The Josephine Baker Story* (1991); Debbi Morgan, a popular soap opera and television actress; and, finally, luminary Diahann Carroll. For all their seeming bankability, such a lineup did not, apparently, inspire confidence. But mainly, *Eve’s Bayou* responds to those earlier films by celebrating the collective. Where *The Silence of the Lambs* and *Candyman* feature largely solitary women who either resist or prove themselves exceptional in the face of patriarchal forces, Lemmons’s film prioritizes female solidarity and kinship. In this, her film diverges from many of the Female Gothic texts covered in this project.

This chapter on *Eve’s Bayou* bridges the classical Female Gothic dramas, where the Black feminine is disavowed and disguised, to the explicitly racialized contemporary depictions of the Black feminine in the Female Gothic, as rendered by Black filmmakers. The respective films of Kasi Lemmons and Jordan Peele make a case for a Black domestic Gothic tradition, one that centralizes the Black feminine and draws from the traumatic racialized looking relations foundational to Female Gothic cinema. In this chapter I will 1) examine how *Eve’s Bayou* applies elements of the Gothic - the double, the threatening male figure, the densely symbolic Gothic house - to articulate a singular portrait of African American domesticity; 2) consider how Du Bois’s concepts of double-consciousness and the veil are channeled through a Black feminine lens and communicate themes of history, identity, cultural memory, and self-defined womanhood; and 3) analyze how the act of spectatorship meaningfully scaffolds the narrative through the performance of looking, which compels viewers to reproduce racialized spectatorship dynamics by positioning the Black female gaze as dominant.

³⁰³ Mark Reid, *Black Lenses, Black Voices: African American Film Now* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), p. 33.

House of Horrors

The film begins on the night of a summer party when ten-year-old Eve discovers her father Louis Batiste (Jackson) having sex with his mistress Matty (Lisa Nicole Carson), who is the wife of his best friend Lenny (Roger Guenveur Smith). The film charts the disintegration of the Batiste family as his philandering grows more brazen. When Eve learns her father may have sexually abused her fourteen-year-old sister Cisely (Meagan Good), she finally decides to take matters into her own hands, and enlists the help of local conjure woman Elzora (Carroll) to abet her father's death in retribution. But it is Lenny who eventually murders Louis for having an affair with his wife.³⁰⁴

Principally a family drama, most of the film's action unfolds inside the Batistes' ancestral antebellum manor. Norman N. Holland and Leona F. Sherman characterize the Female Gothic most usefully: 'The image of woman-plus-habitation and the plot of mysterious sexual and supernatural threats in an atmosphere of dynastic mysteries within the habitation has changed little since the eighteenth century.'³⁰⁵ *Eve's Bayou* is commonly described as Southern Gothic, inviting more comparisons to Tennessee Williams³⁰⁶ than Ann Radcliffe. But like previous cases, the film falls within the Female Gothic cycle mapped by Hitchcock's *Rebecca* (1940): a young heroine, bound to a charismatic, covertly treacherous older man, must uncover the truth of the ever intrusive past, which reveals her idol to be woefully and dangerously fallible.

Of course, Eve is a little girl and the Byronic man responsible for her torment is her father, whose role (a further testament to the film's Gothic impulses) introduces an unsettling incestuous angle. But the secret at the heart of *Eve's Bayou* is only partially revealed, for neither Eve nor the audience ever truly learns who initiated the illicit kiss between Louis and his eldest daughter. Both Cisely and Louis confide in their psychic siblings, but by then we know that, for all the reliable accuracy of their visions, Eve and Mozelle are doomed forever to be 'blind' to their own lives. Because Louis's death impacts them, they cannot attain the truth with their supernatural ability. Nevertheless, Louis's insatiable sexual appetite poses a noxious threat in the traditional Gothic sense, and so he must be removed.

Ruth Bienstock Anolik argues that the violence encoded in the Gothic danger of rape signals a gendered violence beyond the physical, and the conventional depiction of the Gothic male as dark-complexioned emblematises 'not just his moral darkness but the epistemological darkness he imposes, his inhuman resistance

³⁰⁴ *Eve's Bayou*, dir. by Kasi Lemmons (Trimark Pictures, 1997).

³⁰⁵ Norman N. Holland and Leona F. Sherman, 'Gothic Possibilities,' in *New Literary History*, 8.2 (1977), pp. 279–294 (279) <www.jstor.org/stable/468522> [accessed 2 Oct 2019].

³⁰⁶ Roger Ebert, "Eve's Bayou" review in <<https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/eves-bayou-1997>> [accessed 22 Oct 2019]

to apprehension and empathy.³⁰⁷ Louis, however, does not embody the racist, Other-ing ideologies typically symbolized by the Gothic male, whether explicitly or implicitly racialized. In a wry twist, he actually represents the oppressive white colonial Other through his kinship to his white colonialist ancestor and his affiliation with Southern middle-class architecture, in all its history. True to Gothic convention, Louis embodies the politics of the domestic, but he is rarely home. The house is the realm of women: Eve's beautiful mother Rozlynn, affectionately called Roz (Whitfield); the Batiste matriarch, Louis and Mozelle's mother, called Grand-mère (Ethel Ayler); and Cisely and Eve (who childishly terrorizes their youngest brother Poe, much doted upon by Roz). At the party, on the night Eve witnesses her father's sexual transgression, Lemmons maps the knotty family dynamics beneath the glamor and wealth. Mozelle, for example, appears distant from her affable husband Harry (played by noted Louisianian musician Branford Marsalis), and flirts with other men. That same night Harry will die in a car accident, but Mozelle, like Louis, is established as somewhat restless within domestic confines. Cisely enters the scene reciting Shakespeare, which foreshadows her penchant for drama and



Figure 3.1: At the party, Louis dances with Cisely while the Batiste guests (including Eve, in the blue dress) look on in *Eve's Bayou* (Lemmons, 1997).

storytelling. The audience is introduced last to Louis, the charming town doctor, who commands the attention of all the women in the room, especially his daughters, though he hardly interacts with his wife at all. Instead, he dances sensually with Matty while the camera cuts back to shots of the enthralled Eve and Cisely watching from

³⁰⁷ Ruth Bienstock Anolik, 'Introduction' in *Horrifying Sex: Essays on Sexual Difference in Gothic Literature* ed. by Ruth Bienstock Anolik (Jefferson: McFarland & Company Inc., 2007), p. 12.

the sidelines. Afterward, he chooses to dance with Cisely over Eve (Fig.3.1), much to the latter's chagrin. The juxtaposition of these dances with Matty and Cisely foretells the horror to come. Later, Louis confesses to adoring Cisely more than his other children. Although he obviously loves Eve, he flaunts his favoritism of her older sister with uncomfortable, flirtatious exchanges. So when Cisely eventually claims that their father drunkenly kissed her, it feels like a natural progression of preceding events.

Later that summer, Mozelle has a vision of a child's death (actually, what she sees is Eve falling to the ground when Louis pushes her out of Lenny's line of gunfire). A paranoid Roz restricts the children to the house. Eve is evidently a tomboy, often decked in overalls and sneakers, playing along the bayou with her little brother. The house, by now a well fixed symbol of the domestic, does not suit her. And consider what it likely represents by this point: the audience knows that Louis is a shameless adulterer; he has had at least two extramarital affairs when that summer begins - one that may have resulted in a pregnancy - and he frequently returns home late, much to the distress of his family. Nervous over the state of her marriage, Roz has accidentally cut herself so often that both Eve and Grand-mère remark upon it. 'Girl, you're gonna cut your finger off one of these days,' says Grand-mère, in a scene where both she and Roz are preparing dinner, with pronounced close-ups of their (manicured) hands peeling and slicing vegetables. These shots suggest, despite their class, that women assume the role of nurturer and caregiver in this family. The Batiste women do not employ domestics and take on mothering responsibilities themselves. Nevertheless, Louis's absence is felt as a violence in the house, which becomes a stifling environment where the children feel equally their mother's anxious possessiveness and their father's carelessness and indifference.

Josephine Livingstone writes, 'In classics like *Wuthering Heights*, *Jane Eyre*, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, or *Rebecca*, the reader will notice something wrong with the house long before they see the flaws in the lover.'³⁰⁸ The Batiste house is not haunted in the traditional sense, but it is deeply possessed of the past and horror frequently takes place there. Even though Louis is rarely home himself, the house personifies his dynasty. Anne Williams writes in *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic*, a castle or house, in this case, is 'a man-made thing, a cultural artifact linked with the name of a particular family'.³⁰⁹ The Batiste ancestral home first makes a prisoner of Roz, who refashions it as a prison for her children. Although Eve is an heir, the house hints at the proposition

³⁰⁸ Josephine Livingstone, 'Bleak House: Carmen Maria Machado's genre-bending tour of a relationship gone wrong,' *Bookforum* (Fall 2019) <<https://www.bookforum.com/print/2604/carmen-maria-machado-s-genre-bending-tour-of-a-relationship-gone-wrong-23737>> [accessed 16 Nov 2019].

³⁰⁹ Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 44.

that centrally drives the Female Gothic, made visible here in the emotional tension between mother and daughters: the looming threat of domestic entrapment in womanhood.

Typically, the Female Gothic narrative ends in marriage, but *Eve's Bayou* circumvents a romantic ending due to its protagonist's youth. That way the film can freely explore the ways women perilously internalize gendered codes and mores that only yield misery, without forcing its characters to resign themselves to custom and undercutting the power of those reasonable apprehensions. For example, both Eve and Cisely struggle to make sense of their father's actions and what it implies for their own forthcoming womanhood. Eve asks Louis if he 'wants other kids,' a predictably innocent perspective from a ten-year-old for whom sex is purely reproductive. Such a question indicates her confusion about the complexities of adult relationships and her own worth. She seeks her father's reassurance that she is enough, and without elaborating or addressing her real question, the one she cannot articulate for herself, he manipulatively responds: 'Your mother and I are perfectly happy with the three kids we got.' Cisely takes the same approach to an even more dangerous level, if Louis is to be believed, when she tries to kiss him. In both instances, Eve and Cisely, like their mother, perceive Louis's behavior as a reflection on them and what they can provide.

Let us consider more closely Roz, whom Lisa B. Thompson argues conforms to the cultural stereotype of the Black middle-class woman. In contrast to the other women in the film - Matty and Mozelle, who are openly sexual - Roz presents herself as attractive and elegant, but desexualized in accordance with class respectability codes.³¹⁰ Thompson explains:

Roz's performance of the normalized black female identity only allows her to demonstrate passion through motherhood, and it is her son, Poe, who receives a disproportionate share of her attention. His affections substitute for Louis's neglect. She embodies the role of the ideal middle-class housewife...and mother, with her power confined to the domestic sphere. Unlike the barren Mozelle, Roz's role as mother defines and normalizes her. When Mozelle warns of impending doom...Roz forbids the children to go outdoors all summer. Only within the home, she believes, can she protect them.³¹¹

Here, it becomes clear that Roz's femininity, or her portrayal of it, is not just influenced by gender, but race. If, as I have pointed out in the previous chapter, Black women are plagued by hypersexualization that, unlike white women, is attributed to them automatically due to their race, then the calculus is apparent. Her desexualization is linked to this history which casts her and her sexuality as deviant. Moreover, I would argue that Roz's

³¹⁰ Lisa B. Thompson, *Beyond the Black Lady: Sexuality and the New African American Middle Class* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), pp. 82 - 83.

³¹¹ Thompson, p. 83.

submissive version of femininity also resists dominant conceptions of Black womanhood. The scholar Hortense Spillers famously sought to trace how the institution of slavery informs the discourse around Black American domestic life, specifically the way it constructs and indicts Black women within the context of ‘family.’ The Moynihan Report, conceived by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, considered Black women a hindrance to the Black family, where they usurped men as the ‘rightful’ head. Spillers argues, ‘the African-American female’s “dominance” and “strength” come to be interpreted by later generations - both black and white, oddly enough - as a “pathology,” as an instrument of castration.³¹² While clearly frustrated and unhappy, she only seriously confronts her husband about his infidelities late in the film. She makes few efforts to oppose him or overstep her roles as mother and wife. Roz’s thinness, sexlessness, and ‘elegance’ are not incidental, but crucial middle-class trappings directly influenced by her racial history. In an obvious sense, she is a ‘success’ of the (racist) patriarchal project. In every way she has excelled at what the institution demands from her, namely progeny and longsuffering silence.

But Thompson manages to isolate a key element of Roz’s characterization when she observes her performance of ‘passion through motherhood.’ Note that unlike Roz, Mozelle (who cannot have children) and Matty (who, as far as the audience knows, also has no children) do not deny their own sexual appetite, although they may be criticized for it. After she has seen her father having sex with Matty, Eve asks him, understandably, if he loves her mother. ‘Your mama’s a *lady* [emphasis my own],’ says Louis, ‘And I’ll always love her;’ the unspoken implication being that one does not behave so carnally with ‘ladies.’ When Eve tells Cisely what she saw later, Cisely scoffs, ‘What would daddy want with Matty Mereaux? Mama’s the most beautiful woman in the whole world.’ Roz is essentially perfect: ‘a lady,’ or ‘the most beautiful woman in the whole world.’ She is an untouchable and unattainable ideal, not unlike the cinematic depictions of white womanhood discussed in this thesis. Cisely, like her father before her, leans into the familiar dichotomy between the virgin/madonna and the whore. Furthermore, if, as Louis claims, Cisely kissed him ‘like a woman,’ then we can infer the dangerous fruits of those very beliefs when she attempts to offer her father what she presumes her mother cannot - sex - in order to preserve their family.

Black women are certainly not the only women hampered by these strict sexual binaries, but motherhood for Black women holds particularly complicated connotations:

³¹² Spillers, p. 74.

Slavery fractured and dissipated the very condition of motherhood for African American women, reducing and then defining motherhood as merely breeding for profit, a commodification of their bodies as well as a commodification of their ability to reproduce. African American motherhood itself was also a victim of white defeminization of black women. Black female slaves were regarded as nothing more than breeders...thereby justifying the removal of a black woman's children by slaveholders.³¹³

I have explored the ways Black women were excluded from the category of womanhood throughout this thesis. Principally, their history as chattel precluded them from the 'protections' typically accorded womanhood, for the commodification of their bodies and their offspring. We have already seen the legacy of Black womanhood as shaped by American slavery in previously analyzed Gothic films: their racialized hypersexualization (symbolically transferred to white women characters) made their rape and assault 'impossible,' for ultimately they were 'property.' But contemporary Black Gothic cinema - such as *Eve's Bayou* and later Jordan Peele's films *Get Out* (2017) and *Us* (2019) - is especially attuned to the traces slavery left on Black motherhood. Thus, Roz's middle-class representation emerges out of significant historical denials. She performs 1) the 'feminization' of Black motherhood, visually, if not characteristically, antithetical to the Mammy; and 2) the 'virtuous' devotion to parenting her own children, born of her body. Unlike the Mammy, who is plump, dark-skinned, unrefined, and devoted to white children, Roz is svelte, light-skinned, glamorous, and possessive - but not especially nurturing (except for Poe) - of her children. But she is crucially desexualized and defined by caretaking. Therefore, her performance of motherhood, like the white madonna/virgin, is incompatible with sexuality.

Thompson makes some worthwhile connections between the bourgeoisie respectability Roz embodies and early twentieth century discourse around gendered racial progression. Roz operates in the tradition of Anna Julia Cooper's belief that 'the intelligent wife, the Christian mother, the earnest, virtuous, helpful woman' operates as 'both the lever and the fulcrum for uplifting the race.'³¹⁴ For Thompson, these forces are grotesque, fearsome, and ghostly. She repeatedly refers to them as 'hauntings,' writing, 'the history of sexual abuse and objectification haunts all black women, but the figure of the colored lady in particular haunts middle-class black women and influences their behavior and sensibility...the idea of being both black and a lady is a dichotomy that continues to haunt African-American women.'³¹⁵ In this way, Roz herself comes to personify the horror of the

³¹³ *Writing African American Women: K-Z, An Encyclopedia of Literature By and About Women of Color Vol. 2* ed. by Elizabeth Ann Beaulieu (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2006), p. 647.

³¹⁴ Anna J. Cooper, *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper: Including a Voice from the South and Other Important Essays, Papers, and Letters* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), p. 70.

³¹⁵ Lisa B. Thompson, 'Black Ladies and Black Magic Women' in *From Bourgeois to Boojie: Black Middle-class Performances* ed. by Vershawn Ashanti Young and Bridget Harris Tsemo (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011), pp. 287 - 308 (p. 291).

domestic for her daughters. The home she creates and represents is ‘perfect’ in the sense that she seamlessly marries all of these proper and respectable attributes. The Batiste house, likewise, seems conventional: a gendered space where the child’s surface, practical necessities might be met but not - at least consistently and adequately - their emotional ones. In her attachment to Poe, the male heir, she fosters a sense of nurturing that sterilizes the domestic for him; there is no threat, only love (and perhaps boredom) there. But for her daughters, she becomes a frightening, prophetic specter. In their fear, they rail against her hollow authority and emphasize her impotence. When her mother chastises her for rolling her eyes ‘behind my back,’ Cisely responds sarcastically, in a barely veiled reference to Louis’s affairs: ‘Nothing ever happens behind your back.’ Roz’s



Figure 3.2: Roz stands behind her younger children while glaring at a rebellious Cisely out of frame. *Eve's Bayou* (Lemmons, 1997).

powerlessness only amplifies the apparent endlessness of their own as children and, as their mother appears to indicate, into adulthood.

Although the film most visibly employs the double through the character of Eve, Cisely, too, becomes a vessel for dramatic doubling. Cisely and Roz do not look similar; Cisely is brown-skinned with, for the first act of the film, long black hair down her back, usually swept into a ponytail or a high bun. Although Eve later has an explosive confrontation with her mother, Roz clashes most with Cisely, who is teetering on the verge of adolescence. The film communicates the tension between them most effectively through their split looking relations. In one scene, after a Sunday dinner when Louis claims to have ‘patients to see,’ Cisely scolds her

mother: 'Don't you think you're being a little immature? Keeping us in the house because aunt Mozelle is seeing things, and not wanting Daddy to go to work. What's wrong with you?' The camera stays on Roz (Fig.3.2) and the progression of her reaction. Out of shot, Cisely crosses the dining room to stand at the head of the table, where Louis, now gone, had been sitting. Meanwhile, Roz dominates her frame, towering over Eve and Poe. When she finally comes face to face with Cisely, she glares down at her daughter, shorter than her. The censure is cutting but nonetheless revealing. 'If you're lucky, you might live long enough to one day have a husband and children of your own, but until then this is *my* house and you will do as I say. Do you understand?' This medium shot, which indicates Eve's perspective, only gives the audience a profile view of Roz and Cisely. It seems important that there are no close-ups or eye-level shots to emphasize the scene's drama, but we can see that Cisely lowers her eyes away from her mother's angry gaze. There seems little room for any healthy Winnicottian mirroring here. Moreover, although Roz temporarily affirms her power, she alludes to the threat that Cisely's defiance poses: to usurp her place as the woman of the house. As if to cement the tenuous authority of such a position, this power does not hold. Cisely's rebellion reaches its zenith in a later scene when she disobeys her mother's orders to remain inside and returns from the beauty parlor with her hair cut short and styled in loose, shoulder-length curls like Roz. In a doubled scene, Roz and Cisely face each other again. This time, close-ups abound, with Cisely beaming proudly up at the camera/her mother as she says, 'I had to cross the train tracks to get home. And I'm alive, mama. I didn't get hit by anything!' The 'passion' of motherhood Thompson describes turns noxious when Roz responds by slapping Cisely hard across the face.

That night Roz does not apologize, but for the first time she levels with her daughter. Cisely comes downstairs to find Roz sitting in the parlor staring out the window (Fig.3.3). For most of this scene, they face the same direction, ahead, but only briefly and fleetingly meet each other's gaze sideways. 'When I was your age, I was just like you. I thought I knew everything,' Roz explains. 'Now even the things I'm most familiar with seem mysterious to me. But I know I love you, and it's my job to protect you as best I can.' Although each of these scenes establish the ongoing disconnect between mother and daughter, here Roz indicates that she recognizes herself in her daughter. Clearly Cisely, wittingly or not, remakes herself in the image of her mother. This suggests the lack of proper mirroring, one the daughter finds desirable - for all her rebellion - but generally remains elusive. Although we have shots of Roz and Cisely in frame together, directly looking at each other, more often the cinematography splits their gaze, cutting between the two as they regard the other. This not only displays their emotional division, it also materializes the chasm between their perspectives. If, as Winnicott

asserts, the mother should ‘function as a “mirror,” reflecting back the infant’s gestures and experiences,’³¹⁶ then Roz’s line tells us how their roles have been destabilized: ‘When I was your age I was just like you,’ she says, meaning she sees herself in Cisely, but Cisely does not seem to see *herself* in her mother. Therefore, she emulates



Figure 3.3: Cisely comes downstairs to find her mother there. They look away from each other - disconnected - but in a mirrored position. *Eve's Bayou* (Lemmons, 1997).

her (cutting her hair) and, potentially, attempts to outperform her by making herself sexually available to her father. Her ‘mirroring’ needs unaddressed, Cisely transforms herself into the ‘mirror’ of her mother in an effort to get herself recognized.

Later that same night, when Cisely and her father kiss, Louis, whether rejected or horrified, also hits his daughter. The doubled violence she experiences as she explores the femininity her parents model for her, results in a prolonged depression for Cisely. Her self-development not only opposed but violently punished, she refuses to speak for weeks until she eventually asks to be sent away. Once again we see how thwarted mirroring turns into silence. Like Amy and Barbara in *The Curse of the Cat People* (1944), where the female specter supernaturally symbolizes their stifled emotional condition - unseen and unheard - Cisely, too, becomes like a ghost. ‘She won’t eat, she won’t speak,’ Roz tells Louis. ‘It’s like she’s sleepwalking.’ Again the Gothic family reveals the dangerous capacity of the gendered repression it enforces.

³¹⁶ Anthony Elliot, *Psychoanalytic Theory: An Introduction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 73.

That this Gothic family is Black, with a patriarch who is also marginalized, lends to especially layered interpretations. Far from a one-dimensional antagonist, Louis is a deeply insecure man. In his letter to Mozelle, accusing Cisely of initiating their horrible kiss, he writes, ‘To a certain type of woman, I am a hero. I need to be a hero sometimes.’ It is not unreasonable to deduce that, as a Black man in the 1960s South, Louis must often feel powerless, and that he also enjoys the attention he garners as a doctor in sometimes selfish ways, and perhaps does not always realize the breadth of the power he wields over his family. At the party in the film’s opening sequence, a woman tells Grand-mère, ‘Your son is the best *colored* [emphasis my own] doctor in Louisiana.’ This qualification is crucial, because even though the film does not include any white characters and we never see the protagonists encounter racism outright, this dialogue informs audiences that these socio-historical parameters substantially define their lives. Structural racism still inhibits the scope of their achievements.

That said, he is a tragically ambivalent father. He allows Eve to accompany him on medical house calls only to send her away, presumably so he can have sex with one of his patients. And yet he does love his children; after his death, Mozelle relays a ghostly message from him, one of forgiveness and filial love: ‘Tell Eve, I still owe her that dance.’ Between Lemmons’s writing and Jackson’s performance, Louis becomes a multifaceted figure, as self-serving and destructive as he is charming, warm, and compassionate.

In his danger, Louis is kinned with the Gothic lovers of British classics past: Rochester, Heathcliff, Maxim, whose castles operated as extensions of themselves, patriarchal prisons for unyielding women. He is linked even more directly with his own white general ancestor. Lemmons deploys a fascinating negotiation here of racialized, gendered bodies through Louis’s assertion of his sexuality, which is presented as careless, insatiable, and ultimately volatile, not just to his wife and his close friend, but to his children. In contrast to the ‘grotesque’ way Black women’s bodies are generally depicted, Janell Hobson concludes, ‘American culture has fixated more on black male sexuality, usually depicted as signifying “brute force” and thus as highly phallic...The locus for black male deviance is presumed to lie not in the body but in black male libidos.’³¹⁷ This would seem at first outwardly true of Louis. But he is never portrayed as ‘brutish.’ Rather, upon closer inspection, it seems that Louis is blatantly set up to mirror General Jean-Paul Batiste, for it was this forefather who sired sixteen children. Eve wryly narrates that her namesake ‘gave’ the general sixteen children ‘in gratitude,’ subtly acknowledging the enduring imbalance of historical power dynamics that likely persisted in their relationship, even though Matriarch Eve was now a free and landowning woman. In his greed and self-interest, Louis is blatantly equated

³¹⁷ Janell Hobson, ‘“Batty” Politic: Toward an Aesthetic of the Black Female Body,’ in *Hypatia: Women, Art, and Aesthetics* 18. 4 (2003), pp. 87-105 (pp. 95-96) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3810976>> [accessed 3 June 2019]

with the voracious, conquering passions of his colonizer ancestor, as inherited as Eve and Mozelle's clairvoyance from the original Eve.

It should not go unstated that the castles of British Gothic literature - *Jane Eyre* or Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814) - pointedly signal their connection to the slave trade. The Batistes owe their wealth to this same legacy of pillaging and exploitation. Of the Australian Gothic, but equally applicable to the American colonial project, Melissa Edmundson writes, 'colonial houses became symbolic of the "success" of empire as Europeans brought their "civilizing" influence to the colony.'³¹⁸ These structures represent a masculine and imperial domination, where racialized women (in this case, Aboriginal women) were doubly 'outcast'.³¹⁹ So when the children are restricted to the house, as a symbol it invites readings that diverge distinctly from the merely gendered connotations of the conventional Female Gothic. Meredith Miller writes, 'the traditional Gothic association of femininity and entrapment cannot be thought of in America outside of the haunting association of entrapment with blackness'.³²⁰ Miller argues that the language of Southern Gothic literature, which *Eve's Bayou* invokes, validates observations made by Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark*, which theorizes that a Black presence haunts the white American literary tradition, conjured by a system of semiotic blackness that connects racialized Blackness to all the symbols and uncanny sensations that animate the Gothic. In other words, night and darkness and evil and the unseen, all gesture, intentionally or not, to the potential for horror and are inextricably entangled in racialized language.

Moreover, Blackness is principally bound to the idea of subjectivity through the history of slavery ('note,' Miller writes, 'for example, the contemporary mid-century discourse of "white slavery"').³²¹ Put bluntly, Blackness already communicates captivity. The manor and its Black residents are locked in a traumatic dialogue of imprisonment. With the Black presence actualized within the ancestral antebellum house, a remnant of white colonial exploits, this historical captivity reveals itself as ongoing, perhaps inescapable. Ruth D. Weston points out that the American South is particularly haunted by ghosts, religion, and the Confederate dead.³²² Maisha

³¹⁸ Melissa Edmundson, *Women's Colonial Gothic Writing, 1850-1930: Haunted Empire* (Clemson: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 212.

³¹⁹ Penny Russell, 'In Search of Woman's Place: An Historical Survey of Gender and Space in Nineteenth Century Australia,' in *Australasian Historical Archaeology*, 11 (1993), pp. 28 - 32 (p. 30) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/i29544323>> [accessed 12 Oct 2019]

³²⁰ Meredith Miller, 'I Don't Want to Be a [White] Girl': Gender, Race and Resistance in the Southern Gothic' in *The Female Gothic: New Directions* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 133 - 151 (p. 138).

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Ruth D. Weston, *Gothic Traditions and Narrative Techniques in the Fiction of Eudora Welty* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994), p. 3-4.

Wester goes even further: ‘The entirety of the South proves a wild and ruined “home” that hints at a terrible past of sexual violation, gross abuses of authority, and criminal disenfranchisement, much like the haunted houses of the traditional gothic.’³²³ This bond between the house and its Black heirs indicates that regardless of the temporal distance between the era of slavery and the present, its consequences linger, for the Black characters are continually trapped within the white supremacist project emblematised by the manor.

I have argued that the specter of the Black feminine generally haunts American Gothic fictions, perceptible in the aforementioned semiotic blackness that fuels the genre and the central connections between captivity and Blackness. But with the Black characters here explicitly realized, Jean-Paul Batiste, their white ancestor, becomes the haunting, unseen presence, relegated to the shadows, but ever present. Unlike Matriarch Eve, he never appears on screen, but the house that represents white empire and colonial occupation, the white middle-class femininity that Roz feigns to accommodate the space, the repetition of sexual abuse - the history of which, as Lisa B. Thompson formerly notes, ‘haunts all black women’³²⁴ - announce his legacy. If Rebecca is ultimately empowered by those who keep her memory alive - Maxim, who hates her; the new Mrs de Winter, who is hopelessly jealous of her; and Mrs. Danvers, obsessed with her - Jean-Paul relies on no such passions. This is his power. Barely more than a footnote in the story of Eve, nonetheless, traces of his dominion surround his progeny and influence their lives, from their wealth to the patriarchal bonds they replicate.

Eve’s Bayou is fundamentally the tale of a family’s patriarchal entrapment. Women’s complicated relationship to motherhood and sexuality are essential to the Female Gothic, but Lemmons elaborates where the afterlife of slavery materially shapes these anxieties for Black women. Again, we see the Gothic’s innate capacity to subvert itself. The conventions that historically rendered the racialized grotesque, become the same strategies that define their interiority without submitting them to an Othering lens. The threat Louis presents is linked not to dominant racial tropes about his sexuality, but to human frailty and, symbolically, his white ancestor, who signifies the violent origins of their family and the nation. The tense looking relations between Roz and Cisely expose the gendered images that confine them both, and indeed, those gender constructs are steeped in the inherent whiteness of ‘womanhood.’ Although the family is matriarchal and the men largely absent, the gendered and patriarchal social order prevails. Race is not muted, but it is also not weaponized against them. Instead, it becomes the pathway to grappling with the full complexity of these characters. Horror is born of the white supremacist project that haunts them. Lemmons uses the vital instruments of the Gothic to reflect back

³²³ Maisha L. Wester, *African American Gothic: Screams from Shadowed Places* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 109.

³²⁴ Thompson, p. 291.

on its racial history and foremost apprehensions. If the texts examined in chapter 2 generally betray a fear of Black sexuality, miscegenation, and the hollowness of what it means to be white, then *Eve's Bayou* considers the consequences of internalizing that gaze and its values, even in the absence of the white look that racializes. The house, then, stands in for that objectifying gaze that establishes difference or, more aptly, their duality as a Black family in this colonial/American context. The house classically functions as a symbol of confinement, one that does not simply convey female captivity, but a racial and psychological ensnarement that dooms the Black family to alienation from themselves and each other. Their performance of whiteness, the nuclear family structure that constitutes an ideal of womanhood that is unattainable and exploitable, transforms the Gothic architecture into a space where Lemmons can interrogate the psychological defenses that emerge out of the peculiar, innate 'two-ness' Du Bois described, from the perspective of the women he broadly overlooked.

Mother/Nature

If the manor in the film preserves literary tradition as an artifact of the European enterprise to 'civilize' and thus promises to constrain Jean-Paul's Black female descendants, then the land, in spite of its original dispossession (or perhaps because of it), has the opposite effect symbolically: the land acts as Matriarch Eve incarnate, a nurturing terrain to which her heirs are profoundly bonded. Like the land, this Eve, too, is displaced, stolen, appropriated. She (the land) anchors her scion to their origins and the nation that reproduced them.

In the American Gothic, Sharon Rose Yang and Kathleen Healey note, 'landscapes play a central role in this critique of the power structures of white society.'³²⁵ The pastoral is loaded with pointed political subtext, for the land radiates with the history of the uprooting non-white and indigenous peoples. From the opening sequence, the film marks the affinity between the 'first' Eve and the bayou that bears her name. As young Eve recounts the origins of the town in voiceover, her ancestor Eve, statuesque with a turban piled high on her head, is seen in black-and-white, framed against the sugarcane fields. The camera pans over the bayou as Eve announces her ancestry - 'We are the descendants of Eve and Jean-Paul Batiste' - and her ancestor, half camouflaged by the cypress trees, points down the bayou. Suddenly color floods the screen and a grand white mansion comes into view. With these gestures, the film distances the matriarch from the antebellum-style manor where her heirs now reside. Instead, she is unified with the earth. Through their communication with the Louisiana landscape, the film reveals her daughters' kinship with her. Both Mozelle's and Eve's clairvoyant

³²⁵ Sharon Rose Yang and Kathleen Healey, 'Introduction,' in *Gothic Landscapes: Changing Eras, Changing Cultures, Changing Anxieties* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 1 - 18 (p. 9).

visions are reflected upon the water or framed by the trees; young Eve seeks solace in the thick sprawling arms of an oak tree after her father's death, and she buries the only evidence of Louis and Cisely's kiss - Louis's letter to Mozelle - in the swampy waters of the bayou. Kara Keeling locates the death of Louis's masculinist regime in this act that she explicitly connects with nature: 'When, at the end of the film, Eve and Cisely push their father's



Figure 3.4: Eve and Mozelle find refuge in the land named for and symbolically representative of their ancestor, Eve. *Eve's Bayou* (Lemmons, 1997).

handwritten version of what happened the night of the storm into the engulfing, mysterious waters of the swamp, it is clear that the old order of the Batistes, rationalized by their father's written word, has been overthrown in favor of the enigmatic, undecidable, irrational visions available to the viewer and to Eve.³²⁶ Keeling vividly equates the bayou water, Eve's bayou, with the psychic visions we already know to be inherited from Matriarch Eve by her descendants. Moreover, the distinction between the written word, or the 'rational' material world, and the ephemeral, cannot be overstated. Louis, aligned with the 'old order,' delivers a hegemonic performance of history-making. He commits his account of the kiss to the page, a format that has traditionally garnered more credence than the oral history practiced by Black and indigenous peoples.

Mysteriously, when Eve telepathically attempts to 'read' what happened between Louis and Cisely by touching her sister's hands, she finds the memory fragmented and unclear. The camera obscures the lower halves

³²⁶ Kara Keeling, *The Witch's Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 154.

of Cisely and Louis's faces, emphasizing their eyes - two perspectives - and shows them moving to kiss each other, then the slap before the vision abruptly ends. 'I don't know what happened,' Cisely sobs as her sister holds her. The audience knows that in the days after their kiss, Cisely retreated into a long silence. It seems as if, during that period before she eventually tells Eve her version of events, Cisely has forgotten or somehow 'lost' the truth before Eve can psychically access it. We also know that Cisely's silent period is a time of great invisibility for her, when she aims to make herself Roz's 'mirror' with disastrous consequences. Not seen and furthermore silenced, Cisely's history, not unlike Irena's in *The Curse of the Cat People*, is forever lost.

The Female Gothic aptly demonstrates what is at stake when Black women are so violently repressed: authorship over their own stories and the chance to define themselves. Audre Lorde writes, 'Within this country where racial difference creates a...distortion of vision, Black women have on one hand always been highly visible, and so, have been rendered invisible through the depersonalization of racism.'³²⁷ Throughout this project I have examined the paradox of this condition, the way Black women are all at once hypervisible and yet invisible.



Figure 3.5: Cisely and Eve stand together on the bayou in solidarity with each other in *Eve's Bayou* (Lemmons, 1997).

Although that invisibility does not always equate to powerlessness, it does frequently denote displacement and loss, of history or of home. Lorde elaborates, 'In the cause of silence, each of us draws the face of her own fear - fear of contempt, of censure...of annihilation. But most of all, I think, we fear the visibility

³²⁷ Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Trumansburg: Crossing Press, 1984), p. 30.

without which we cannot truly live.³²⁸ While Lorde clearly speaks to something more political - overcoming silence as a psychological defense to build action and language as resistance - her words apply here because, as we have seen in *Ouanga* (1936) and *The Skeleton Key* (2005), the Black body made visible often comes under assault. Cisely, as a young Black girl, whose mother's distracted gaze gives her no recognition, finds emotional and physical violence upon moving into the 'seen' realm, the era where she mirrors her mother. Her silence in response can be read as the pursuit of invisibility. But as Lorde asserts, visibility or, language as resistance, is necessary to truly live. Louis may or may not have rewritten the truth, but when the girls bury his letter in the swamp named after their matriarch, they embrace her legacy, her way of processing truth and the past, which directly opposes their father's, for she personifies oral storytelling, emotional ambiguity, the spiritual and the unknown.

The water plays no small part in communicating the changeable, tempestuous, and ultimately healing qualities introduced by the divine realm of their matriarch. Although, their ancestor belongs to the celestial world, she is not unseen. Not only does she appear in the film's opening sequence, her name and legacy survives in her young descendant and the town. She bridges the narrative's material and spiritual worlds. Jane Caputi argues that 'the waters are not only the home of the goddess; they also are her magic mirror, serving as a portal between the worlds of the numinous and the mundane.'³²⁹ The film's final shot shows Eve and Cisely holding hands between twin trees, visually positioned like the children standing beneath them (Fig.3.5). The camera pulls back to reveal they stand on a strip of land overlooking a vast body of water, 'the ordinary world on top, and its reflection mirrored below.'³³⁰ Perched on the banks of the bayou, aligned with her sister and their matrilineal ancestry, Cisely finally receives the reflection and feminine solidarity she has been missing. The 'magic mirror' Caputi describes acts as the Winnicottian mirror, performing the mother's role by literally reflecting them (in the water) and responding to their gestures (the intertwined trees mirroring the children holding hands).

Mary Ayers explains the mother 'facilitates or makes possible the infant's realization of inherited potentials through her empathic reflections of her infant.'³³¹ During this concluding scene, the adult Eve's voiceover returns: 'Like others before me, I have the gift of sight...memory is a selection of images...Each image is

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Jane Caputi, *Goddesses and Monsters: Women, Myth, Power, and Popular Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), p. 340.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Mary Ayers, *Mother-Infant Attachment and Psychoanalysis: The Eyes of Shame* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2003), p. 63.

like a thread; each thread woven together to make a tapestry of intricate texture. And the tapestry tells a story. And the story is our past.' Eve announces her family legacy: like her clairvoyance, passed down through generations, so, too, is the story - the history - that unites them. The two sisters sandwiched between the water and land images the spectral and literal connection between them, the land, and their heritage. Moreover, this shot illustrates the Batistes' inherited liminal condition, racially and supernaturally, which allows them to straddle two worlds and multiple temporalities. The sisters situate themselves in the symbolic likeness of their ancestor as mediator between realms and heirs to this mystical memory-making. Their father's tale lost to the swamp, the sisters elevate themselves from mere players in this story to authors, akin to their psychic ancestor.

The Southern landscape is often portrayed lavishly in cinema, with a glossy or halcyon gaze that frequently romanticizes the South, all the while obscuring the historical horrors that unfolded there. Alternatively, some films have used this conventional portrait of beauty to arbitrate uglier horrors thinly veiled by its aesthetically glamorous surface. Tarshia Stanley notes how the landscape of *Eve's Bayou* emerges in the film as a character in its own right:

The green world where Eve thrives is a catalyst for her development and links her to the past....Numerous scenes depict her walking alone along country roads, walking alone at night, and having overall freedom to roam the landscape. When Eve takes Cisely's hands at the end of the story to determine what really happened between Cisely and their father, her vision, too, is embedded in the landscape. The moss hanging from the great cypress trees parts and lets Eve into her sister's memory.³³²

The Batistes continually turn to nature for comfort or to grieve. Not only does Matriarch Eve, expressed by nature, respond to their gestures, but the Louisiana wetland, equal parts foreboding and seductive, begins to echo its inhabitants. 'The green world' does allow for Eve's maturation; she exudes a sense of belonging there and that security fosters her growth. As Stanley observes, Eve possesses and frequently exercises her rapport with the land, but this environment also begins to reflect her character and even visually manifests as part of her id. Naturally, Eve is fully at ease in the 'green' world with its 'green' things (moss and trees), representing youth and growth, but also guilt and jealousy.

By comparison, Elzora, the conjure woman Eve pays to 'kill' her father, lives on the outskirts of the community, surrounded by the swamp, 'a classic border of outsiderhood and threat,'³³³ according to theorist D.

³³² Tarshia Stanley, 'The Three Faces in Eve's Bayou: Recalling the Conjure Woman in Contemporary Black Cinema' in *Folklore/Cinema: Popular Film as Vernacular Culture* ed. by Sharon R. Sherman and Mikel J. Koven (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2007), pp. 149-165, (pp. 159 - 160).

³³³ Ibid.

Soyini Madison. Narratively, these boundaries become especially interesting because, if historically the project of racial segregation has been one of space - regulating and limiting the spaces Black citizens had access to, and so confining them spatially, economically, financially - then the affinity between the Batistes and the land further affirms their class flexibility. Stanley continues, 'Eve occupies the beautiful green space of the bayou, while Elzora inhabits the dark, foreboding, and dangerous marshland. Unlike Mozelle's elegant home, Elzora's "office" is a tiny rundown shack perched precariously on the stagnant waters of the swamp.'³³⁴ The land operates as an extension of the Batiste family power, supernatural and socioeconomic. Like the 'exotic,' racialized islands of early zombie films explored in the previous chapter - *White Zombie* (1932), *Ouanga* (1936), and *I Walked With a Zombie* (1943) - in part, nature in *Eve's Bayou* represents the captive, expropriated Black feminine. But unlike those older films, Lemmons's portrait confronts the complicated context of the land, its original theft, and how it is structurally compelled to replicate class divisions due to the nature of wealth. Elzora - childless, unmarried, middle-aged - 'a purposeful stock type,'³³⁵ must occupy the shadowlands because she embodies the rejection of access and participation in this system altogether. That said, I would resist Madison and Stanley's conceptions of Elzora's environment as 'dark' or 'dangerous' or 'threatening.' When young Eve first accompanies Elzora to her home, the moss-covered trees and viridescent waters very much resemble the bayou on which Eve's own ancestral house sits, and where she and her brother Poe often play together. The swamp may be a 'classic border of outsiderhood and threat,' as Madison argues, but the bayou has much in common with the swamp, and both spaces can be as beautiful as they are treacherous. Elzora is mainly relegated to the market square, where she works as a fortune teller, and to the border, but, arguably, her surroundings are no less scenic or alluring. This outsider character is typical of the Gothic and from Eve's perspective she clearly falls into the 'witch' category. But this geographical arrangement takes on a different context in the Black Female Gothic mode.

The land does not adopt moral qualities mapped onto a racial binary. Because all the women in Eve's life are Black, what distinguishes them is their approach to a world that seeks to confine them. Their respective environments reflect them and their interiority. Roz lives in a towering colonial house that conveys her wealth, but otherwise stifles her independence and power. Mozelle lives in a more modest structure, fenced in by shrubbery and partially obscured by low hanging branches, which indicates her emotional remoteness and the walls between her (as a psychic and thrice widowed woman) and her family/the community. The attributes that make Elzora's habitat 'precarious' and 'dangerous' could more neutrally be described as lush and marshy. Her

³³⁴ Stanley, p. 160.

³³⁵ Ibid.

home seems perilous because she is surrounded by swampland and clearly the foundation of these structures - the bridge and the house itself - are underwater. But this also suggests that, like Matriarch Eve, Elzora represents the same mystical hybridity between the material and spiritual realms: the divine unknown. She is certainly separated from other characters by class, but she also remains a somewhat morally inscrutable figure. Her role in Louis's death is debatable, because before Eve goes to her with her deadly request, she runs into Matty's husband, Lenny Meraux, and hints that her father and Matty are having an affair. It is arguably this revelation, registered painfully on Lenny's face, that leads to Louis's murder. Furthermore, Elzora repeatedly attempts to dissuade Eve from her decision. 'I will give you something to protect you and your family from this person,' she initially suggests. But Eve insists stubbornly, 'I want him dead!' Again, Elzora presses the child: 'For certain? You are sure? People have a way of dying at their own speed...' More than anything, Elzora functions as an ambiguous, malleable force, an avatar and mirror to Eve's own vengeful nature, which I will explore more deeply when I analyze how the film portrays the conjure woman.

Traditionally, nature in the Gothic form is an essential source of the sublime, often characterized by awe or astonishment, although there exist many varied conceptions of the sublime. Edmund Burke famously defined terror as the 'ruling principle'³³⁶ of the sublime, more specifically a terror that illuminates human limits, usually imaged against nature. These Gothic depictions are not restricted to the natural landscape, but invoke a 'delightful' sense of dread that arises from those objects which indicate a boundlessness beyond what humans can process. Fred Botting writes, '[t]he terror was akin to the sense of wonderment and awe accompanying religious experience. Sublimity offered intimations of a great, if not divine, power.'³³⁷ For Burke, the sensation stirred by the sublime had its roots in an exciting (in other words, safe) proximity to threat of pain and death.³³⁸ Indeed, being overwhelmed and overpowered is very closely linked to being reduced to nothingness, not unlike the repeatedly disavowed Black feminine in cinema. David Morris persuasively concludes that the Gothic sublime, 'by releasing into fiction images and desires long suppressed, deeply hidden, forced into silence - greatly intensifies the dangers of an uncontrollable release from restraint...'³³⁹ Much of the horror explored in this thesis relies upon both the threat of being reduced to nothing - negated, silenced, made invisible - and release from

³³⁶ Edmund Burke, 'A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful, Part I, Section VII' <https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=GsjRwh-O-UC&printsec=frontcover&dq=burke+sublime&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiz5_z9nmAhUQjFwKHcv8C9YQuwUITzAF#v=onepage&q=astonishment&f=false> [accessed 20 Dec 2019]

³³⁷ Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 39.

³³⁸ Burke.

³³⁹ David B. Morris, "Gothic Sublimity," *New Literary History*, 16. 2 , The Sublime and the Beautiful: Reconsiderations (1985), pp. 299–319, (p. 306), <www.jstor.org/stable/468749>

control. Certainly, Irena's story in *Cat People* exemplifies this, her traumatic self-negation to her chaotic surrender.

The sublime is consistently a psychological affair and an aesthetic form that makes fear palatable, even pleasing. Inspired by Freud's descriptions of the uncanny, Morris attributes the power of the sublime to the 'return of the repressed,' those 'long suppressed, deeply hidden' desires that threaten to break free. He explains that for Freud, 'the uncanny derives its terror not from something external, alien, or unknown but - on the contrary - from something strangely familiar which defeats our efforts to separate ourselves from it.'³⁴⁰ In other words, the uncanny reveals the self's ultimate powerlessness, but its aestheticization - the 'delightful sense of dread' or the 'wonderment and awe' Botting describes - renders it an ambivalent art, equally capable of producing terror and enjoyment. In this pleasure audiences can absorb the instinctive connections between fear and desire that may reveal powerful lessons about the human condition.

For Freud, the epitome of the *unheimlich*, the most uncanny place of all, is the former home of all human beings: the womb.³⁴¹ Horror famously and quintessentially presents the uncanny as the symbolic womb: the haunted house, room, or cellar.³⁴² But in *Eve's Bayou*, the uncanny maternal is fundamentally disembodied and uncontainable; she is, I have argued, found in nature instead, but she also resurfaces through her female progeny. Natural water metaphorically functions as the Winnicottian mirror, but Matriarch Eve imparts a doubled gaze in which her descendants literally experience the repressed past (as psychic visions), which simultaneously leads them back to her, that familiar 'home,' their first mother, and expressed through nature.

As formerly noted, the uncanny manifests as a constant intrusion (haunting) of the traumatic past in its doubling, its repetition, the familiarity or recognition of something long disavowed. Thus, the double is the most classic expression of the uncanny. In the following section, I will expand on how Eve's three doppelgängers rescue the captive Black feminine as she has appeared in previous cases. For now, I want to stress that Eve's heiresses are not simply reflected by her through the landscape that portrays and develops their emotional state, they also inherit her gaze, her way of looking, which transcends the material world. Their bodies become the 'haunted houses,' spectrally possessed by her. Where Female Gothic heroines traditionally roam the foreboding dungeons in an effort to confront and separate themselves from an all-consuming 'maternal blackness,'³⁴³

³⁴⁰ Morris, p. 307.

³⁴¹ Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny' in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth Press, 1948), p. 245.

³⁴² Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 55.

³⁴³ Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Dell, 1966), p. 132.

Matriarch Eve is principally located in the psyche, most specifically the gaze. Her daughters already understand themselves to be powerfully linked to her. Their experience of her, then, is more akin to Amy's relationships with her racialized 'Other' mothers in *Curse of the Cat People*, where they - that is, Irena and Julia - create an environment for her to play or be creative. Likewise Matriarch Eve grants similarly conducive conditions for her descendants.

Recall that, for Winnicott, playing/creativity happens in the transitional space, 'an intermediate area of "experiencing" between inner and outer realities,'³⁴⁴ ushered by the mother. Significantly, between their imagination and the outside world, the child begins a passage from dependence to separation to individuation.³⁴⁵ Much like the classic Female Gothic journey to separate from the haunting maternal, the transitional space, as theorist Annette Kuhn notes, 'involves an engagement with boundaries that is full of potential pitfalls: on the one hand the risk of containment and compliance...on the other that of boundlessness, and failure to engage with outer reality.'³⁴⁶ Or in Female Gothic terms, as Diana Wallace argues, 'the heroine must either resume a quiescent role or be destroyed,'³⁴⁷ and often at the expense of the mother's story.³⁴⁸ But unlike Irena and Julia, both of whom become racialized transitional phenomena that bridges Amy's admittedly more complex reconciliation with her father, Matriarch Eve both preserves her legacy - her story and her name, passed down by her descendants - and, as the 'good enough mother,' gives her daughters an environment to explore their own creativity. More plainly, her gift of clairvoyance becomes the channel through which Eve and Mozelle are connected to her, but also establish their own (visual) language separate from her.

Cinematically, their prophetic visions are stylized according to their respective natures. Eve's visions possess an unrefined, childlike quality compared to the sweeping, graceful sophistication of Mozelle's. For example, after the opening party scene, Eve dreams of her uncle Harry's death before the audience sees it happen. The transitions are abrupt, the images and sounds distracted and incongruous, all the while strikingly visceral. Her monochromatic dream is noticeably sonically driven: the clock gong, a spinning coin (given to Eve by Harry), and broken dialogue. The audience hears a disembodied woman's voice blurred and incomplete:

³⁴⁴ Teresa Dalley, Gabrielle Rifkind, and Kim Terry, *Three Voices of Art Therapy (Psychology Revivals): Image, client, therapist* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 12.

³⁴⁵ Annette Kuhn, 'Cinematic Experience, Film Space, and the Child's World,' *Revue Canadienne D'Études Cinématographiques / Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, 19. 2 (2010), pp. 82–98 (p. 85) <www.jstor.org/stable/24411822> [accessed 18 Dec 2020].

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ Diana Wallace, "A Woman's Place," in *Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. by Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), pp. 74 - 90 (p. 80).

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

'So-so-sorry...Harry...why the Lord sees fit...' The next day at her aunt's house, she hears these words in context when one of Mozelle's clients says, 'I'm so sorry about Harry, Mozelle. I don't know why the Lord sees fit...' It is here, when Mozelle begins her 'psychic counseling', that the audience can observe the distinctions between their premonitions. Mozelle's visions are smooth, connected, and focused. We first see a man's balled fist, before the camera slowly rolls back to reveal his arm as he gives himself an injection. The needle falls to the ground of the bathroom where he sits and the audience can hear ambulance sirens blaring in the background. 'He is alive, Hilary,' Mozelle says calmly, opening her eyes. 'You'll find him in Detroit at St Michael's hospital next Tuesday.' Mozelle is a powerful medium whose visions appear to her in precise, vivid detail. But importantly, both her visions and her niece's are framed by the natural environment. Mozelle's vision of her client's drug-addicted son opens with a black-and-white panning shot of the bayou waters, the cypress trees reflected there upside down. The same opening shot recurs when she 'counsels' another client on the location of his wife. Interestingly, Eve's dream of Harry's death does not feature the landscape at all; but by the film's conclusion, when she tries to access Cisely's memories, her vision begins with a brief tracking shot through the leaves of a willow tree, sealing Eve's maturation as an heir to her ancestor's supernatural legacy (emphasized through the land) and the development of her psychic 'language,' as her premonition is framed by the trees, rather than the water, as Mozelle's are.

Kathleen Brogan argues that contemporary African-American writers filter Gothic conventions through 'African folklore,' historically characterized by 'belief in ancestor spirits.'³⁴⁹ We know that the female ghost, especially the doubled female ghost, seeks to restore silenced female history, and she furthermore signals - vividly seen, for example, in *The Curse of the Cat People* - the way the family institution is especially antagonistic (even deadly) to its daughters. This bears out in *Eve's Bayou*, where Cisely is abused and young Eve, broadly overlooked by her two parents, can only find understanding in her aunt Mozelle, whom Louis dismisses as 'not unfamiliar with the inside of a mental hospital.' But unlike the typical Gothic ghost narrative, including the cases explored in the last chapter, their ancestor Eve, as a spirit, does not articulate disempowerment or silence (though she never speaks); instead, she becomes a harbinger of unseen modalities of power, a new way of speaking and communicating that usurps the dominant symbolic order.

Peggy Dunn Bailey shrewdly observes that the Southern Gothic 'is fueled by the need to explain and/or understand foundational trauma, the violation or loss of that which is essential to identity and survival but often

³⁴⁹ Kathleen Brogan, 'American Stories of Cultural Haunting: Tales of Heirs and Ethnographers,' *College English*, 57. 2 (1995), pp. 149–165 (p. 150) <www.jstor.org/stable/378807> [accessed 1 Oct 2020].

irretrievable.³⁵⁰ As so many cases analyzed in this thesis have proven, the Gothic is centrally preoccupied with matters of blood, inheritance, and traumatic origins, which must be confronted before they inevitably destroy the heroine. Although previous films generally doomed racialized women to the shadows or death, the Batistes' link to their divine ancestor empowers them, economically and supernaturally. Mozelle and Eve in particular have a vital relationship with 'the mirror,' which is to say that they are especially connected to the 'mirror' as symbolized by their ancestor. She reflects them and they reflect her, the ideal Winnicottian bond, for they possess the same 'mirror' which affords them access to other worlds. This rapport is especially present through Mozelle, constantly on the precipice of the spirit world and who, when she stands before an actual mirror, offers the audience a view into its depths.

The Gothic mirror can often be a portal to the underworld or hell³⁵¹ - e.g. *Candyman* (1992) - but as Kinitra D. Brooks, Alexis McGee and Stephanie Schoellman point out, 'the act of haunting provides a methodology of resistance and transformation for Black women in horror.'³⁵² For these theorists that means that hauntings are not intrinsically negative and can force the haunted to face the oppressions and repressions these ghosts embody, restoring and transforming both parties. Applied to Lemmon's film, Eve and Mozelle function as animated Gothic mirrors who become vessels for unseen, otherworldly realms, where the divisions between past and present collapse. Put another way, their ancestor essentially passes on to them a 'language' with which to communicate with the living and dead, the material and the spiritual. If, as Winnicott states, the maternal gaze becomes a mirror for the child, in this film that gaze/mirror is reproduced to fortify these otherwise vulnerable characters. Matriarch Eve is the 'good enough mother' whose children go on to develop formidable reservoirs of empathy and resistance through the language of looking relations.

Eve's Bayou is a ghost story. Intriguingly, it is the men, not the women, who are most endangered. Unlike films previously encountered in this project, the Batiste women seem doomed to survive them. But their most enduring gift lies in their relation to mystery. Like their ancestor, Eve and Mozelle possess the capacity to marshal typically hidden or repressed stories, stories that become history. They embrace their heritage as conjure women, the ultimate griot: historian, storyteller, and archivist of African culture and memory.

³⁵⁰ Peggy Dunn Bailey, 'Female Gothic Fiction, Grotesque Realities, and *Bastard Out of Carolina*: Dorothy Allison Revises the Southern Gothic,' *The Mississippi Quarterly*, 63.2 (2010), pp. 269–290 (p. 271).

³⁵¹ David Hawkvale, *Touchstones of Gothic Horror: A Film Genealogy of Eleven Motifs and Images* (Jefferson: McFarland and Co., 2010), p. 128.

³⁵² Kinitra D. Brooks, Alexis McGee and Stephanie Schoellman, Speculative Sankofarration: Haunting Black Women in Contemporary Horror Fiction," *Obsidian*, 42. ½ (2016), pp. 237–248 (p. 239) <www.jstor.org/stable/44489515> [accessed 1 Oct 2020]

The Seventh Veil

Thus far, I have considered how the house emblematizes white patriarchy in the lives of its Black female residents, while the disembodied feminine encapsulated by their ancestor provides an alternative power structure. The bayou so named for the Batiste matriarch operates literally and supernaturally as a ‘transitional space’ where, as outlined by Winnicott, the child’s needs are reliably met and they gain ego strength,³⁵³ creating healthy conditions for individuation and creativity. Now, I want to examine how young Eve also develops this ‘ego strength’ through the spectatorship dynamics modeled by the film’s other conjure women Mozelle and Elzora.

As previously noted, the conjure woman both safeguards and creates history through memory.³⁵⁴ In fact, the creative works of Black women authors have long been associated with this figure. In *Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction and Literary Tradition* (1985), Marjorie Pryse and Hortense Spillers illustrate how African-American women writers frequently perform the role of the conjurer in their fiction, for ‘part of the conjure woman’s power is her ability to tell stories.’³⁵⁵ Zora Neale Hurston’s influential auto-ethnographic collection of Black folklore, *Mules and Men* (1935), includes accounts of conjure practices and positions Hurston herself in the spirit of the conjure woman. Indeed, Hurston may well be the first Black woman to have published horror.³⁵⁶ In *Spirituality as Ideology in Black Women’s Film and Literature* (2005), Judylyn Ryan asserts that spirituality essentially defines the composition of Black women artists’ portrait of empowerment, an empowerment that critically relied upon pilgrimage to the past, often the slave past.³⁵⁷ Kameelah L. Martin significantly builds on this scholarship by charting the literary expressions of the conjure woman in African-American fiction, reflecting upon her symbiotic relationship with the blues, and reevaluating her status in American mainstream culture.

Revisiting and restoring unmarked history has been of chief concern for storytellers within African diasporic literature. As I have pointed out, ghost narratives especially do this work, using the spirit figure to announce violent absences and insisting the living name their silenced histories. The conjure woman, however,

³⁵³ Petra Bueskins, *Mothering and Psychoanalysis: Clinical, Sociological and Feminist Perspectives* (Bradford: Demeter Press, 2014), p. 12.

³⁵⁴ Stanley, p. 149.

³⁵⁵ *Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction, and Literary Tradition*, ed. by Marjorie Pryse and Hortense J. Spillers (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), p. 14.

³⁵⁶ Brooks, McGee, and Schoellman, p. 246.

³⁵⁷ Judylyn Ryan, *Spirituality as Ideology in Black Women’s Film and Literature* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), p. 4.

needs no such help. Although she is deeply connected to the spirit world, she is the storied icon through which the survival and endurance of Black American communities has often been translated. She becomes the linchpin between the ancestors (the spirit world) and their descendants, and thus, articulates how the preservation of a shared past and lore sustains a community/family and Black Americans more broadly. The stories Lemmons's characters exchange become their family's legacy. If Black American life is foundationally constituted by the 'two-ness' Du Bois described, we find that the conjure woman powerfully personifies his conceptions of double-consciousness and 'the veil.'

Early in *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois describes Black Americans as 'a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world— a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world.'³⁵⁸ In this passage, with the phrase 'seventh son,' Du Bois alludes to Judeo-Christian idioms and African American folk belief.³⁵⁹ For, 'according to the folklore, a seventh son may see ghosts,' Robert Gooding-Williams explains, 'while a child born with a caul (a veil-like membrane that sometimes covers the head at birth) will enjoy a second sight (for he is "double-sighted") that lets him see ghosts as well as the future.'³⁶⁰ So the veiled child is doubly gifted, not only seeing ghosts, but also having clairvoyance. It is interesting that Du Bois encapsulates all Black Americans under 'son,' considering the veil is an historically gendered symbol with rich implications, particularly in the Gothic. In general, the Du Boisian veil has been interpreted away from these supernatural connotations, although Du Bois gives equal weight to psychological, social, and spiritual matters throughout his argument. Indeed, the veil takes on different meanings at different points in the text, but for now I want to stick with these symbolic readings.

In Lemmons's film, the conjure woman, a specifically racialized and gendered figure who represents duality and storytelling, also manages to embody the central themes that drive Du Bois's thesis. She is, as Du Bois argues all Black Americans are on some level, supernaturally double-sighted. She is innately veiled. Of course, there exist conjure men, but *Eve's Bayou* emphasizes this magic quite literally through a feminine lens. Between Lemmons and her cinematographer Amy Vincent, the film privileges female spectatorship and Black women's spectatorship specifically. Before I examine these intricate looking dynamics, I want to delve into the characterizations of Eve, Mozelle, and Elzora. Each in their own way demonstrates how significant the gaze is to

³⁵⁸ *Souls of Black Folks*, p. 1.

³⁵⁹ Michael Coyle, 'Pops, Pygmies, and Pentecostal Fires: Sanders and Thomas's "The Creator Has a Master Plan" in *Black Music, Black Poetry: Blues and Jazz's Impact on African American Versification*', ed. by Gordon E. Thompson (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 163 - 178 (174).

³⁶⁰ Robert Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois: Afro-Modern Political Thought in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 78.

women's empowerment. Furthermore, Du Bois's theories about the veil and double-consciousness illuminate certain dimensions of the Black female experience that so rarely find themselves communicated on screen.

Early on, the audience learns Eve has 'second sight.' At ten-years-old, she is able to divine the past and vividly predict future events, 'like others before me,' as the adult Eve narrates. The film carefully delineates the parameters within which its characters' premonition powers exist. Mozelle repeatedly acknowledges that, while she can read the futures of others quite clearly, she remains woefully blind to her own life and future; Eve's first lesson in mystery. Sure enough, it is Eve who foresees her uncle Harry's death in a dream, not Mozelle. In the same vein (another mirror/image reversal), Mozelle will have a cryptic vision of her brother's murder, which Eve will witness but never psychically foresees.

Two things become increasingly clear about the psychic connection that bonds Mozelle and Eve. First, the second sight is positioned here as genealogical, a blood inheritance. From the first Eve to Mozelle, the Batiste women bear magical qualities which are passed down through the generations, an affinity that is accentuated physically to highlight that biological relationship. Upon their introduction, Eve and Mozelle look strikingly similar for niece and aunt: both have long curly red hair, round faces, and tawny complexions. Secondly, and somewhat paradoxically, their gift also seems to isolate them within that same family. Louis dismisses his sister's 'talents' openly in front of his children: 'That fortune-telling is just something we let her do to keep her busy...I love my sister, but she is not unfamiliar with the inside of a mental hospital.' While clairvoyance may be acknowledged among the Batistes, it is not uniformly embraced. As empaths, their gifts carry with them a lonely weight. Morgan's performance as Mozelle carries a compelling sense of gravitas and melancholy; her line delivery is slow and measured, with the air of someone always carefully considering her words, as a storyteller would. Equally discernible in Tamera Tunie's voiceover work as the adult Eve is a similar, ethereal heaviness that hints at the kind of woman Eve will become, one marked not just by tragedy and guilt, but honed by an otherworldly responsibility.

Stanley contends that Lemmons's film breaks the conjure woman into pieces, 'like a fractured mind.'³⁶¹ This description is not very different from Du Bois's own vision of double-consciousness, as an essentially psychological split. David H. Brown explains that '(c)onjure was used within the "slave quarters" and later free communities as a system of alternative medical care, a mechanism of social control by elders, and as an effective mode of settling scores, effecting change in everyday situations, and satisfying ambitions.'³⁶² While Eve's ability

³⁶¹ Stanley, p. 154.

³⁶² David H. Brown, 'Conjure/Doctors: An Exploration of a Black Discourse in America, Antebellum to 1940,' *Folklore Forum* 23.2 (1990), pp. 3 - 46 (p. 4).

affords her a deep and especially unique bond with her aunt - who, as someone who employs her 'gifts' responsibly and judiciously, acts as both mentor and model for Eve - the young child is also drawn instinctively to the vengeful aspect of her role, embodied by Mozelle's rival, an altogether different kind of conjure woman: Elzora.

Elzora and Mozelle are purposefully positioned as opposites, though they both occupy much the same space in the town. Mozelle primarily uses telepathy to assist her clientele with all manner of, typically, domestic troubles: locating lost relatives and even prescribing charms to sustain clients amid financial ruin. Elzora performs a much cruder version of this, set up at a booth in the town market where she 'tells fortunes' for one dollar. In fact, when Roz and Mozelle visit the market, Roz accuses her sister-in-law of 'professional jealousy' after she bitterly disparages Elzora. Like Roz, Mozelle is elegant and glamorous, always donning form-fitting black dresses (except in the opening scene where she wears white), which signal her constant state of mourning. Elzora incorporates these colors, too. In the marketplace, she wears her face painted white with a black dot between her eyebrows. Her stringy gray hair is sometimes concealed by a turban or straw hat, and she wears loose fitting, functional dresses. Elzora courts an eerie, remote and somewhat conventional 'witch' persona. She prides herself on the fear she invokes in Eve and the local children. When Eve visits her at night, an initially startled



Figure 3.6: Elzora's mask both makes her a mirror/reversed image of Mozelle who uses the same colors in *Eve's Bayou* (Lemmons, 1997).

Elzora snaps, 'Get off my property before I cook you and eat you!' Upon recognizing Eve, she explains she thought the girl was one of the town children who bother her. That said, Mozelle snobbishly insists upon these

shallow divisions between them. ‘I am a psychic counselor,’ she tells Roz. ‘Elzora is a sideshow attraction!’ But, of course, they function as mirror/reversed images of each other. Not only do they both incorporate black and white into their wardrobe, consider that Mozelle and Eve’s premonitions also occur in black and white. Eve exists in a space somewhere between these women - a trickster spirit, neither frightened nor alarmed by her gift³⁶³ - but not yet as in tune with nor in command of her abilities as her aunt. In that way, her bildungsroman must culminate in a mature reconciliation with the ambiguity of existence, human character and relationships, to fulfill her role as adjudicator and preserver of history.

Before she achieves this, it is Elzora whom Eve seeks when she decides her father must be punished. In many ways, this is the natural choice; she certainly cannot go to Mozelle with her resolution. However, while it seems that Elzora has been the arbitrator of this dispute, in retrospect her culpability remains rather ambiguous. Even the spell by which she claims to have brought about Louis’s death implicates Eve. Throughout the film,



Figure 3.7: Eve and Poe find a snake while playing along the bayou in *Eve's Bayou* (Lemmons 1997).

Eve and the snake is a recurring motif, which draws parallels with her Biblical counterpart, and, as such, symbolically foreshadows our heroine’s loss of innocence. Down by the bayou, Eve and her brother play with a snake they think is dead. Eve picks it up only to discover that it is very much alive. Even earlier in the film, during

³⁶³ Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, *Troping the Body: Gender, Etiquette, and Performance* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), p. 121.

their period of confinement, Eve places a toy snake on her sleeping brother's pillow, beside his head, merely to abate her boredom. So the snake, commonly associated with betrayal, is already frequently paired with Eve. Initially, Eve expects Elzora to give her a voodoo doll to stick pins in, but she presumes this unprompted, for Elzora never mentions a doll. She explains that instead she placed Louis's hair into the mouth of a snake and buried the snake in the Batiste family plot. Even without this magical element, Eve's involvement in her father's death seems intrinsically linked to this more obvious Biblical kinship. Before she enlists Elzora's services, Eve stumbles across Lenny Meraux in the town marketplace where she blatantly suggests to him that his wife and her father are having an affair. 'You must get home real late...well, when you get home. So does my daddy. My mama gets awful lonely, but then, she's the lonely type. Not like daddy and Matty.' As realization shadows Lenny Meraux's face, the head-on shot of Eve reveals behind her a row of bright red apples. Here, the apple works two-fold symbolically: it represents the passage of unwanted knowledge and cements Eve's literary kinship to the Biblical Eve.

But naturally, given its Louisiana location, the religion most foregrounded in *Eve's Bayou* is voodoo. Jane Caputi references Zora Neale Hurston's *Tell My Horse*, an autoethnographic account of her experiences studying voodoo practices in Haiti and Jamaica, when she writes that Elzora and Mozelle manifest the divine presence of the goddess Erzulie, who has been characterized as both a gentle ally in matters of love and alternately an old, insensitive woman.³⁶⁴ As examined in the previous chapter, we know Erzulie bears multiple names and 'can take the features of a dark-skinned slave woman, her mistress, or a mulatto in between'.³⁶⁵ Indeed, the names Mozelle and Elzora, as Caputi also points out, invoke the name Erzulie. Although Erzulie has been associated with the Virgin Mary, on the contrary Erzulie represents 'luxurious sexuality'³⁶⁶ and inherent duality. Consider that Mozelle, unlike Roz, is a nurturing mother figure to Eve and also confidently sexual. Halfway through the film she meets another man, Julian Grayraven (Lemmons's husband Vondie Curtis Hall), who later proposes to her. The two dimensions (motherhood and sexuality) are not incompatible for her the way they historically have been for women characters, including Roz, discussed in this project. Moreover, it is worth pointing out that unlike *White Zombie* (1932) or *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943), where the connections

³⁶⁴ Jane Caputi, *Goddesses and Monsters: Women, Myth, Power, and Popular Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), p. 337.

³⁶⁵ Sophie Saint-Just, "Mistè a Gatem": Deploying Ezili and Queering the Haitian Religious Experience in Anne Lescot's and Laurence Magloire's Film *Des hommes et des dieux*' in *The Future is Now: A New Look at African Diaspora Studies* ed. by Vanessa K. Valdés (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), pp. 13 - 26 (p. 18).

³⁶⁶ Patrick Colm Hogan, *Colonialism and Cultural Identity: Crises of Tradition in the Anglophone Literatures of India, Africa, and the Caribbean* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), p. 61.

to Erzulie in the white female leads affirmed their racialization and sealed them symbolically as Black, in *Eve's Bayou* her presence adds complexity (rather than threatening Otherness). Erzulie maps a course toward the way these characters trouble rigid gender norms and binds them to a lasting cultural heritage that contradicts white supremacist concepts of Black femininity.

But if Mozelle personifies the warmer aspects of Erzulie's personality, the other side of the coin is Elzora, the 'old, insensitive woman.' Patrick Colm Hogan, who also defers to Hurston's formative writings, points out that Erzulie is 'mulatto' and notes - because when she is impersonated by Black worshippers, they coat their faces in talcum (like Elzora) - 'she is, in short, another variation on the theme of black skin, white masks.'³⁶⁷ This image of Elzora completely disturbs Eve, who initially runs from Elzora when she first encounters her in this makeup. It does at least visually invoke Fanon's 1952 work *Black Skin, White Masks*, a foundational analysis of colonized Black people, particularly the construction of Blackness in the white imagination, and the psychological consequences for the racialized. Fanon's text has much in common with Du Bois's, down to their gendered blindspots. In contrast to their deeply gendered interpretations of this psychic racial split, Erzulie, 'born on the soil of Haiti,'³⁶⁸ innately diasporic, communicates this inherited two-ness through an intersectional image of Black femininity.

Elzora portrays these themes most vividly. Her mask is openly a mask. Like the veil, the mask conceals, but also betrays its own deception: both reveal themselves as disguises. Masks and veils permeate the Gothic, and often hint at spiritual and psychological boundaries, the known and the unknown. Catherine Spooner argues that insofar as masks and other disguises evoke doubleness, horror springs from the 'collapse in the control of the mask or the disguise, so that it estranges the bearer from his/her "original" identity, entrapping him/her in a role experienced as alien to the self.'³⁶⁹ But clearly the horror Elzora imparts lies in the obvious dissonance she presents: the white face paint thinly veiling brown skin, the disconcerting exaggeration of blurred (racial) binaries. Mama Cecile in *The Skeleton Key* engages in a similar race-bending performance, only better camouflaged. These conjure women characters are hardly alien to themselves; on the contrary, they weaponize duality. It is those who witness them who must suddenly face this body instability. Crucially, masks are different from the veil in that masks do not merely conceal, they transform. It will be important to keep this distinction in mind going forward, as the mask and the veil seem destined to clash in Black Female Gothic texts.

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Joan Dayan, 'Erzulie: A Women's History of Haiti' in *Research in African Literatures*, 25. 2 (1994), pp. 5 - 31 (p. 6).

³⁶⁹ Catherine Spooner, 'Masks, Veils, and Disguises' in *The Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, ed. by William Hughes, David Punter, and Andrew Smith (Chichester : Wiley, 2015), pp. 421 - 423 (p. 422).

Erzulie's plurality defies the white supremacist strategies that Du Bois and Fanon name in their respective analyses, for she exists outside the white (and, for that matter, Black) patriarchal imagination, brazenly championing fluidity between ages, genders, races and sexualities. She fundamentally deceives the gaze.

However, it is still critical to understand how Du Bois and Fanon address hybridity. For both men, the veil becomes a central and effective racial metaphor. While Du Bois applies the veil allegorically, Fanon famously outlined the politicization of the veil in the Algerian War. In 'Algeria Unveiled,' he examines the colonial perception of the burqa as a symbol that encapsulated Algerian culture. Women's role in the Algerian liberation struggle was significant: they increasingly adopted the veil to assert their cultural identity in defiance of French imperialism, and as agents of the revolution, the veil allowed women to conceal messages and smuggle arms.³⁷⁰

Thus, for the colonizers, the veil became a mark of resistance and a powerful inciting image in their campaign for conquest, representing the whole of Algerian society, or more aptly the threat it posed to the French regime.

Fanon writes:

Beneath the patrilineal pattern of Algerian society, the specialists described a structure of matrilineal essence...This enabled the colonial administration to define a precise, political doctrine: "If we want to destroy the structure of Algerian society, its capacity for resistance, we must first of all conquer the women; we must go and find them behind the veil where they hide themselves and in the houses where the men keep them out of sight..."³⁷¹

French colonial authorities' systematic efforts to remove the veil contained huge symbolic implications, mainly the colonial civilization's triumph over the 'retrograde' society.³⁷² Of course, in response, Algerian women resistance fighters simply adjusted their strategy, and began donning European dress in public. Fanon generally concerns himself with the way clothing becomes a mask or, indeed, a performance, and therefore revolutionary. But he fails to adequately account for the Arab woman's intersectional experience of colonialism and patriarchy, and draws dubious connections between womanhood and propensity for masquerade. Diana Fuss contests Fanon's premise: "The wearer of the veil becomes a veil, the inscrutable face of a nation struggling to maintain its cultural inviolability."³⁷³ In other words, the veil can doubly operate as a means of dissidence against colonial

³⁷⁰ Gareth Griffiths, 'Clothing the Borders: Dress as a Signifier in Colonial and Post-Colonial Space' in *Postcolonial Gateways and Walls: Under Construction* (Netherlands: Brill, 2016), pp. 3 - 20 (p. 10).

³⁷¹ Frantz Fanon, 'Algeria Unveiled,' *A Dying Colonialism* (New York: Grove Press, 1965), pp. 35 - 67 (pp. 37 - 38).

³⁷² Suzanne Gauche, 'Fanon on the Surface,' *Parallax* (2002) , 8:2, pp. 116-128 (p. 116).

³⁷³ Diana Fuss, *Identification Papers: Readings on Psychoanalysis, Sexuality, and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 150.

forces and as preservation of the patriarchal order; the latter, Fanon minimizes. Furthermore, as I noted earlier, I would resist Fanon's perilous slippage between the veil and the mask. In this instance, the veil does become a mask, but this is not always or naturally the case; it certainly does not ring true of the Du Boisian veil.

Intriguingly, the Algerian woman stands in stark contrast to the colonized Black woman in Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, where she is famously emblematised by Martinician writer Mayotte Capecia. While the former is positioned, somewhat disingenuously, as a wholly empowered figure, the latter has betrayed her race by sexually engaging with a white man. Such a woman, Fanon calls 'frenzied' and considers her disastrously self-loathing. In her analysis of texts by Caribbean women, among them Capecia, Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert writes, 'In their quest for autonomy as women - their feminine quest - the characters...must contend not only with their internalized prejudices about race - with their potential for self-contempt - but with received notions of male dominance and their own middle-class aspirations.'³⁷⁴ In both scenarios (Fanon's petty obsessions with Black female sexuality aside), racialized women play key roles in the colonial enterprise. They are the 'contested ideological battleground, overburdened and saturated with meaning.'³⁷⁵ Although Fanon wisely recognizes and rejects the Western metaphor of the nation as family,³⁷⁶ he conflates body and nationhood in a way that muffles the specificity of the racialized, gendered experience and prioritizes masculinist notions of liberation.

Gillo Pontecorvo's 1966 film *The Battle of Algiers* popularly features a scene where three women revolutionaries remove their burkas and re-fashion themselves as European - dying their hair and changing their clothes - all the while gazing at their reflection in the mirror. Lindsey Moore uses the film to challenge Fanon's position, arguing, 'The film does not present unveiled women as being in a more "authentic" state as does 'Algeria Unveiled'; rather the captivation of the women by their mirrored images and their stilted movements outside suggest that the unveiled body is in a strategically inauthentic state: it is being deployed as a war machine.'³⁷⁷ Although specifically notable for their masquerade of the West, their simultaneous artifice and subversion of assimilation, the veil seems comfortably allied with the mirror to communicate fascinating intersectional looking dynamics that have long consumed political writers and filmmakers alike. Unveiled, these women perhaps find themselves, as Spooner suggests, 'estranged' from their original identities or entrapped 'in a

³⁷⁴ Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, "Feminism, Race, and Difference in the Works of Mayotte Capécia, Michèle Lacrosil, and Jacqueline Manicom," *Callaloo*, 15. 1 (1992), pp. 66–74, (p. 67).

³⁷⁵ Fuss, p. 150.

³⁷⁶ Anne Mcclintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 93.

³⁷⁷ Lindsey Moore, *Arab, Muslim, Woman: Voice and Vision in Postcolonial Literature and Film* (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 39.

role experienced as alien to the self,’ given how Moore describes their ‘captivation’ and ‘stilted movements.’ The mirror reverses the image, so that although they are unveiled, they are indeed wearing a kind of ‘mask.’ Yet again, it is the mask that transforms them, and the mirror simply reflects their ‘inauthentic state’: their unveiled-ness or their unnatural de-racialization.



Figure 3.8: Unveiled women before the mirror in *The Battle of Algiers* (Pontecorvo 1966).

It is revealing that Fanon and Du Bois equally find the veil to be an especially weighty emblem that visualizes the condition of the colonized, not least because of its relationship to power (and the powerless) and surveillance. Fanon writes that, ‘to begin with, the veil hides a beauty.³⁷⁸ The colonial gaze is driven by the urgency to see and consequently possess, to dominate. The veiled woman meanwhile can look unimpeded; she can see without being seen herself. Du Bois somehow largely elides these gendered connotations, but similarly uses the veil to characterize a social and existential barrier, one that simultaneously disconnects the white gaze from the racialized and allows the racialized to view with clarity the unreachable experience of whiteness. The veil, significantly, negotiates levels of the seen and unseen. The veil of the Female Gothic, too, traffics in these concepts. Marie Mulvey-Roberts writes, ‘The door, curtain, or veil are threshold motifs for the mysteries of life, death, and sexuality.³⁷⁹ The veil, whether symbolizing marriage or the church, represents the unseen and the unknown, and promises the disappearance of women within those institutions. However, these spaces also

³⁷⁸ Fanon, p. 43.

³⁷⁹ Marie Mulvey-Roberts, ‘From Bluebeard’s Bloody Chamber to Demonic Stigmatic’ in *New Directions*, ed. by Diana Wallace and Andrew Smith (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 98-114 (p. 104).

indicate otherwise inaccessible knowledge that might only be ascertained by ‘taking the veil.’ The veiled, in this sense, are always privy to some mystery.

Because there are no white people in *Eve’s Bayou*, the veil functions as a symbol of her supernatural and racial inheritance. Put another way, the veil becomes, too, the vantage point of the audience. The film most reflects Du Bois’s musings on the veil and double-consciousness where Eve - doubled with Mozelle, Elzora, and the original Eve - constantly reckons with her identity as conjure woman through her relationships to these characters. She must learn how to reconcile her dual nature maturely and decide what kind of medium she will be. This interior dimension of her coming-of-age is presented externally through Mozelle and Elzora. But, essentially, her relationship to the veil and her own veiled-ness is characterized by her ‘double sight’ and her position as conduit. Stanley writes:

Like a fractured mind, the conjure woman in this film dwells in the lived experiences of three characters, each of whom plays one or more of the roles of the traditional icon. Through the narrated memories of the young Eve Batiste and the characters of Aunt Mozelle and the witch woman Elzora, we come to understand the conjure woman herself, not only as the site where identity is reclaimed but also as the very process of negotiating myth and memory.³⁸⁰

The conjure woman, whose veil gifts her with the otherworldly capacity to divine mystery, the unseen, does not only relay the painful past, but also gives it a racialized, gendered author rather than a colonizing, patriarchal one. Thus, it is important that she is veiled, for we know that it is those outside of the veil who fail to see properly; those within possess the clearest vision of other worlds beyond their own. Woven conspicuously throughout *Eve’s Bayou* is the significance of perspective. ‘The truth can change color depending on the light,’ adult Eve monologues at the film’s conclusion. Authorship, the capacity to communicate one’s story, boasts great currency here, and silence is potentially fatal. Gradually, it becomes clear that what happened between Louis and Cisely may matter the least in this family portrait, for Lemmons and her cinematographer Vincent privilege the gaze in all its subjectivity and untapped empowerment at every turn.

According to bell hooks, ‘the “gaze” has been and is a site of resistance for colonized black people globally.’³⁸¹ Generally, she refers to active critical analysis of the way Black people are typically framed in cinema and popular media. However, she makes a productive case study out of Julie Dash’s early short film *Illusions* (1982). In the short, a young white-passing Black woman called Mignon works in Hollywood where she oversees

³⁸⁰ Stanley, pp. 154-155.

³⁸¹ bell hooks, *Reel to Real: Race, Sex, and Class at the Movies* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 199.

the voice dubbing for studio films. There she meets another young Black woman Esther Jeeter, who performs the singing for white film stars. Apart from these layered illusions, hooks finds the way the two Black women are juxtaposed especially radical:

Throughout *Illusions*, Mignon's power is affirmed by her contact with the younger black woman whom she nurtures and protects. It is this process of mirrored recognition that enables both black women to define their reality, apart from the reality imposed upon them by structures of domination. The shared gaze of the two women reinforces their solidarity.³⁸²

For hooks, the 'process of mirrored recognition' promises shelter and solace; it is nurturing, and in its dynamic not unlike the Winnicottian mother-mirror. Therapist Marilyn Wedge writes, 'The act of mother mirroring her children is what Winnicott called play, which he viewed as the wellspring of all creative and meaningful experience...' ³⁸³ Similarly, hooks argues that this kinship allows Black women the space to create, for authorship, and therefore provides a necessary environment for growth away from the dominant white hegemonic forces that otherwise surround them.

In *Eve's Bayou*, looking relations invoke a similar ethos. In the director's commentary for the film, Kasi Lemmons reveals that each of the Batiste children have their own 'special' adult.³⁸⁴ While the twisted relationships between Cisely and Louis, and Poe and Roz, breed division among the children and gesture toward the family's disorder, Eve's bond with Mozelle does not contribute to this discord. On the contrary, it becomes the place where Eve begins to orient herself within the conjure tradition. Through Mozelle, Eve discovers the power of history and her responsibility as a conjure woman to the truth.

To clarify the formative role of the gaze in Eve's development and the film, I want to look at two significant stories told to Eve, one by Cisely and the other by Mozelle. To begin with, it should be said that the women characters in the film are constantly shown in various states (supernatural or otherwise) of looking and interpreting their stories for other characters. From the opening shot, the audience witnesses Louis entangled with Matty within Eve's gaze; a troubling image to be sure, but necessary, for it establishes Eve as the author of her own story. After she witnesses her father's tryst with Matty, Eve, upset and emotionally manipulated into silence by Louis, turns to Cisely, who seeks to calm her younger sister by revising the events. 'I'm gonna tell you what happened,' Cisely says confidently. In the next scene, their backs to the camera, the two girls sit in the

³⁸² hooks, p. 212.

³⁸³ Marilyn Wedge, *In the Therapist's Mirror: Reality in the Making* (New York: Norton, 1996).

³⁸⁴ *Eve's Bayou*, dir. by Kasi Lemmons (Lionsgate, 1997) [on DVD].

carriage house looking upon the scene where moments before Eve had stumbled upon her father with his mistress. Cisely reimagines their interaction for her sister. ‘They came in to get some more wine, and daddy told her a joke. And she fell against him laughing. Then they woke you up.’ As Cisely narrates, the scene plays out for the audience, the first - but far from the last - moment of cinema/theater in the film. When Cisely finishes, the girls turn to each other in Eve’s bedroom. In two juxtaposed close-ups, Eve looks up at the camera and Cisely looks down, to further ground the audience in Eve’s perspective. In this instance, Eve allows someone else authorship over a story that is rightfully hers. She knows Cisely’s retelling to be untrue, but understandably accepts her sister’s inoffensive account of history rather than stick with her own painful one, in a way that anticipates the battle of histories between Cisely and her father.

Although later both girls will admit her story was a farce, Cisely revealingly demonstrates a disconnect from her sister that interrupts their shared gaze. Their encounter cannot lead to the solidarity hooks describes. In fact, hooks insists that every Black woman does not necessarily develop an oppositional gaze. It is an active rebellion, not inherent. Consider what Cisely’s distorted version ultimately defends. It disguises itself as a balm for Eve, and no doubt Cisely intends it as such. But by denying the horror of their father’s actions, Cisely preserves their innocent wholesome portrait of Louis. However, it is neither true nor strong enough to sustain them; their anxiety about their father and the stability of their home life prevail.

On the other hand, Mozelle confronts the past in all its complexity. Of the adults in her life, only her aunt properly notices Eve’s disquiet and endeavors to help the child make sense of her internal turmoil. In true griot form, Mozelle shows Eve how she might connect the same story of her father’s infidelity to a broader tapestry of their history; in other words, the process of negotiating myth (Cisely’s account) from memory.³⁸⁵ Mozelle begins her tale by assuring her niece that for all his flaws, their father loves them, and that she also loves them like her own children. Thoughtfully and organically, she recalls how her inability to have children put a strain on her marriage with her second husband Maynard and led her into a passionate affair with a man called Hosiah. Terence Blanchard’s haunting score lends a sensual, if somber tone to this scene that hints at its grim ending before the audience knows Mozelle is describing her husband’s demise, for it begins as a tale of Mozelle’s empathy for, and likeness to (in her restlessness and sensual appetite), her brother Louis. She gives Eve a tale, not of judgment, but compassion.

At first, the camera steadies on Mozelle and Eve, half embracing on the couch, but Mozelle jumps up as her story approaches the climactic confrontation between Hosiah and Maynard. Hosiah has come to take

³⁸⁵ Stanley, pp. 154-155.



Figure 3.9: Mozelle and Eve as a scene from Mozelle's past plays out in the mirror in *Eve's Bayou* (Lemmons, 1997).

Mozelle away and, she narrates, initially she plans to go with him. Behind Mozelle, the mirror begins to replay the event and functions all at once as cinema/theater and a portal to the past, imaging Mozelle's parlor on that day where her lover and her husband stand facing each other. Mozelle orates, 'Then I heard Maynard say in a voice I'd never heard him use before: "Mozelle, tell this man you ain't going nowhere with him so he can get the hell out of my house." ' In the mirror, Hosiah holds a gun aimed at Maynard's chest (Fig. 3.9). Mozelle sets the scene for Eve as they both stand looking in the mirror: 'Mama was standing in the kitchen holding her heart...' Aurally, the audience can discern the voice of the Batiste matriarch, played by Ayler, whispering in hushed tones, 'oh my Lord!' Mozelle turns to face an enraptured Eve and cries, 'Oh Eve, in that moment I knew that I loved Maynard!' But the tension of the scene rises, rather than dissipates, with this revelation. Eve now stands in the mirror unreflected: she is fully a spectator while Mozelle leaves her niece's side to stand beside Maynard in the mirror. Not only does she observe and weave this memory alongside Eve, she is at the center of it. She is narrator, interpreter, and actor. Mozelle, part of the story now, stands between the two men. The camera closes in on the trio inside the mirror as she explains that she told Hosiah to leave. 'Hosiah's eyes turned another color and he stopped trembling,' Mozelle continues. 'He looked right at me and said, "Alright then." Then, he shot Maynard in the chest.' The scene ends abruptly with a gunshot, but its implications resound across all that unfolds later.

On one level, Mozelle delivers an adult message to Eve about the evolving dimensions of romantic relationships, for Mozelle confesses that she, like Louis, had been an unfaithful spouse. She wisely warns Eve of the sudden death that preys upon their family and to respect those bonds when life is so precarious. Eve will awaken to the truth of this at the last minute and, ultimately, too late. In another major sense, this story turns out to be prophetic and, true to the mirror, occurs in reverse: just as Mozelle watches her lover kill her husband, Eve will witness her father shot to death by his lover's husband.

Perhaps the most compelling facet of this sequence is the way it performs restorative Black female spectatorship. In a way, Mozelle reproduces her own Female Gothic tale for Eve, who is literally trapped in the household (this scene happens when the children are still confined to the house by Roz) and surely already wary of what adult romantic relationships might look like for women. As Winnicott expects the good enough mother to do, Mozelle, through the mirror, empathically reflects Eve's experiences. And the mirror, as Wedge acknowledges in pulling together Winnicott's ideas of the mirror, play, and transitional space, is a realm 'whose central truth is that paradox must be accepted.'³⁸⁶ Scientifically, Winnicott means, 'the baby creates the object but the object was there waiting to be created.'³⁸⁷ It is interesting that this scene never makes clear who conjures the past, whether it is Mozelle's memory or Eve's divine intuition the audience enjoys, and so replicates that omnipotent illusion necessary for the whole emergence of the self.

This project does not hope to make a precise correlation between Winnicott's object-relations theory and Black female spectatorship. Instead, I want to use that dynamic to emphasize the manifold power of mirrored recognition in cinema. As I note in chapter 2, while E. Ann Kaplan perceptively argues that for white children and white women, the Mammy functions as 'Winnicottian "holding environment" or "transitional object,"'³⁸⁸ in this film, the mirror is reclaimed as a liminal space for exchange between a Black woman and Black girl. For this Black girl in particular, this is gratifying because, to return to Anthony Elliot's reading of Winnicott, this space operates as a bridge between the interior fantasy world and the external world. In other words, 'for Winnicott, the child forges a connection with the outside world through actively discovering the characteristics of other persons.'³⁸⁹ Although this can mean the child's physical and tangible experience of the world, it operates on a rather poetic level in *Eve's Bayou*. These cinematic acts of storytelling in the film binds the

³⁸⁶ Wedge, p. 73.

³⁸⁷ Winnicott, p. 119.

³⁸⁸ E. Ann Kaplan, 'Film and History: Spectatorship, Transference and Race' in *History And-: Histories Within the Human Sciences* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), pp. 179-208 (p. 198).

³⁸⁹ Elliot, p. 74.

Batistes under a common history and helps them process trauma. Furthermore, while not prescriptive, Mozelle's tale displays for Eve, in a safe environment, how fundamentally complicated and unwieldy relationships can be, a fact Eve herself is already experiencing, but in this episode is able to witness as spectacle.

The other major element that emerges from this sequence is how audience spectatorship is configured. Without restating the various conceptions of spectatorship proposed throughout this thesis, this sequence exposes the limits of the gender polarities that typically define those theories. Feminist scholarship has historically positioned mainstream cinema as patriarchal: Laura Mulvey posits female spectators must adopt 'bisexual identifications' while Teresa de Laurentis has argued that female spectatorship is a twofold process of 'double' or split identification,' which is to say, identification with the active masculine gaze and the passive feminine object-image.³⁹⁰ Ultimately, it seems visual as well as narrative pleasure in mainstream cinema is male.³⁹¹ Still more scholars have called for a hybrid subjectivity or, rather, a 'loosening of the boundaries of self through cross-gender identification.'³⁹² Much more recently, Elizabeth Reich and Scott C. Richmond have scoffed at 'the notion that a process of identification lies at the intersection of cinema's two overlapping technological functions, projecting representations and producing subjects.'³⁹³ But it seems important to recognize that the organization of spectatorship has been overwhelmingly white and masculine, even as I argue that this architecture anxiously produces a Black feminine subject. The value of this set piece in *Eve's Bayou* lies, then, in its reconstruction of the 'typical' or rather, prevailing order. Within this story told by a Black woman, as a girl she watches another Black woman tell a story in which that Black woman is an object but also a creating subject. The presumed chasms of gender and race need not be negotiated here, except for the non-Black, non-feminine spectator. In this specificity and performance of looking relations, the film rather skillfully replicates a Black feminine gaze for its audiences, not simply because the performers we behold are Black, but because we must navigate the story through their gaze.

This sequence becomes important because of what it means to Eve. The viewers must first process this tale in the way she does, through child-like rapture and without the crucial context it will take on later in the story. There are moments throughout the scene, despite Morgan's charisma, where the camera seems to long for

³⁹⁰ Karen Hollinger, *In the Company of Women: Contemporary Female Friendship Films* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), p. 18.

³⁹¹ Ibid.

³⁹² Kimberly Chabot Davis, *Postmodern Texts and Emotional Audiences* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2007), p. 50.

³⁹³ Elizabeth Reich and Scott C. Richmond, "Introduction: Cinematic Identifications," *Film Criticism*, 39. 2 (2014), pp. 3–24 (p. 4), <www.jstor.org/stable/24777945> [accessed 7 Jan. 2020].

Eve or be missing crucial glimpses of Smollett's performance, which suggests that Eve is no longer object, but subject, like the viewers. Far from the 'universal' tale critics at the time wanted it to be, the film fundamentally announces itself as a tale of Black female authorship and spectatorship, thematically and cinematically.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I have examined the ramifications of the screen that distorts the Black feminine. *Eve's Bayou*³⁹⁴ was released twenty-three years ago, and few films since have so thoroughly communicated the cinematic positionality of Black women, nor addressed so well the gaze of Black female audiences. By enlisting the gaze and reclaiming the figure of the conjure woman within the Gothic framework - which has long alienated Black audiences, and Black women in particular - Lemmons grapples with themes of identity, heritage, and history.

With this chapter, I hope to link those early Female Gothic films, which productively establish the conditions and anxieties that haunt American life, to the cinematic Black Female Gothic. Structurally, *Eve's Bayou* is perhaps the most conventionally Female Gothic text of this project, concerning, as it does, domestic entrapment, incest, matrilineal legacies, and the patriarchal violence that is both external and internalized by its suffering heroines. Subsequent films will be less straightforwardly Female Gothic, but purposefully so, for these texts reveal the constantly evolving dynamism of the genre and its central capacity to reflect back on itself. Indeed, one of the major triumphs of Lemmons's film is its ability to revise the same strategies that once served to disavow the Black feminine. Where she was once relegated to the margins as servant or nurturer, she becomes, through the ghost of Matriarch Eve, an empowering force to the Black female characters who look to her for mirroring. Where she was once unseen, negated, and disappeared, she becomes a dimensional figure of duality, equally important to the narrative whether she is expressly visualized or largely unseen. In fact, she embraces her veiled heritage as a figure of hybridity, both racially and visually. When Elzora 'masks' herself, she speaks to this

³⁹⁴ The director's cut of *Eve's Bayou* features a curious arc that was cut from the film's original theatrical release. This version includes a Batiste relative called Uncle Willie, an elderly man in a wheelchair, feared by Eve and her siblings. His inclusion is frankly redundant and seamlessly excised from the theatrical version of the film. In fact, the most vital themes crumble under his involvement because he bears witness to Louis and Cisely's kiss, although he cannot and never does reveal the details of that night. Certainly, Uncle Willie adds to the film's already distinct Southern Gothic framework, except this version never corrects or thematically excavates 'the grotesque' element that Willie is clearly (and I would argue problematically) meant to represent. In any case, I have decided not to incorporate this version of the film in my analysis mainly because it is so superfluous (it neither adds to nor diminishes the central principles of the film) and Willie largely appears in the periphery of scenes, which may indicate the very real and harmful consequences of ableism, but not in any fully defined way.

cinematic tradition of white concealment (the racialized white feminine explored in *Cat People*, *I Walked With a Zombie*, and so on) as well as that more pervasive, social masking of Blackness, poorly hidden and grotesquely misrepresented as Other. The family institution, too, must be amended in this context, for Lemmons reminds us that a Gothic history shadows these personal formations. In a story that concerns the descendants of enslaved people, that past, symbolized by the house, engulfs their practice of intimacy. Ultimately, they must confront their complicity in their own masking (e.g. Roz's performance of white middle-classness) and deceptions, which divide them against each other. Only by embracing the maternal legacy, characterized by the discarnate and the liminal, do her female descendants find alternative measures of power.

In the next chapter, I want to elaborate on the incorporeal, explicitly Black feminine in Jordan Peele's directorial debut *Get Out* (2017). Thus far, I have traced the disguised to the explicitly realized Black feminine in the Female Gothic. However, *Eve's Bayou* cogently raises questions about the capacities of the unseen. Significantly, Lemmons's film resolves a great wound for Black female spectators by prioritizing them in her film as characters and as an audience. She employs the instruments of the genre, such as the house and uncanny double, to communicate the interior lives of Black women without pathologizing or racializing them, as other texts analyzed here have done. But Lemmons also demonstrates the potential for a cinematic Black Female Gothic tradition, principally defined by two-ness, narratively and visually. The themes that drive *Eve's Bayou* also centrally occupy Peele's films: 1) spectatorial two-ness; 2) negotiation between the mask/performance and the veil, with the boundaries between the seen and the unseen repeatedly defied and reworked; and 3) the Black Gothic family, if not fragmented, then somehow haunted by loss or its shadowy, repressed traumas as the Batistes are. Above all, what emerges is a context where dominant, or white patriarchal spectatorship dynamics, are shifted and an oppositional gaze is urgently required. Something like *The Skeleton Key* is not outside the bounds of a Black Female Gothic tradition, but it is important in this thesis to privilege *Eve's Bayou* (which was released first and establishes this filmic precedence) and Peele's work, for these texts crucially navigate strategies of racialized looking. By that I mean, while *The Skeleton Key* certainly fits within this tradition I want to argue for, that film concerns itself more with the deception rather than the performance of looking itself. *Eve's Bayou* and Peele's films must be explored in greater depth because, narratively, they actively organize and objectify the gaze, its dominant and historical implications, as well as the masquerade so often involved.

In the next chapter, I want to demonstrate the impact of *Eve's Bayou*, which meaningfully addressed the culturally specific legacy and looking dynamics of Black women in America. Lemmons's film becomes a crucial

framework for the subsequent two films, both of which vigorously confront the spectral Black feminine, haunting the American domestic, through radical, complex performances of the racialized gaze.

four

BLACK MOTHER

*He is not hers, although she bore
For him a mother's pains;
He is not hers, although her blood
Is coursing through his veins!*

*He is not hers, for cruel hands
May rudely tear apart
The only wreath of household love
That binds her breaking heart.*

- Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, *The Slave Mother*³⁹⁵

In interviews, including his director's commentary, Jordan Peele has repeatedly referenced the influence (among other texts) of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818) and the satirical thriller *The Stepford Wives* (1975) on his directorial debut *Get Out* (2017). Like Peele's film, *The Stepford Wives* can credibly be described as a direct heir to *Frankenstein*. When she outlined her definition of the Female Gothic in *Literary Women*, Ellen Moers famously chose Shelley's novel as the quintessential case, even without the trappings - an imperiled female heroine, for example - we have come to understand as integral to the genre. Her observations proved enduringly cogent. Mad scientist Victor Frankenstein 'gives birth' to a monster who ultimately repays his

³⁹⁵ Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, 'The Slave Mother' in *American Poetry: The Nineteenth Century* (The Library of America, 1993) ll. 5-6 <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/51977/the-slave-mother-56d23017cead>> [accessed 20 June 2020]

'mother' figure's repulsion and neglect with a series of brutal murders. For Moers and several other feminist theorists - Mary Poovey, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar - Shelley's tale communicates feminine anxieties about birth, alienation in male society, and female powerlessness.³⁹⁶ These fears persisted well into 1972, never more plainly than in the novel by Ira Levin (who had, incidentally, penned *Rosemary's Baby* just five years earlier): in *The Stepford Wives*, a young mother discovers that the blissfully submissive housewives in her new suburban neighborhood are robots created by their husbands.

Peele revises and updates both tales with formidable results. Photographer Chris (Daniel Kaluuya) accompanies his white girlfriend Rose Armitage (Allison Williams) to the New York countryside for the weekend to meet her parents, only to discover it all a ruse: Rose and her family have been kidnapping young Black people and transplanting the brains of old white people into Black bodies.³⁹⁷ Beyond plot and thematic similarities (if not inheritances), these two earlier works provide a compass toward the film's Female Gothic and intersectional impulses. I would argue that both of Peele's films to date bear a mappable genealogy with the Female Gothic in their preoccupations with the domestic, deformed families, underground passages entailing secret histories, monstrous women and/or mother figures, the Gothic double, and ambiguous endings.

Thus far, I have attempted to sketch what formative, conventional Female Gothic cinema communicates about American cultural anxieties, which tends to implicate a fear of the Black feminine. Located in the domestic, principally concerned with gendered entrapment, the genre seems ideally positioned to articulate the Black feminine experience, her slave past and the legacy of her role in the white nuclear family. What has more consistently emerged is her explicit negation or relegation to the margins; clearly she is dangerous, given how desperately any trace of her is repudiated or destroyed. Rarely are her own fears centered. Instead, we see a cinematic history founded on fear of her. *Eve's Bayou* (1997) addresses this history using the Female Gothic to mediate the concerns of Black middle-class women. The film not only narratively conveys these women's experiences, but considers spectatorship - modes of seeing and not seeing - as central to the project of actualizing the interiority and multiplicity of Black women on screen. Lemmons's film seems to institute or, more aptly, coalesce a Female Gothic tradition all its own, premised on the split Black feminine gaze, the synergy between the mask and the Du Boisian veil, and the fragmented Black family, which the Black Mother is tasked to restore and submit to, socially if not diegetically.

³⁹⁶ Devon Hodges, "Frankenstein and the Feminine Subversion of the Novel," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1983), pp. 155–164 (p. 155) JSTOR <www.jstor.org/stable/463717> [accessed 3 June 2020]

³⁹⁷ *Get Out*, dir. Jordan Peele (Universal Pictures, 2017) [DVD].

In these next two chapters I will continue to examine how the mode activates under-theorized conceptions of what Black women themselves fear. Using the characteristic traits of the Female Gothic in addition to the mirror and the veil, I want to establish how these contemporary films make way for a more explicit reckoning with terror from an intersectional lens. Without question, racialized anxieties animate Peele's films, where white spectatorship is displaced for the fantastically realized everyday horror that plagues his specifically Black viewership. But invariably, gendered dynamics within Black American identity inform his work, too, though these implications have received comparatively less attention in the discourse.

With that, I begin with *Get Out*, a slavery parable (therefore, as I point out in chapter 1, essentially Gothic) that first marks its proposed kinship to *The Stepford Wives* with its sunny milieu: the American suburb. Of the opening scenes, theorist Ryan Poll writes:

...the geography of horror from which Black subjects must “get out” is suburbia. In the opening frame, we see a quiet, sleeping, suburban street, a geography zoned exclusively for single-family homes. Functioning streetlights emit a soft yellow glow, lawns are manicured, and all cars are parked in driveways...Even though not a single person is visible on screen, popular culture has aesthetically trained us how to read this geography zoned exclusively for residential purposes: this is a zone of and for Whiteness.³⁹⁸

The film prepares us in the prologue for the danger that awaits on these deceptively safe streets when a young man, Andre Hayworth (Lakeith Stanfield), is abducted. This is a classic horror setup, designed to shock and ready the audience for the horror that lies ahead. Anyone even reasonably versed in the form can anticipate that this early, tertiary character walking alone at night will shortly, horrifically, be dispatched to reveal a taste of the monster/villain’s capacity for evil. Except usually the character walking alone, coded vulnerable, is a white woman. Poll notes this sequence flips the racist expectation that Black men walking alone at night are to be feared; it is Andre who is afraid, lost as he is on foreign terrain. Audiences will surely be reminded here of current events, in particular the murder of Trayvon Martin, which began in precisely this way. As Poll suggests, the film draws equally from genre conventions as from contemporary history.³⁹⁹ The seamless, textually fertile replacement of the traditional victim with a Black man also substantiates how ripe the genre is for articulating racialized terrors.

³⁹⁸ Ryan Poll, “Can One ‘Get Out?’ The Aesthetics of Afro-Pessimism,” *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, 51.2 (2018), pp. 69–102 (p. 73) <www.jstor.org/stable/45151156> [accessed 5 June 2020].

³⁹⁹ Poll, p. 75.

Mother to Son⁴⁰⁰

James M. Keech describes the Gothic response of fear, ‘a fear characterized by a necessary presentiment of a somewhat vague but nevertheless real evil...[Gothic fear] moves beyond the concrete in allowing the imagination to build upon and shape foreboding outlines into a sustained fear which is verified periodically by peaks of intense concrete terror or horror.’⁴⁰¹ In other words, ‘Gothic’ fear is steeped in history. Its transformation from an abstract, not unreasonable, dread to material threat takes direction not from wild delusion but knowable danger: Gothic fear reveals itself in the ontology of the vulnerable body. That body has typically been white and female, but the Black and male body signals a storied endangerment of its own. From the opening shot to the last, the film repeatedly employs classical tropes that not only requires the audience to vicariously experience the expansive danger that preys upon Black people (where horror has historically sought to establish the opposite), but in many instances the presence of Blackness conveys an entirely different meaning altogether, given texture by contemporary political and social events. Thus, before evil announces itself, the audience fears for this minor character, their imaginations ordered by an archive of well recorded abuses.

Andre shrewdly abandons his route to head home, appreciating the very real risk of harm or death, but the conspicuously white car lurking nearby has already begun to follow him. An ominous melody follows his assault. As the opening credits roll, the chorus whispers, ‘Sikiliza...Kwa Wahenga...’ Swahili for ‘Listen to [your] ancestors.’ Andre’s kidnap and enslavement is all at once reliably Gothic - a supernatural or otherwise hyperbolized rendition of ongoing oppression - and evocatively historic, pointing to America’s slave past.

The film encourages audiences to keep these two major themes in mind: ancestors and history. It should be noted, in another deviation from common horror practice, there are no elderly Black characters in *Get Out*, no mystical old conjure men or women to offer the hero wisdom, only this warning: *listen to your ancestors*. But the ancestors, most notably Chris’s mother, are all absent. Poll argues that Black families are missing from the film’s contained world in an effort to execute its argument against the individualist, anti-collectivist concept of post-Blackness.⁴⁰² The Black characters’ isolation can thus be viewed as a break with the history that connects Black Americans, a generational rush to compartmentalize the past and embrace progress. For me, the absent Black family reaffirms the Female Gothic framework, centered around the displaced orphan; and far from

⁴⁰⁰ Langston Hughes, ‘Mother to Son’ in *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002) <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47559/mother-to-son>> [accessed 29 Dec 2020]

⁴⁰¹ James M. Keech, ‘The Survival of the Gothic Response,’ *Studies in the Novel*, 6.2 (1974), pp. 130–144 (p. 132) <www.jstor.org/stable/29531653> [accessed 3 June 2020]

⁴⁰² Poll, p. 83.

anti-collectivist, Chris, subconsciously or otherwise, clearly laments his alienation. Most importantly, this isolation shapes his victimhood. Like many Gothic heroines, Chris is motherless. Although he mentions a ‘cousin,’ ostensibly his closest living ‘family’ is his best friend Rod Williams (Lil Rel Howery). In other words, he is the perfect victim for the Armitages’ nefarious machine to swallow. Furthermore, Chris may not be naive, but he is as idealistic and romantic as any love-starved Gothic heroine, increasingly estranged from the outside world, imprisoned in the dark passages of a house with monstrous secrets, then pursued by a lover revealed all along to be a sadistic psychopath.⁴⁰³

Get Out marries American and genre histories in a project that locates the bedrock of horror in the gaze. Like early zombie narratives, the Armitages incapacitate their victims through hypnosis, deployed by Rose’s mother Missy (Catherine Keener), a psychiatrist. In perhaps the film’s most haunting scene, Missy sits before Chris in her office, under the pretense of curing him of his smoking addiction (Fig. 4.1). She asks him a series of questions about his childhood until, crying, he confesses that he harbors crushing guilt over the death of his mother, who was hit by a car and lay dying while he was watching television. The scene dissolves into a hazy flashback where the audience sees a young Chris sitting cross-legged on his bedroom floor staring, transfixed, up at the screen. Back in the present, the now deeply emotional Chris regrets that he did not call the police or go out looking for his mother. Missy seizes upon his fragility. She sends him, with a voice barely above a whisper, to the now infamous ‘Sunken Place,’ an infinite dark void where a drowning Chris screams soundlessly to no avail. True to Missy’s word, he seems to be endlessly falling.

We never see Chris’s mother in the film, a vivid absence emblemized by the pitch-black, womb-like Sunken Place, akin to the Middle Passage. Rizvana Bradley sees it this way:

It is not simply the literal haunting of Chris’s mother in her neglected death, but more specifically, the abstraction of that death, which signifies an irretrievable grammar of black maternity that bridges the onscreen pitch-blackness of the “sunken place.” The figure of the lost and irretrievable black mother alludes to the historic fact of the original crossing and the irreducible terror of the Middle Passage; Chris’s mother functions as a premonition, as a foreboding omen of the historical continuity between the crossing and this moment of performative subjection.⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰³Giles Menegaldo, ‘Gothic Convention and Modernity in John Ramsay Campbell’s Short Fiction,’ in *Modern Gothic: A Reader* ed. by Victor Sage and Allan Lloyd Smith (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp. 188-197 (p. 190).

⁴⁰⁴Rizvana Bradley, ‘Vestiges of Motherhood: The Maternal Function in Recent Black Cinema’ in *Film Quarterly*, (vol. 71.2), pp. 46-52 (p. 46).

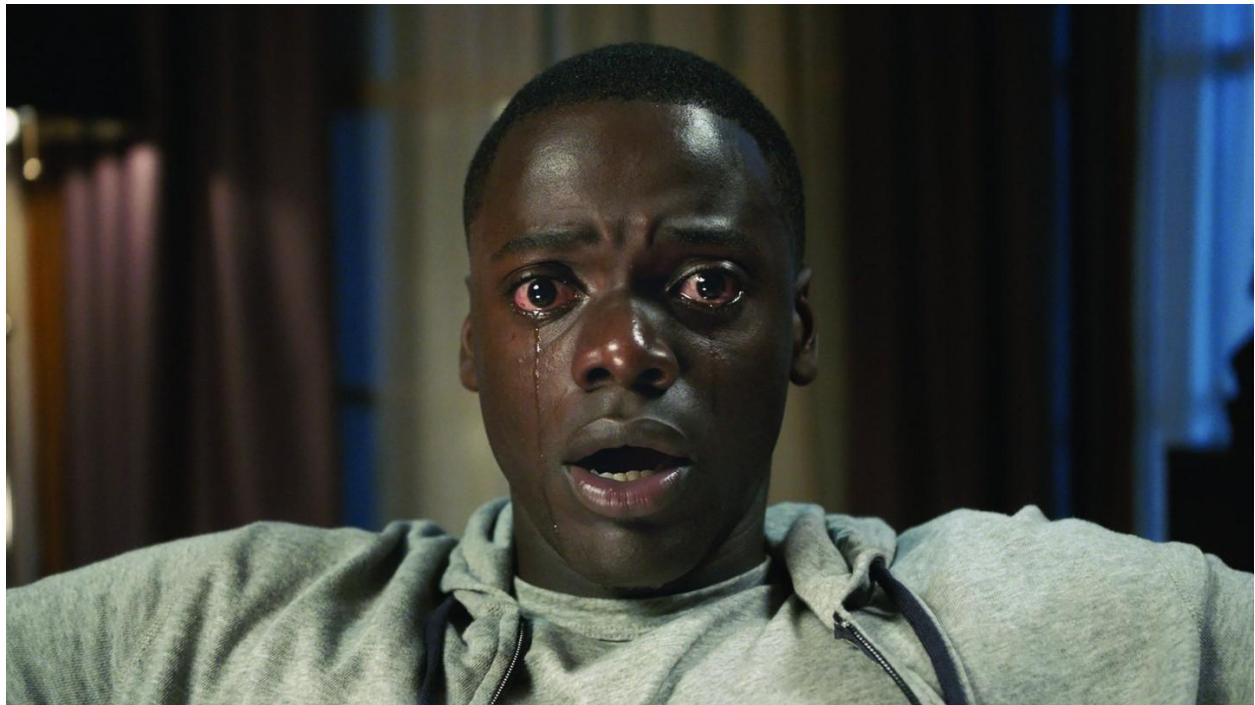


Figure 4.1: Chris is rendered powerless when Missy psychically sends him to ‘The Sunken Place.’ *Get Out* (Peele, 2017).

True, the void supplants his mother as a weighty symbol of the rupture engendered by the Middle Passage, which serves Peele’s modern captivity narrative on multiple levels. The Sunken Place, both psychologically and metaphorically, replicates that original birth and the relentless ensuing powerlessness. In her article, ‘The Belly of the World,’ Saidiya Hartman writes chillingly, ‘The slave ship is a womb/abyss. The plantation is the belly of the world. Partus sequitur ventrem—the child follows the belly.’⁴⁰⁵ The Black female experience as property turned sexuality and reproduction into capital, and her child[ren] inherited her dispossessed status. Effectively, as Hartman continues, ‘the theft, regulation and destruction of black women’s sexual and reproductive capacities would also define the afterlife of slavery.’⁴⁰⁶ Crucially, the survival of slavery, where patriarchal conditions of gender and kinship crumbled, depended upon human reproduction, ‘the captive female body.’ The Sunken Place - not unlike, for example, the dungeons of Cabrini-Green, the Chicago housing estate from which Candyman is reborn - is bound up in genre-defining aesthetics that announce the specter of Black maternity as indispensable to American horror. ‘Marked twice over as the genre’s other,’ Maisha L. Wester notes that the Gothic makes especially perilous ground for Black women, but the genre’s ‘trapping tropes allude to the real

⁴⁰⁵ Saidiya Hartman, ‘The Belly of the World: A Note on Black Women’s Labors,’ *Souls* (2016), 18:1, 166-173 (p. 166).

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

traps of Black female sociopolitical resistance.⁴⁰⁷ Bradley is correct to interpret the role of Chris's mother as broadly functional - a 'premonition,' an 'omen,' that evokes the historic, continual terror raced bodies find themselves physically and psychically subject to - but I would argue that in a Female Gothic context she also emerges slyly as a character distinct from the larger figurative imagery of the film. The subgenre's popular absent mother trope allows us to diagram her and to confront the questions that her identity poses independent of her child/double.

The womb has long been essential to horror's psychological obsessions. Freud declares, 'It often happens, that neurotic men declare that they feel there is something uncanny about the female genital organs. This *unheimlich* place, however, is an entrance to the former Heim [home] of all human beings, to the place where each one of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning...'⁴⁰⁸ By and large, the Gothic seems to have, if not exactly proved him right, found his premise endlessly useful. Certainly, applying his conception of the uncanny has suited mine and other analyses of *The Sunken Place*, for it opens up numerous diegetic and metaphorical possibilities. In any case, the Gothic seems especially preoccupied with family, or rather heredity, and this theme broadly links many of the films already discussed here. We have seen over and over how the institution of the family - whether openly or covertly, but almost always inherently warped - generates terror. Frequently, the Gothic family can trace its corruption to some perversion of established boundaries, usually to do with sexuality or gender, often the maternal. While paternity can be obscured or falsified, mother and child will always have shared one body. Indeed, her very state bespeaks 'doubling' in the words of Ruth Bienstock Anolik who explains, 'In the process of childbirth, the comforting integrity of the body is fragmented: one becomes two; what was internal and invisible becomes external and visible.'⁴⁰⁹ Barbara Creed argues that men in horror become monstrous when they endeavor to usurp the role of women, specifically in relation to reproduction. As Freud indicates, the *unheimlich* place is both seductive and fearsome, an undeniably powerful realm. However, when men attempt to 'become' mothers, the exercise turns them grotesque.⁴¹⁰ Mad scientists like Frankenstein or manic serial killers - whose 'masculinity is severely qualified,' described by Carol Clover as

⁴⁰⁷ Maisha L. Wester, *African American Gothic: Screams from Shadowed Places* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 80.

⁴⁰⁸ Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny' in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth Press, 1948)

⁴⁰⁹ Ruth Bienstock Anolik, 'The Missing Mother: The Meanings of Maternal Absence in the Gothic Mode,' *Modern Language Studies*, Spring - Autumn, 2003, Vol. 33, No. 1/2 (Spring - Autumn, 2003), pp. 24-43 (p. 30).

⁴¹⁰ Barbara Creed, *Phallic Panic: Film, Horror and the Primal Uncanny* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2005), p. 50.

'spiritually divided ("the mother half of his mind")'⁴¹¹ - guarantee their own destruction by defying familial gender conventions, in other words, 'nature' itself. The gender order, then, is extremely important. Creed proposes that whenever 'man attempts to assume woman's powers he also becomes uncanny through association with her primal uncanniness - that is, her womb - which Freud argued was to some men the most uncanny thing of all.'⁴¹²

Inflecting these tropes with race troubles the original readings. Slavery had refashioned nuclear, patriarchal practices of 'family.' For one thing, Black women labored alongside Black men in and out of the fields. Their 'owners' took on the ultimate authoritarian role in their lives. Not even their own children belonged to them: at any moment the family structure could be violated and irrevocably fractured by the selling of humans for profit. The 'fractured' Black family would remain an obsession of white supremacist thinking, and even policy, well into the twentieth century. It was widely agreed that the party responsible for this disorder was Black women. In the afterlife of slavery, Black women continued as breadwinners. Hortense Spillers speaks to this legacy of the 'ungendered' when she contests Daniel Moynihan's pathologizing 'Report,' which argues that the Black family 'has no Father to speak of,' a 'problem' he concludes is the 'fault of the Daughter, or the female line.'⁴¹³ bell hooks would note, 'an undue emphasis on Black "masculinity" has emerged as sociologists and historians have attempted to explain the damaging effects of racist oppression on Black people.'⁴¹⁴ Essentially, slavery had compromised Black men's masculinity by 'elevating' Black women to the same status, and thus the burden fell on Black women to restore what had been taken from Black men by subordinating themselves.

Du Bois did not so much condemn Black women for denying Black men their 'rightful' place in the patriarchal order, but he, too, believed that advancement for the Black family, and by extension the community on the whole, depended upon the reestablished Black Father. In fact, he would frame the emasculation of Black men more tolerably as 'disruption' to the Black family. Black women's gender nonconformity, the irreversible fact of their longstanding labor - since labor has been central to defining gender and power - is bothersome precisely because it exposes the hollowness of these gendered hegemonies and resists systems of domination. Spillers writes:

⁴¹¹ Carol J. Clover, 'Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film,' *Representations*, no. 20 (1987), pp. 187–228 (p. 209), www.jstor.org/stable/2928507 [accessed 30 May 2020]

⁴¹² Creed, p. 50.

⁴¹³ Hortense Spillers, 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book,' *Diacritics*, 17.2 (Summer 1987), pp. 64–81 (p. 66).

⁴¹⁴ bell hooks, *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 45.

...these social and cultural subjects make doubles, unstable in their respective identities, in effect transports us to a common historical ground, the socio-political order of the New World. That order, with its human sequence written in blood, represents for its African and indigenous peoples a scene of actual mutilation, dismemberment, and exile. First of all, their New-World, diasporic plight marked a theft of the body, a willful and violent (and unimaginable from this distance) severing of the captive body from its motive will, its active desire. Under these conditions, we lose at least gender difference in the outcome, and the female body and the male body become a territory of cultural and political maneuver, not at all gender-related, gender-specific.⁴¹⁵

In slavery, gender structures, as they are traditionally formed through labor and class, lose much of their distinctions. The Black family already resembles the motherless or fatherless ‘Gothic family’ because these conventional formations are not respected; these social borders are already blurred. Moreover, as Spillers explains, gender differences break down under cultural and communal trauma - ‘theft of the body’ - which marks all bodies, regardless of gender, as subjugated.

Therefore, Chris is innately ambiguously gendered. The film negotiates the hypermasculinity that has historically been transferred upon the Black male body while, in his captivity and victimization, he parallels - indeed, doubles - his mother. It is significantly this haunting by her that provides Missy the pathway into his mind. This sequence literalizes the arguably ‘masculine’ terror of the uncanny/womb when Missy brings the uncanny alive in Chris. But by the film’s climax, wielding the phallic antlers of a deer mount, which he uses to impale Dean, he cements his status as a ‘Final Girl’ with her ‘chainsaw.’ Peele himself identifies Chris (who also possesses a gender neutral name) as such in a *New York Times* interview.⁴¹⁶ In her influential article, ‘Her Body, Himself,’ Carol Clover persuasively argues that dominant gender paradigms break down in the slasher film, exemplified in the affinity between the final girl and the presumably male spectator. Chris seamlessly evolves into this role because the abject conditions of the film construct it. If abject terror is gendered feminine, Clover argues, ‘figuratively seen, the Final Girl is a male surrogate in things oedipal...the audience incorporate; to the extent she “means” girl at all, it is for the purposes of signifying phallic lack, and even that meaning is nullified in the final scenes.’⁴¹⁷ The final girl is already coded as male in significant ways. Although Clover concludes that in the customary practice of the slasher, ‘masculine female repeatedly prevails over the combination feminine male,’⁴¹⁸ Chris channels an altogether different social lineage, where the experiences of Black men have often

⁴¹⁵ Spillers, p. 67.

⁴¹⁶ Wesley Morris, ‘Jordan Peele’s X-Ray Vision,’ *New York Times*, 20 Dec 2017.

<<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/20/magazine/jordan-peele-s-x-ray-vision.html>> [accessed 5 June 2020]

⁴¹⁷ Clover, pp. 213 - 214.

⁴¹⁸ Clover, p. 221.

stood in for, or eclipsed, Black women's experiences. His foregrounding presents a complicated realization for Black feminine spectatorship, but for now, suffice to say that as a Gothic heroine/final girl, Chris inherently operates as a double figure locked in a Freudian battle with the parental Other.

As a character, Chris's mother remains unnamed and largely defined by her relationship to her son. But the Female Gothic gives us the tools to trace the contours of her personhood. Consider that 'the typical Gothic mother is absent: dead, imprisoned or somehow abjected,'⁴¹⁹ and what is at stake in the Female Gothic novel is the 'psychic and linguistic reconfiguration of the parental figures, both as social and historical realities and as ambivalent psychic and emotional constructions of power and powerlessness combined.'⁴²⁰ Generally, theorists of the genre have approached the abject/absent mother realm as one characterized by the Gothic heroine [Chris]'s psychic fear and longing. She is both 'habitat and...jailor,' and therefore, 'separation and individuation, for both boys and girls, then, means breaking or loosening the primal attachment to the mother.'⁴²¹ This separation is reputedly easier for boys because they can use their biological sexual difference to distinguish themselves. But as formerly evidenced here, the context of American slavery does away with these commonplace borders. In the film's slave allegory, Chris's journey, too, becomes an endeavor to separate himself from the captive, violated Black maternal. The Gothic makes this psychological toil especially dramatic, for the mother's vacancy represents this stage of individuation: the house or castle becomes emblematic of the maternal body which threatens to engulf her children, and the pre-Oedipal efforts to escape the castle/house requires exploration of its labyrinthine halls and the excavation of secrets buried there, often the concealed true history of her imprisonment. Chris, however, spends the whole of the film displaced. The Armitages' house does not symbolize his mother's body, but instead manifests a twofold disavowal process, a double - or generational, as Hartman would argue - dispossession, for in his 'psychic and linguistic reconfiguration' of his parental figure, Chris must face, as Bradley describes it, the 'irrecoverable grammar of black maternity.'⁴²²

As demonstrated by many of the films discussed here, the anxiety generated by the Black feminine is mitigated by either a sexless, kindly or sassy, magical manifestation of Black femaleness (a helper figure) or the destruction of a more physically innocuous, coded version of Black femininity. For Bradley, that Chris's mother is only made accessible through the Armitage's maid Georgina (Betty Gabriel), who has been made partially

⁴¹⁹ Anolik, p. 25.

⁴²⁰ Diane Long Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), p. 23.

⁴²¹ Claire Kahane, 'Gothic Mirrors and Feminine Identity,' *The Centennial Review*, 24.1 (1980), pp. 43–64 (p.48) <www.jstor.org/stable/23740372> [accessed 28 June 2020].

⁴²² Bradley, p. 46.

insentient as a vessel for Grandma Armitage,⁴²³ speaks precisely to this history of disavowal and substitution. That said, I would argue that, within a Female Gothic schema, Georgina represents the one character through whom Chris can negotiate his own identity with a mother surrogate. Georgina, it should be said, appears to be the only female victim of the Armitage clan. We learn in the film that Rose typically lures the men she dates to their zombification. Georgina (possibly called something else, because, aptly in the slave narrative allegory the film reproduces, Black victims are renamed by their white ‘buyers’) was apparently Rose’s friend. Importantly, Georgina also appears to be the only one of the Armitages’ victims to preserve some degree of autonomy post-supernatural lobotomy. Over the course of that weekend Chris meets two other male victims: Walter (Marcus Henderson), the gardener (who is really Grandfather Armitage) and Andre, renamed Logan. Chris discovers that the camera flash from his phone ‘awakens’ Walter and Andre - as in, they recover some degree of consciousness and their former identity - but Georgina exhibits moments of consciousness throughout the film without any technology: first, when she is serving Chris tea on his first evening at the Armitage house, and later when she apologizes to him for unplugging his phone. To return again to the obvious influence of the zombie framework, Chris experiences the disconnect that Seabrook describes, the experience of the uncanny: he is consistently confronted with ‘Black’ people only to discover there is something eerie or not quite authentic



Figure 4.2: Chris and Georgina double each other as tears invoke their resistance to The Sunken Place.

⁴²³ Bradley, p. 48.

about these interactions. As the only black person at the Armitage compound, Chris spends much of his time searching for community and communion with other Black people. He tells Georgina, 'If there's too many white people I get nervous, you know?' He expresses similar sentiments to Walter and Andre before her, hoping to connect with them in his isolation and historically well-founded fear of being outnumbered by white people. On each occasion, both men have responded politely, but without genuine understanding or empathy. However, for Georgina these words trigger an utterly chilling response (Fig. 4.2). Her smile drops. Her mouth trembles. She gasps for words that ultimately never come. She smiles again, but her eyes become the site of her internal resistance, for a mournful horror never fully leaves her gaze as tears begin to stream down her cheeks and Grandma Armitage laughs, repeating 'no' over and over again. This scene of Georgina crying doubles the earlier sequence in Missy's office where Chris begins crying before she delivers him to the Sunken Place. In this subsequent moment, Chris is, of course, disturbed and mutters 'crazy bitch' as Georgina whirls out of the room, but she has already triggered an emotional response in him that nearly becomes his undoing at the climax of the film. Without a typical family network, Chris, as I have stated, longs to form community, but thus far every single Black person he has encountered shares neither the desire nor the language for rapport. Georgina hints at a potential kinship with, in the tradition of the Female Gothic, a language of victimization that Chris should recognize because he had experienced it himself just the night before.

It is interesting that the film positions Georgina - not Walter, or even Andre/Logan - as Chris's mirror. In fact, he mainly interacts with them in his capacity as a photographer documenting his subject. He first sees



Figure 4.3: Georgina is often seen looking through reflective surfaces, for example here, in the glass patio door.

'Logan' when he is looking through his camera lens. Furthermore, only when Chris takes their photograph with his phone, are they finally able to 'wake up' and recognize him. In contrast to Andre and Walter, both of whom Chris experiences through a stark author/subject divide, he and Georgina often seem to be reflecting each other. Georgina is constantly framed in transparent looking apparatuses, whether in the window or primping herself in the mirror. When he takes a stroll on the grounds at night, he is initially startled to discover her standing at the glass-paneled patio door (Fig. 4.3), but he lingers to watch her lovingly caress her face. Even more fascinating, when the shot jumps to Georgina's perspective, we can see that she does not see Chris at all, only herself as she admires her reflection. This moment in particular presents a fantastic, multivalent realization of the veil. On one hand, this scene illustrates exactly how Du Bois describes the veil functioning, as a diaphanous barrier which Black people can see through, but white people cannot. On the other, due to Grandma Armitage's propensities - of which we never learn, whether that is youth or beauty, etc. - this Black woman is forced to regard herself from a place of de-centered spectatorship.⁴²⁴ At the same time, the audience must employ the 'second sight,' in order 'to reconfigure the racialized structures of the gaze through which [Du Bois] suggested race was formulated and racial identification negotiated.'⁴²⁵ In other words, if the veil provides 'an observation deck from which White America was watched,'⁴²⁶ though the audience may not realize on first viewing, we spend much of the film navigating not Blackness and Black identity, but whiteness and the sociopathy of the white colonial project. The film unfolds entirely through the veil. It is whiteness that is pathologized, and the film makes sure that the screen/gaze is at the center of its strategy, conscious of the role looking relations plays in this history.

What Deborah D. Rogers identifies as the 'matrophobic gothic,' pioneered by Ann Radcliffe, emphasizes '[the daughter's] issues of identification and separation, focusing on inadequately mothered, deluded heroines who are rescued by maternal reconciliation.'⁴²⁷ For Claire Kahane, too, the Gothic challenges its consumers to confront 'the mysteries of identity, which turn on discovering the boundary between self and a mother-imago archaically conceived who threatens all boundaries.'⁴²⁸ Chris arguably discovers the boundary between self and mother when he escapes her fate, the void, although this leaves his childhood shame intact. Georgina, then, becomes for Chris a deceptive mother figure in his quest to resolve his past betrayal of his real

⁴²⁴ Charles F. Peterson, *Dubois, Fanon, Cabral: The Margins of Elite Anti-colonial Leadership* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2007), p. 15.

⁴²⁵ Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line: W. E. B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 3.

⁴²⁶ Peterson, p. 14.

⁴²⁷ Deborah D. Rogers, *The Matrophobic Gothic and Its Legacy: Sacrificing Mothers in the Novel and in Popular Culture* (Vienna: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 15.

⁴²⁸ Kahane, p. 52.

mother. As I have detailed here, she does not merely haunt Chris, but lives on within him; he is her legacy embodied. Indeed, the Gothic framework unites them as doubles, cementing his own status as Gothic heroine; but Georgina is not his mother and the film casts doubt on whether he can ever obtain absolution or reconcile with his actual parent. When he eventually flees the Armitage house, he accidentally hits Georgina with his car, a violent staging of his extant guilt and which, for Chris, further seals her twinship with his mother. As expected, his attempt to correct the original rejection of the Black maternal backfires. The moment in which he decides to rescue the injured Georgina is precipitated by a flashback to her crying, but again Chris has been fooled by his own broken instincts. He has in fact rescued a white woman, the architect of his trauma and the destruction of so many others, and who, when she awakens, immediately tries to kill him. Grandma Armitage releases a shriek seeping with double entendre: ‘You ruined my house!’

I want to return to the scene where Missy hypnotizes Chris, because, once again, the Sunken Place illustrates Black feminine negation with iconography evocative of the theories I have applied throughout this research. To begin with, his mother’s exclusion from the core drama of the film in its invisibility/hypervisibility is quintessentially cinematic, part of a long filmic tradition that encapsulates the disavowal processes in which horror engages: branding raced femininity all at once too risky to be visualized but a constant preoccupation within the diegesis of the film. The visualized absence of Chris’s mother and his rejection of her for the television screen suggests he replaces her healthy Winnicottian mirroring with the imbalanced dynamics proposed by the

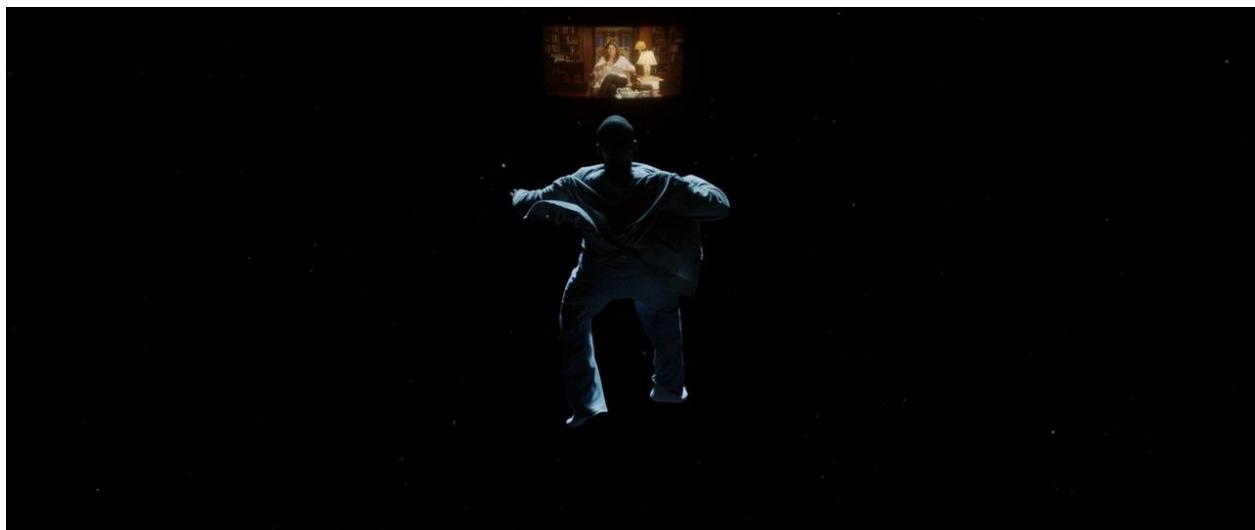


Figure 4.4: Chris falls into the Sunken Place as Missy watches, visually recreating Chris’s childhood trauma and his mother’s absence.

screen image. As noted throughout this project, generally Black spectators cannot reliably expect to be reflected by the screen. Therefore, not only does the physical absence of his mother profoundly epitomize this history, but

the imagery of the Sunken Place also reifies this dyad, wherein Chris has replaced the mother-imago with white femininity instead. In yet another instance of sinister substitution, Chris plunges back into the vast darkness of the Sunken Place as the theatrical view of Missy sitting in her office slowly recedes (Fig. 4.4). This moment possesses twofold implications for the purposes of this thesis. This one shot illustrates one of the main theories here: essentially that Winnicott's conception of the mirror-role the mother plays in infant development has similar currency in cinematic spectatorship. bell hooks writes, 'To stare at the television, or mainstream movies, to engage its images, was to engage its negation of Black representation.'⁴²⁹ Much of my research has been predicated on how the unreflected spectator might, as Winnicott puts it, 'look around for other ways of getting something of themselves back from the environment,'⁴³⁰ but here, Peele dramatizes the insidious design of non-reflection as a nightmare, a hellish sphere of open-ended horror. Therefore, audiences can interpret The Sunken Place as a realm of repeated, enduring trauma, one vitally informed, defined even, by the colonial gaze which seeks to shape realities through one of its most persuasive avenues: the image. Both Fanon and Du Bois recognized the immense psychological power the gaze enacts upon the colonized. Chris's early trauma not only demonstrates the seductiveness of the colonial portrait, but how deeply intertwined it is with trauma. The screen, in his mind, has cost him his mother, and, as an adult, he seemingly strives to master the image by becoming a photographer. Chris's journey of separation from the maternal, from her ubiquitous negation, entails his choice to become author of the image, rather than fall prey to his own erasure.

This all means something uniquely complex for the Black female spectator. Winnicott writes, 'when the average girl studies her face in the mirror, she is reassuring herself that the mother-image is there and that the mother can see her and that the mother is en rapport with her.'⁴³¹ The Female Gothic is largely about establishing difference from the mother, but whether the mother-image even exists is taken for granted. Chris becomes the film's Gothic 'heroine' only functionally. *Get Out* queers the Female Gothic by constructing a narrative where Chris approximates the position of heroine in a simultaneous quest-for-mother and separation from the 'maternal blackness' that Leslie Fiedler argues defines the subgenre.⁴³² In reality, Black men have had to reckon with economic, institutional, and social 'castration': the systematic denial of work means the inability to financially support one's family (not to mention the prison-industrial complex which disproportionately targets Black men), precluding them from Western notions of masculinity and empowerment. The myopic Moynihan

⁴²⁹ bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, p. 117.

⁴³⁰ Winnicott, p. 2.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Dell, 1966), p. 132.

Report does not simply condemn Black women, it also perpetuates the cultural mythology of Black male impotence without acknowledging how American institutions purposefully enforce these conditions. At the same time, the specificity of Black feminine entrapment emerges in Chris's successful individuation, when his friend Rod rescues him. Rod is the film's one beacon of hope, not just as consistent comic relief, but in his caregiving. When he cannot contact Chris, he goes to the police with his concerns, and when he is laughed out of their precinct, he ventures to the Armitage compound himself. Chris is able to outrun the maternal legacy twice over; he elides the carnage visited upon her body and finds himself saved, not through 'maternal reconciliation,' as Deborah Rogers proposes, but fraternal solidarity. Rod adds multiplicity to the Black masculine in a film where the Black feminine crucially remains abjected.

Susana Araújo observes that Gothic fiction by women translates women's conflicts with their physical selves into 'blunt physiological imagery.'⁴³³ Although Chris stands in as Gothic heroine/final girl, the two emblems most explicitly coded as feminine are the hollowed out Georgina and the womb-like Sunken Place, both symbolic avatars of lack. For her analysis of the Gothic's gendered imagery, Kahane turns to Moers, who redefines the Gothic as any work that gives 'visual form to the fear of self.'⁴³⁴ From this Kahane infers (at least of the conventional Gothic), '[i]mplicit in this is the notion that what had once remained veiled in the pre-Freudian darkness, is now unveiled and even more terrifying for being seen.'⁴³⁵ Where the racialized feminine is concerned, we have seen, as explored in previous chapters, that there is a safety in invisibility for the vulnerable. Their visibility, their veiled-ness, makes of them targets for violence, silencing, and negation. In such circumstances, the racialized might predictably internalize 'fear of the self' which the Gothic gives language to: Kahane identifies the female body as the primary antagonist of the Female Gothic, but the racialized female body emerges as the most frightening outcome of a framework that privileges negotiation between the seen and unseen.

In *Get Out*, the two spectral, racialized maternal figures expose a most chilling, unresolved horror: they embody a persistent state of abandonment, host bodies that bespeak an unatoned history in the 'perfect anonymous language' of the Gothic 'for the peculiar unwillingness of the past to go away.'⁴³⁶ They are, in the

⁴³³ Susana Araújo, 'The Gothic-Grotesque of *Haunted*: Joyce Carol Oates's Tales of Abjection,' in *The Abject of Desire: The Aestheticization of the Unaesthetic in Contemporary Literature and Culture*, ed. by Konstanze Kutzbach and Monika Mueller (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), pp. 89 - 106 (p. 92).

⁴³⁴ Moers, p. 107.

⁴³⁵ Kahane, p. 55.

⁴³⁶ Victor Sage and Allan Lloyd Smith, 'Introduction,' in *The Modern Gothic: A Reader* ed. by Victor Sage and Allan Lloyd Smith (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp. 1 - 5 (p. 4).

original spirit of the doppelgänger, the unrescued harbingers of death. Chris spends much of the film subconsciously longing for community/family, which in the end, comes to his defense. All along it has been the Black feminine that remains substituted, stranded, and deserted. And in a way, the film reconstructs for gender-identifying spectators the female self-loathing and self-rejection that critics such as Kahane and Juliann Fleenor⁴³⁷ have argued dominate the genre. The gender displacement that occurs through Chris affords Black spectators an authentic victory by conflating the vulnerability of racialized bodies in his character while simultaneously maintaining the specificity of discarded Black femaleness. She proffers the film's true horror, in that she visualizes through her vacancy this tragic ongoing absence and disavowal.

Their Eyes Were Watching

Peele illuminates a cinematic and literary tradition that has compelled Black spectators to subject themselves to the objectifying gaze: the double-consciousness that Du Bois argued, before the prevalence of cinema, already characterized Black life in America. One of the more concise ways he achieves this commentary is through the character of Jim Hudson (Stephen Root), the blind art dealer who eventually purchases Chris's body. Besides Rose, Jim is the first white person that Chris meets on the Armitage estate with whom he feels completely comfortable because, unlike the other guests, he does not immediately racialize Chris. Of course, no white character in the film is to be trusted, not Rose and certainly not Jim. For his part, Jim comes to represent an emerging informal social discourse known as 'color-blindness,' which purports to mitigate racism by ignoring race. Notice how this ideology tacitly locates the problem of racism not, as might be supposed, in the 'racialized structures of the gaze'⁴³⁸ as Shawn Michelle Smith explains of Du Bois's theories, but in the Black body, which is simply seen.

Chris meets Jim after the Armitages' white guests, all potential buyers at this contemporary slave auction, have vigorously insulted him with rude, invasive questions that amplify his racial difference, including references to Tiger Woods and stereotypical questions about his genitalia and sexual prowess. Jim sits away from this gathering, supposedly signifying his ideological distance, which he further substantiates by praising Chris's talent as an artist. But Jim, of Hudson Galleries, also personifies the institution. At first, Chris is pleased because institutions establish value for artists and confer power. Poll places this scene in a broader socio-historical context which shows that 'African Americans have been systematically excluded from participating in the modern art

⁴³⁷ Juliann Fleenor, *The Female Gothic* (London: Eden Press, 1993).

⁴³⁸ Smith, p. 3.

world...For Jim to express admiration of Chris's work is a monumental gesture, a potential bridge across the racial divide that still defines and dominates the art world.⁴³⁹ I would argue that, given Chris's specific characterization, institutions also become another fraudulent signifier of community, a network from which he may draw acceptance and validation.

When we next see Jim, he is lying in a hospital gown preparing for the surgery that will effectively make Chris's body his own. Once again, the film arranges a sophisticated commentary on cinematic looking relations for Jim is projected to Chris, tied to a chair in the Armitages' basement, from a television, by now a well-established site of trauma in the film (Fig.4.5). When Chris asks him why they choose Black people, Jim responds, 'I could give a shit what color you are. What I want is deeper. I want your Eye, man! I want those things you see through.' This, of course, becomes complicated since, as I have sought to outline here, the gaze for Black spectators entails a constant negotiation of identity. For Du Bois, the gaze is the very place where double-consciousness forms (the 'sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others'⁴⁴⁰) and 'second



Figure 4.5: Jim Hudson speaks to Chris through a television screen, a site of racialized trauma in the film.

sight' emerges. This scene in particular elaborates on the major theme that connects Du Bois's text to Peele's film: how critically the machine of white supremacy depends on the intrinsically asymmetrical looking dynamics

⁴³⁹ Poll, p. 86.

⁴⁴⁰ Du Bois, p. 8.

it has constructed. The sequence directly mimics the earlier flashback to a young Chris sitting before the television as his mother dies. This time he is strapped to a chair and forced to absorb the images, a moment that attests to the screen's capacity for psychological conditioning, for this scene is doubly linked to Chris's hypnosis in Missy's office, which blatantly merges the visual language of cinema with psychoanalysis. In both sequences, the screen imposes upon Chris's agency and creativity. In other words, the scene displays the exact opposite of what Winnicott describes as 'a two-way process in which self-enrichment alternates with the discovery of meaning in the world of seen things.'⁴⁴¹ Here, Winnicott formulates the effects of a mother whose face is a mirror and who does not betray instead the 'rigidity of her own defences'.⁴⁴² The mirror carries especially cogent weight when applied to cinema and combined with Du Bois's philosophy of the veil, or more exactly, the conveniently compromised sight of white people. Like Grandma Armitage in the body of Georgina, Jim cannot see (by this I mean, in ways more than just biological, he cannot connect to) Chris as he casually details the condition of the Armitage victims: 'A sliver of you will still be in there somewhere, limited consciousness. You'll be able to see and hear...but your existence will be as a passenger, an audience. You'll live in *The Sunken Place*'.

I want to emphasize the multifaceted implications the screen brings into this scene. First of all, Jim communicates with a trapped Chris through a visual medium that affirms Jim's power, both historically and diegetically, ensuring that even though the two men are in conversation, it is not a mutual exchange. Secondly, this interaction perfectly depicts what Jim promises Chris's experience of limited consciousness will be. *Your existence will be as a passenger, an audience*. While Jim occupies, or rather colonizes, his body, Chris will exist as a prisoner in his own skin, doomed to watch the world like he is watching television. Thus Jim's blindness takes on another dimension: he may not see his actions as racially motivated, but it was race that sprung from racism, born out of the necessity to justify violating bodies that were Black.

Ironically, he does not quite register what truly animates the gaze he so desperately covets. Earlier he had described Chris's aesthetics as 'brutal' and 'melancholic,' but the opening scenes of the film reveal that Chris has actually used his photography (his gaze) to capture Black people living hopefully: a close-up of a pregnant Black belly, a Black man clinging to bags of balloons. The perspective cannot be divorced from the man himself, but Jim cannot apprehend that the talent and the man are inextricable, inseparable (like race) from history and experience. It is the natural extension of the mindset that first reduced Black people to mere bodies to be

⁴⁴¹ Winnicott, p. 2.

⁴⁴² Ibid.

expended for the will of another; vessels compelled into service. In the end, Chris's humanity and autonomy matters less to Jim than his (white) preeminence.

Belly of the Beast

Isabel Pinedo writes that *Get Out* features 'the savagery against people of color by a regime of white power that regards Black people as objects to be used and consumed by them.'⁴⁴³ For all its contemporary trappings, *Get Out* is a film about slavery and about heritage. Not unlike their ancestors, these young Black people find themselves sacrificed to white supremacist greed, in all its violence and horror. Wester cogently writes of the racialized Gothic, 'if the slave mother is repressed body, then silence is the form of her repression,' and '[her] silence is inherited by and destructive to later generations.'⁴⁴⁴ As a Female Gothic 'heroine,' Chris becomes his mother's double, the evidence of, and heir to, her subjection. He signals a past where '[s]lavery conscripted the womb, deciding the fate of the unborn and reproducing slave property by making the mark of the mother a death sentence for her child.'⁴⁴⁵ The Armitages have thoroughly preserved this horrific enterprise, snatching Black bodies, severing them from their families and communities, and scientifically replacing the captive female body as procreator. Although he destroys the evil institution (the house) and triumphs over the family, Chris never does find a way to restore his mother, to reverse her silence, her concealment, and he, too - at least, for much of the narrative - seems destined for the same volatile repression.

Furthermore, Logan, Georgina, Walter, and the other uncounted Armitage victims, remain forever voided, forever silenced, by the family's depraved scheme. Hartman fittingly calls the plantation the 'belly of the world,' and, indeed, the Sunken Place, with all its rich cinematic connotations, even more expressively invokes the hold of a slave ship, where Africans were reborn into another world as a slave class defined, for all generations after, by this initial rupture. The film advances its overarching metaphor when Chris ends up imprisoned in the Armitages' basement, the 'belly' of the house, awaiting his consumption. Here, the *Frankenstein* parallels really begin to take shape. In the director's commentary, Peele notes, 'In many ways, the African American experience is this country's *Frankenstein* monster,' an observation that proves increasingly productive upon closer inspection of this primary text. Barbara Creed writes, 'The [male] scientist who attempts to create life becomes monstrous - usually more monstrous than his creation,' and this, she contends, because of his 'displaced desire to

⁴⁴³ Isabel Pinedo, 'Get Out: Moral Monsters at the Intersection of Racism and the Horror Film,' in *Final Girls, Feminism and Popular Culture*, ed. by Katarzyna Paszkiewicz and Stacy Rusnak (Cham: Springer Nature, 2020), pp. 95 - 114 (p. 107).

⁴⁴⁴ Wester, p. 76.

⁴⁴⁵ Hartman, p. 169.

reproduce.⁴⁴⁶ Her subsequent references - among them *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), *Dr Jekyll and Sister Hyde* (1971), and *The Stepford Wives* - all break down along these strictly gendered lines, where woman becomes monster and casts her primal uncanniness (her womb) on the monstrous man who dares to create life without her.⁴⁴⁷ Shelley's novel foregrounds the doppelgänger, too, and, according to Linda Dryden, 'is probably the most obvious early nineteenth-century novel that weaves themes of duality into a Gothic context.'⁴⁴⁸ Dryden announces the novel's thematic doubling in Biblical terms, saying, '...Frankenstein, like God, creates a man "in his own image."⁴⁴⁹ Certainly, 'Frankenstein' endures largely misremembered in the cultural memory as the creature, not the doctor. The pair behaves like the classical literary double act in the sense that the latter arguably incarnates the darker instincts of the former and their (physical and psychological) identities increasingly merge until eventually they perform as aspects of a whole individual. So their twinship falls within the central Gothic dilemma already named here: the fear of self. To return again to Dryden, 'the double is a threat to the integrity of the self, and frequently evidence of a Gothic, supernatural force at large that brings with it death and destruction.'⁴⁵⁰ As such, the doctor remains dismally bound to his creature until their Gothic entanglement ends appropriately, in death for Victor and obscurity for the Monster. Unsurprisingly, film adaptations tend to deviate from this bleak conclusion.

For the most part, I have focused on how psychoanalysis has driven racial themes in *Get Out*, but medical science has historically played an equal role in the white supremacist project. From the Tuskegee experiment to Henrietta Lacks and many more cases besides, Black people have long been subject to the cruel, inhumane experiments of doctors in the name of medicine and science. Rose's father Dean, a doctor who performs the lobotomies that transform their victims into automatons, seems the most obvious correlation to Victor Frankenstein; thus, melding together Black and white 'parts' suggests the 'creature' is the American project, premised on violating Black people, their bodies rendered all at once disposable commodities, forever bound as colonial subject to the white imaginary and its ensuing violences.

Not to be overlooked, feminist themes similarly bridge the two texts. Several critics have stressed the racial overtones that permeate Shelley's novel and animate the iconography found in its cinematic translations.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁶ Creed, p. 50.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁸ Linda Dryden, *The Modern Gothic and Literary Doubles: Stevenson, Wilde and Wells* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 38.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁰ Dryden, p. 38.

⁴⁵¹ H. L. Malchow, "Frankenstein's Monster and Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain," *Past & Present*, 139 (1993), pp. 90–130.

⁴⁵² Devon Hodges, in the tradition of Gilbert and Gubar, understands the creature as Shelley's double, a figure who can all at once articulate the general frustrations of womanhood, maligned by a patriarchal society, and the particular contradictory position Shelley (and other women writers like her) occupied as both woman and author: '...the misery of being neither fully inside nor outside the culture. The monster does not desire to be a rebel; he wants to be assimilated into society.'⁴⁵³ In this way, Shelley's novel typifies the Female Gothic mode in its characteristic ambivalence, reflective of the white middle-class femininity the genre portrayed, as complicit as it is oppressed by the paternal social order. Moers calls the tale a 'birth myth,' which owes its origins to Shelley's own experience as a mother.⁴⁵⁴ One begins to see, then, how this central duality emerged for the author, who channeled the ambivalence of creating as an author and a mother into her novel, and how this twofold, fundamentally Female Gothic negotiation would spawn a tale such as *The Stepford Wives*, its paranoid descendant, where autonomous womanhood is eradicated. Intriguingly, both *Get Out* and *Us* contain a 'mad scientist' theme where characters find themselves endangered by a pathological project to refigure their bodies. Dean is linked in lineage to both the deranged Frankenstein and the husbands of Stepford, Connecticut, but not because they attempt to 'usurp the female role.'⁴⁵⁵ Peele's film undermines essentialist gender dynamics. We know that men (like Rod) can be caregivers and nurturers. This suggests he locates the true depravity of these male scientists in the practice of violating bodies, not boundary defined roles. Like Frankenstein, it is not that Dean attempts to 'reproduce' or take on the role of mother, but that he attempts to dominate another body. This grotesque animation is an awful duality, a horrible split that severs the body from its own rightful autonomy and psyche. Across these texts, the systematic arrangement of their 'reproduction' measures resembles industry (economy) and represents the exact inverse of birth: a network that consumes, dissects, and crucially, robs the body. It is a practice that is closer to death - to zombification - than birth.

Frankenstein and *The Stepford Wives* offer a language and dimensional metaphor for the widespread commodification of marginalized bodies by a white patriarchal system that does not respect the independence of the marginalized. There are several such narratives that cover these themes from which Peele could have taken his cues, yet the filmmaker gravitated toward the sources that are discernibly Female Gothic and deeply concerned

⁴⁵² Elizabeth Young, *Black Frankenstein: The Making of an American Metaphor* (New York: New York University Press, 2008)

⁴⁵³ Hodges, p. 160.

⁴⁵⁴ Ellen Moers, 'The Female Gothic: The Monster's Mother,' *The New York Review of Books* (1974)

<[https://janeaustensummer.files.wordpress.com/2018/04/moers-female-gothic-the-monster_s-mother.pdf](https://janeaustensummer.files.wordpress.com/2018/04/moers-female-gothic-the-monster-s-mother.pdf)> [accessed 21 Jan 2016]

⁴⁵⁵ Creed, p. 17.

with gendered anxieties such as maternity, birth, and abjection. With these fundamental influences, the film's commentaries on race take on an openly intersectional scope. When our male protagonist finds himself vulnerable to bodily assault, it does not just invoke his history as a Black man: his ordeal must necessarily confront the historical and ongoing captivity of Black women. His subjection is intertwined with hers, so much so that the gender boundaries between them are often blurred. However, although she doubles his victimhood, unlike him, she remains characterized by the void. In the early zombie films that *Get Out* clearly draws from, the Black masculine is configured as a sexual threat to white femininity, a phallus: the saber the houngan uses in *I Walked With a Zombie* (1943) or the Black hands grasping a shrieking white woman in *Ouanga* (1936).⁴⁵⁶ Of course, Black femininity, too, operates as a sexual threat, as many case studies examined in this thesis reveal. Here again, racialized masculinity makes itself visible, where the Black feminine remains largely unseen. Not only do the Armitages seemingly have more male victims, but there is the racialized and racist language to describe the nature of Chris's subjugation: for example, Rose's brother speaks in openly racist terms about Chris's 'natural' physical prowess, in addition to the questions at the party/slave auction about his genitalia. But no one speaks of Georgina's body or describes the historical architecture of her captivity the way they do with Chris, so that her ordeal, violated and displaced, remains entirely silent.

Conclusion

Get Out may not be as straightforwardly Female Gothic as previous films discussed in this thesis. However, it comes to summarize the cinematic themes this project engages with on multiple levels: the gaze, the screen, and the Black maternal; issues Kasi Lemmons also prioritizes in her vision of the Female Gothic. In trying to determine how the genre articulates the Black feminine experience, particularly where it concerns visibility and invisibility, a pattern seems to emerge among Black filmmakers who adopt its framework: one that inevitably foregrounds the gaze and its two-ness, the mask as well as Du Bois's veil, and the Black family, absent and longed for, or in some way fragmented. Importantly, unlike the Moynihan Report, which considers these familial dynamics in racist, gendered terms as evidence of racial pathology, Lemmons and Peele present the Black family as an institution that often replicates its original fissure. The consequences of that historical rupture reverberate across generations. Moreover, while the Black maternal may or may not deliver her descendants from absolute tragedy, she does not primarily exist to nurture. Even Eve, matriarch of the Batistes in *Eve's Bayou* (1997),

⁴⁵⁶ Chera Kee, *Not Your Average Zombie: Rehumanizing the Undead from Voodoo to Zombie Walks* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017), p. 75.

emerges as a character with her own personhood separate from her scion. She has her own Gothic backstory, which troubles her heirs. Maternal absence seems to haunt the Black Gothic family with precisely these historical implications in mind. In *Get Out* she comes to implicate not only her child's estrangement and inherent duality, but her own loss of self as disembodied Other, nothingness, unseen and ultimately abandoned.

It is significant that *Get Out* depicts how the Black feminine is socially and historically disavowed in richly cinematic language. While the other cases covered here, from *Cat People* (1942) to *Eve's Bayou*, revealingly utilize spectatorship dynamics, Peele's film images the relationship between the racialized and the screen, identifying the latter as central to the architecture that terrorizes Black consciousness. Not only does the film foreground racial looking relations, they become the key driving force for the film's narrative and allegorical horror. The Sunken Place already invites analogies to the Middle Passage, but Peele also connects this racialized psychological wound to the screen, and, by applying Winnicott's theories to this relationship, to the lost Black maternal, whose absence and substitution by the white feminine begets unspeakable trauma for her descendants, for all who bear her mark.

Get Out is not the first of the genre to make Black anxiety the locus of its horror. Rusty Cundieff's *Tales from the Hood* (1995) and Ernest Dickerson's *Bones* (2001) are frank takes on contemporary Black life that, while not entirely divorced from slavery, are vitally linked to the urban space and telegraph a reckoning with external, institutional forces whose dismantling depend upon solidarity and thus communal resistance. The former, in particular, streamlines a satisfying deconstruction of gendered and raced hegemony⁴⁵⁷ and points to a conventionally economic or otherwise social symbol of villainy: aggressive forces from the outside and those within who betray the unit must be destroyed. White filmmakers have contributed to this lexicon, too, most notably Wes Craven with his 1991 film *The People Under the Stairs* and the less successful 1995 film *Vampire in Brooklyn* (1995). However, what makes Peele's film so pertinent to this project is that he meaningfully distinguishes his tale as a significantly psychological and genealogical project, two major pillars of Female Gothic fiction. At its heart, the film is an exploration of Chris's alienation from his family and the psychic conditions that foster his victimization: like so many Female Gothic heroines, he belongs to a vulnerable class, and encounter with the mother (with his own history of subjugation) becomes the only pathway to survival.

Certainly Chris doubling his mother, who is also partially doubled by Georgina, represents a queering of the genre and a deconstruction of Black gender performance so rarely found in the film's predecessors. But

⁴⁵⁷ Fulmer, Jacqueline, ““Men Ain’t All”: A Reworking of Masculinity in Tales from the Hood, or, Grandma Meets the Zombie,” *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 115, no. 457/458, 2002, (pp. 422–442).

while Chris may be the lead, it is the Black feminine that becomes the most fascinating element of the narrative. While most case studies explored in previous chapters have mapped the racial anxieties around Black femininity, which usually necessitate her destruction, here, the tension between her visibility and invisibility illuminates her enforced illegibility and also provides a compass toward her fears. We witness the embodied Georgina's helpless toil for autonomy over her body, operated by Grandma Armitage, but we also witness the nothingness of the Sunken Place communicated, not coincidentally, in the metaphorical language of the lost, violently substituted maternal: in other words, the audience must confront her irretrievability. The Black maternal, at least here, can never be rescued or fully reconciled with; Chris must survive with his guilt.

As such, *Get Out* conveys the horror of the Black feminine experience with specificity, and furthermore complicates the mirror as a way to negate a legacy of silence. Indeed, the Black feminine in this film is characterized as both unseen and silenced, but consider, too, how often Black people are seen and equally silenced. Unlike *The Skeleton Key*, where a Black woman camouflages herself in an act of survival, in Peele's film disguised white characters literalize the threat the Black body faces, never safe from the threat of white violation. The film powerfully complements *Us* (2019) which goes on to trace how the mirror may fail us; or, as Evelyn Hammonds might put it, this subsequent film throws into question what we assume reflections would show, for 'an appeal to the visual is not uncomplicated or innocent.'⁴⁵⁸ Although young Eve in *Eve's Bayou* finds empowerment in the mirror, the instrument becomes a complex one for Black women, as Peele's films reveal.

⁴⁵⁸ Evelyn Hammonds, 'Black (W)holes and the geometry of Black female sexuality' in *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 6.2-3 (Summer-Fall 1994), pp. 301 - 312 (p. 312).

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MOTHERLESS CHILD

Mothers plead with the kosanba to remain in the mortal world and not to return to its spirit mother, and masters command the slave to stay put and to forget all thoughts of the mother country, the natal land. Come and stay, child, they both implore.

- Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*⁴⁵⁹

If *Get Out* attends to the son longing for the abject mother, then Jordan Peele's second feature *Us* (2019) confronts her directly. No need to illumine traces of her specter, or unravel the intricate network of apprehensions and fixations that betray her veiled presence. Here, she is finally visually realized - seen, tangible - not for the first time, but certainly uniquely and in all her exquisite complexity.

I have argued that the Female Gothic routinely produces the Black feminine as character and implied spectator. In her evaluation of Black women's role in horror as characters and creators, Kinitra Brooks observes that scholarship principally locates the genre's anxieties in the 'other sides of the white male binary,' a tendency which she believes excludes Black women, for 'she is the non-Other, the Other of the white male's Others (black men and white women).'⁴⁶⁰ I would argue that her status as 'non-Other' in a tradition that inherently normalizes the white masculine actually suggests she is the white male's (and thus the Gothic's) ultimate Other. She is both

⁴⁵⁹ Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), p. 86.

⁴⁶⁰ Kinitra D. Brooks, *Searching for Sycorax: Black Women's Hauntings of Contemporary Horror* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2018), p. 8.

female and Black, twice Othered, doubly ‘monstrous,’ and perhaps the most powerful possible embodiment of the genre’s foremost preoccupations.

The Gothic, as discussed throughout this project, has generally announced itself through ‘thematic and stylistic characteristics that suggest the inescapability of the past and of inheritance (via both blood and culture)...and the naïveté or outright falsehood of foundational tenets of American society: freedom from persecution based on difference, original equality and opportunity, [and] the possibility of self-determination.’⁴⁶¹ In other words, the mode is essentially organized around unveiling not merely human capacity for horror, but how that capacity informs the fundamental institutions upon which communities are built. The institutions may surround people, but people equally internalize institutions. James Baldwin famously writes, ‘People are trapped in history and history is trapped in them.’⁴⁶² The Gothic project, then, is crucially about confinement: confinement to the past, to family, to delineated roles. Typically, the family will represent society and/or facilitate an analysis of broader social themes, but what Peggy Dunn Bailey implicitly establishes in her reading above is that integral to the Gothic is internal danger. Those spaces of presumed safety (like family and nation), and, more than that, spaces that have shaped identity (‘the inescapability of the past and of inheritance’) prove the most treacherous, usually because they require conformity and the stifling of difference.

Such classically Gothic qualities are not exclusively rendered through retellings of the Black diasporic experience, but this experience does precisely evoke the aforementioned quintessential elements of the form. Given the legacy of American slavery, which has reproduced itself in the police state and mass incarceration, contemporary cultural commentators such as Ta-Nehisi Coates⁴⁶³ have pointed out that the American past remains continually slippery because national mythology (which translates to identity) so blatantly contradicts the facts of its violent heritage. Thus, a necessary repression must take place. The temporal relationship that emerges is fundamentally Gothic because it fosters the uncanny: history is both mystery and extant, its denizens doomed to repeat and relive disavowed horrors. Authors have reckoned with these enduring hauntings from the earliest iterations of the American Gothic, fueled by the urgency to resolve the trauma that has been suppressed because of the threat it poses to personhood. This mythos inevitably entails the suppression of certain

⁴⁶¹ Peggy Dunn Bailey, “Female Gothic Fiction, Grotesque Realities, and Bastard Out of Carolina: Dorothy Allison Revises the Southern Gothic,” *The Mississippi Quarterly*, 63.2 (2010), pp. 269–290 (p. 271) <www.jstor.org/stable/26477320> [accessed 15 July 2020].

⁴⁶² James Baldwin, ‘Stranger in the Village,’ in *Notes on a Native Son* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955) <<https://www.janvaneyck.nl/site/assets/files/2312/baldwin.pdf>> [accessed: 3 November 2020]

⁴⁶³ Ta-Nehisi Coates, *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy* (Great Britain: Hamish Hamilton, 2017)

populations, unsurprisingly the same communities whose marginalization recalls the very history that must be forgotten. Andrew Ng puts it this way: ‘Again and again, the American self is maintained through separation and repression...the formation of the American self (a self which later becomes infused with and inseparable from “white” ideology) can never be finally independent of its others.’⁴⁶⁴ *Us* outwardly operates as a slasher, but it embodies the Female Gothic project. The film contains all its familiar traits (omens, premonitions, secret tunnels that operate like prisons) to expose the innately grotesque underpinnings of society through the more intimate, domestic sphere of the family (‘blood and culture’). That way, the feature becomes a direct encounter with the American Gothic tradition which has long contended that American identity is forged through technologies of Othering⁴⁶⁵ that point back on itself. This paradoxical exclusion and codependence fittingly manifests in *Us* as the double.

For me, the Female Gothic expresses something especially cogent in the vein of what Saidiya Hartman describes as ‘the entanglement of violence and sexuality, care and exploitation [that] continues to define the meaning of being Black and female.’⁴⁶⁶ This originally literary terrain lends itself to her experience metaphorically and cinematically, for, as Brooks put it, ‘she is the non-Other;’ or, she is ghost, she is the unseen. Perhaps no realm more desperately requires the final actualization of her body as heroine than the one that has made her not simply monstrous - for all Female Gothic protagonists must face the internalized psychic ambivalence provoked by the quandary of their bodies - but invisible in a narrative so instinctively hers: that is, a tale of subjection, of complex genealogy, of muffled traumas that refuse to remain history. This final chapter will consider the breadth of what the form is able to do when the racialized female double, no longer ‘absent’ or dispossessed, becomes conventionally legible. It is not merely that she is *seen*, for that has been done many times, especially in recent years - e.g. *28 Days Later* (2002), *It Comes At Night* (2017) - or even that the modernized Female Gothic has plainly proven to accommodate her - *When the Bough Breaks* (2016) - but that this case has privileged her perspective using the genre’s vocabulary to give texture to her interiority and evidence her specific racialized, gendered, and cultural anxieties.

Us allows us to explore the cardinal theme of the Female Gothic - ‘the imprisonment and vulnerability of women within structures purportedly designed for or devoted to their safety, especially the family home’⁴⁶⁷ -

⁴⁶⁴ Andrew Hock-soon Ng, *Interrogating Interstices: Gothic Aesthetics in Postcolonial Asian and Asian American Literature* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 35.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁶ Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2019), p. 30.

⁴⁶⁷ Bailey, p. 273.

from the lens of a Black woman, whose complicity and anguish seals her Female Gothic lineage. In this chapter I outline how the genre translates and brings dimensionality to her socio-psychological experience. Moreover, I detail how, as in Peele's first film, the spectatorial response is imaged to depict the generally overlooked psychic toil that marks Black femininity, in constant tension with white patriarchy. Because Peele's films correlate in framework and their preoccupations with Black spectatorship, this chapter will likewise address how the mode can be harnessed to elucidate what Black women fear, particularly how what is feared about them shapes what they may fear in themselves.

Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl

Like *Get Out*, the story of *Us* is essentially a slave narrative. The film follows the Wilsons, a middle-class Black family: Gabe (Winston Duke), Adelaide (Lupita Nyong'o), and their two children Zora (Shahidi Wright Joseph) and Jason (Evan Alex). While on summer holiday in Santa Cruz, their home is invaded by their doppelgängers who call themselves 'the Tethered': Abraham (Gabe), Umbrae (Zora), Pluto (Jason) and Red (Adelaide). Curiously, Red appears to be the only one among the Tethered who can speak, although her voice comes out



Figure 5.1: The Wilsons' Tethereds arrive in the Wilsons' front yard to un-Tether themselves in *Us* (Peele, 2019).

throaty and croaking as if her vocal chords have been mangled. She commands not just her family, but the Tethered population at large, and is also revealed to be the architect of this long planned uprising.⁴⁶⁸ Hitherto their revolt, the Tethered had been condemned to roam secret tunnels under American cities, where they were involuntarily compelled to replicate the actions of their doubles above ground. As per Red's plot, they have all now come, clad in red jumpsuits and equipped with gold scissors, to 'un-Tether' themselves: to slaughter their doppelgängers and take their place in the sun.

Beyond the double entendre the title conjures - *Us* and the U. S. - all at once, the plight of the Tethered recalls several historical and contemporaneous racialized American horrors: the genocide of indigenous peoples, their subsequent relocation and confinement within the reservation system, slavery, Japanese internment camps, mass incarceration, etc. While *Get Out* is more openly about race and specifically Black Americans' ongoing captivity as colonial subject, *Us* seems, at least initially, to elide racial discourse. According to the film's mythos, all characters have a Tethered no matter their race. In fact, when asked who they are, Red replies in her raspy delivery, 'We are Americans.' They are apparently clones, developed with the objective to control their human counterparts overhead, and abandoned when the project failed. Although many state-sanctioned American tragedies could be mapped onto them, the condition of the Tethered connects them most evocatively to slavery in two significant ways.

First, their nature - grunts and groans (if not complete silence) in place of coherent speech, their mindless mimicking of their counterparts - directly references the early zombie films discussed in this research. In films such as *White Zombie* (1932) and *I Walked With a Zombie* (1943), the formerly docile figure alternately signified a helpless, exploited labor force or linked its zombified white character to the Voodoo-practicing Black locals. The Tethered, too, resemble the zombified Black characters of *Get Out* in their diminished autonomy, which haunts them even after they escape the tunnels. Furthermore, film theorist Chera Kee notes that 'even with fundamental transformations in the zombie's character with the move from slave-style to cannibal-style zombies, the zombie remains raced.'⁴⁶⁹ I would agree because although, as Kee fittingly acknowledges here, recent zombie films have become superficially 'raceless,' they can never be divorced from their origins in Haitian Vodou, a religion borne of the African diaspora. However far from its progenitor, in its very translation to the screen, the distorted zombie of American cinema still manages to communicate the colonized Black body and the legacy of American slavery.

⁴⁶⁸ *Us*, dir. by Jordan Peele (Universal Pictures, 2019) [DVD].

⁴⁶⁹ Chera Kee, *Not Your Average Zombie: Rehumanizing the Undead from Voodoo to Zombie Walks* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017), p. 50.

The second major way the Tethered inscribe this history lies in the implications of their name. Thus far, the captive Black body in horror has repeatedly been presented as decontextualized, unmoored: from Clelie to Chris to Candyman, all orphans, ripped away from their communities, forced to navigate a white world, forever isolated. Their alienation emblematises that initial split that wrought generations of displaced children longing for ‘home.’ Like many scholars before me, I have interpreted this positional duality in terms of ‘loss.’ Saidiya Hartman has very different ideas. In her essay ‘The Time of Slavery,’ Hartman writes cogently of the relationship Black American tourism constructs with Africa. She troubles the dominant framing that sees the voyage to the continent as a return:

The return is a fantasy of origins...the primal scene that explains the origin of the subject is the event of captivity and enslavement, thus the sites returned to are the dungeons, barracoons, and slave houses of the west coast of Africa. The journey through the dungeons is a kind of time travel that transports the tourist to the past.⁴⁷⁰

Here, Hartman calls on Jean Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis’s theory of the primal scene, which comes to portray, for her purposes, the ‘original point of departure of a history.’⁴⁷¹ What she meaningfully identifies throughout the essay is that the journey back is an entirely temporal exercise. It is not an encounter with Africa in its contemporaneity.⁴⁷² Tourists are drawn to the dungeons or the barracoons, and themselves announce the ‘point of departure,’ the primal [birth] scene. They are tethered not to a place but to a past.

The Tethered need not signal Africa to evoke American slavery. For one thing, the tunnels literalize the hold, representing a liminal space that symbolizes the Middle Passage and the slave institution itself. Put another way, the Tethered exist in an ongoing state of dispossession, born to ‘the hold,’ without full agency or claim to any land beyond the space they are shoved into together (which again restages the slave ship and the plantation). When they finally break free they have no choice but to take their place as rightful Americans. Indeed, as Red declares, that is exactly what they are. Apropos, nothing more aptly marks their enslavement than their name. They are tethered to their overground counterparts, forced to repeat their movements down to the most minute detail. They have no say even over their own bodies. But already, before the film ever defines its world, the term Tethered means to be attached, to be bound to something. Hartman herself makes use of the word no less than

⁴⁷⁰ Saidiya Hartman, ‘The Time of Slavery,’ *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 101.4 (2002), pp. 757 - 777 (pp. 766 - 767).

⁴⁷¹ Jean Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis, “Primal Phantasies,” *The Language of Psycho-analysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Norton, 1973), p. 332.

⁴⁷² Hartman, p. 763.

three times, in which she notes Black people are tethered to an inheritance of dispossession, to the dead, and, of course, to the past.⁴⁷³

As I state in chapter 1, slave narratives have been recognized as some of the earliest entries in the American Gothic canon. Several scholars, including Toni Morrison and Teresa Goddu, contend that the American literary tradition is steeped in slavery and the long silenced Black presence. Although slave narratives are crucially distinguished by their explicit political agenda, Kari Winter draws fascinating connections between women's slave accounts and Female Gothic fiction: 'Both genres focus on the sexual politics at the heart of patriarchal culture...the two genres are remarkably similar in imagery, structure, and social analyses...I read both genres as sites of ideological struggle.'⁴⁷⁴ Winter demonstrates that, despite the immense chasm between the experiences of white middle-class women and Black enslaved people, the two modes share certain vital affinities. True, both provide incisive political critiques of the forces that, to varying degrees, oppress women. Of course, slave narratives frequently indict white women for their complicity in a structure that, at least racially, benefits them. But on the whole, these genres address the ways that women are divided against each other and, fundamentally, themselves. Even Hortense Spillers notes, inspired by Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, that 'we could say that African-American women's community and Anglo-American women's community, under certain shared cultural conditions, were the twin actants on a common psychic landscape, were subject to the same fabric of dread and humiliation. Neither could claim her body and its various productions - for quite different reasons...' ⁴⁷⁵ The point is not to conflate the two experiences. Understanding their nuances, their contrasts, the levels of power, is key to disentangling the pernicious threads that bind all women. Spillers elaborates, 'from one point of view, we cannot unravel one female's narrative from the other's, cannot decipher one without tripping over the other.'⁴⁷⁶ Drawing from Spillers and Winter, I have argued here that slavery becomes the canvas, the common psychic and cultural landscape that produces American 'womanhood,' their similarities and the distinctions which significantly denied Black women access to the category. The Gothic and its instruments, namely 'imagery' and 'structure,' are the colors that materialize their condition and resistance. Thus, the shades of difference matter very much.

⁴⁷³ Hartman, pp. 766, 767, 771.

⁴⁷⁴ Kari J. Winter, *Subjects of Slavery, Agents of Change Women and Power in Gothic Novels and Slave Narratives, 1790-1865* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), p. 13.

⁴⁷⁵ Hortense Spillers, 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book,' *Diacritics*, 17.2 (Summer 1987), pp. 64-81 (p. 77).

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

For his part, Peele relocates this difference between two Black women, which seems to beckon exclusively class-based analyses. Ultimately, his equation yields a multifaceted portrait of Black womanhood, its concessions and violations, a heritage of survival and outright rebellion come to life thanks to the intersection of the Female Gothic and the slave narrative. Both genres speak to historically gendered subjection and defiance, which allows us to codify the material oppositions presented by two Black women. For as much as the film explores the binary, as much as it reflects upon nation, most potently the film works as a study of the self. In terms of the ‘structure’ that Winter identifies above, the commonalities between the two modes generally look like confinement and (at least for the Female Gothic, temporary) escape, followed by somewhat emotionally



Figure 5.2: An illustration of the character ‘Topsy’ from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

ambiguous conclusions that never fully concede to despair nor hope, which reflects back on the unyielding dominant order that envelops the heroines. To be more specific, Winifred Morgan outlines the general characteristics of the form: ‘In all slave narratives, the fugitive or former slaves relate their trials as slaves, their flight to freedom, and, finally, their dedication to helping others flee slavery.’⁴⁷⁷ So, notably, the slave narrative

⁴⁷⁷ Winifred Morgan, “Gender-Related Difference in the Slave Narratives of Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass,” *American Studies*, 35. 2 (1994), pp. 73–94 (p. 77).

galvanizes its readership first by reporting the horrors the individual slave endures. Her escape, then, is revolutionary, righteous sedition against an inhumane, irredeemable institution, and her ordeal necessitates its downfall.

In *Us*, it is possibly not clear until the end that we have been watching a slave narrative, although there are some intertextual allusions: namely, that Red resembles the Topsy character (Fig.5.2) from the anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), and the casting of Lupita Nyong'o, who won an Oscar for her performance as a tormented slave woman in *12 Years a Slave* (2013). For the majority of its runtime, the film plays instead like a Female Gothic slasher, because the story seemingly encourages us to root for Adelaide, who, although Black, largely enjoys the luxuries and privileges of a middle-class existence. True, the Wilsons are not as wealthy as their white friends: Josh (Tim Heidecker) and his wife Kitty (Elisabeth Moss) along with their twin daughters function as an interesting foil to the Wilsons as the 'un-Tethering' event unfolds. That said, the Wilsons have a summer house (which may or may not be Adelaide's childhood home) and Gabe has earned enough money to splurge on a small speedboat. As the film progresses, the Wilsons dispatch their murderous doppelgängers one by one and we get farther away from Red's inaugural monologue - when she and the Tethered first invade the Wilsons' home - in which she details the unjust discrepancies that have defined the lives of the underground doppelgängers:

Once upon a time, there was a girl and the girl had a shadow. The two were connected, tethered together. And the girl ate, her food was given to her warm and tasty. But when the shadow was hungry, she had to eat rabbit raw and bloody. On Christmas, the girl received wonderful toys: soft and cushy, while the shadow's toys were so sharp and cold they sliced through her fingers when she tried to play with them. The girl met a handsome prince and fell in love. But the shadow at that same time had Abraham. It didn't matter if she loved him or not. He was tethered to the girl's prince after all. Then the girl had her first child, a beautiful baby girl. But the shadow, she gave birth to a little monster. Umbrae was born laughing. The girl had a second child, a boy this time. They had to cut her open and take him from her belly. The shadow had to do it all herself. She named him Pluto; he was born to love fire. So you see, the shadow hated the girl so much for so long until one day the shadow realized she was being tested by God.

Red describes a life fraught with suffering inextricably bound - 'tethered' - to Adelaide's happiest moments. Her marriage, the birth of her children - moments considered especially monumental for women - become volatile tragedies for Red because they evidence her enslavement, her lack of agency. Worse still, Red demonstrates how such a grotesque dynamic disfigures her own relationships and emotional capacities: marriage - 'it didn't matter if she loved [Abraham] or not' - and motherhood - 'she gave birth to a monster' - have been foisted on her. In her

role as ‘shadow’ they become acts of servility. She is not simply detached from the family, she is menaced by it; and as she relays this tale, visually shrouded in the shadows of the Wilsons’ dark living room, tears stream down her cheeks and her face quakes with horror. Spillers gave us the endlessly productive groundwork with which to grasp the way slavery distorts kinship to others and, importantly, to the self. In her landmark essay ‘Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,’ Spillers explores how conditions of slavery complicate gender: ‘Under these arrangements, the customary lexis of sexuality, including “reproduction,” “motherhood,” “pleasure” and “desire” are thrown into unrelieved crises.⁴⁷⁸ If the woman is not free, if she can lay claim to no property, not even her own children, we begin to see how ‘feminine’ attributes, too, elude her because she is a keg in an economic enterprise: reproduction and motherhood are labor rather than roles or relationships that can be cultivated, pleasure and desire of no consequence whatsoever. The Female Gothic themes meet here with a concise class critique, where Red relays an existence marked by a lack of resources and an absence of nurturing. As she catalogues the horrors she faced, her construction indeed resembles the slave narrative - plight followed by flight - but it is curious that she should frame this account as a fairy tale and in third person rather than first.

At this point, the audience knows that Red and Adelaide have met once before, as children. Before the Tethered even showed up, Adelaide had been plagued by an ominous feeling that ostensibly stemmed from this childhood incident in Santa Cruz. The film opens at a carnival in 1986 when young Adelaide (Madison Curry) wanders away from her distracted father and stumbles across a seemingly empty hall of mirrors. Inside she

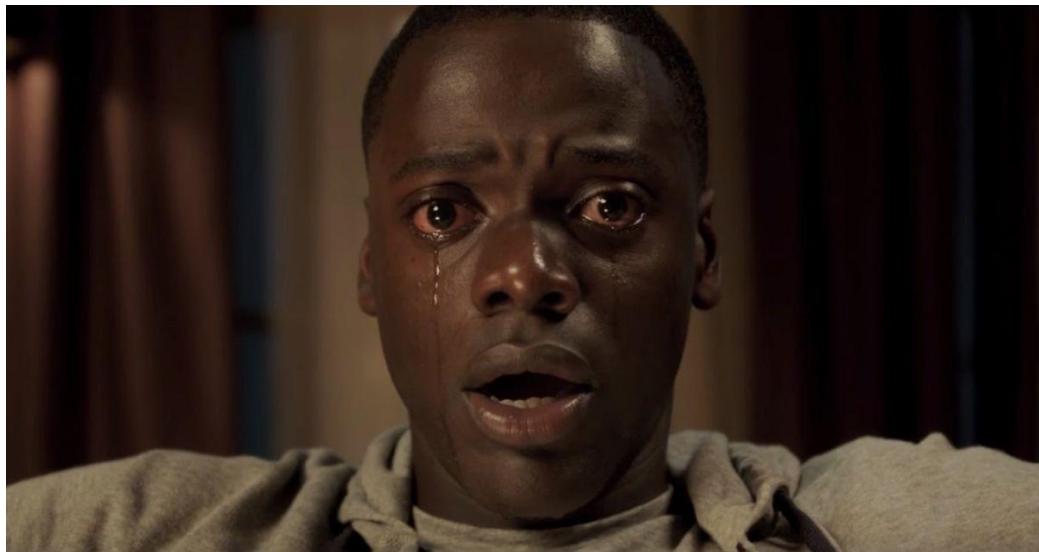


Figure 5.3: Chris’s terrified gaze in Missy’s office in *Get Out* (Peele, 2017).

⁴⁷⁸ Spillers, p. 76.



Figure 5.4: Young Adelaide meets her Tethered in *Us* (Peele, 2019). Peele's films foreground the terrorized Black gaze. Both projects are organized around fear and spectatorship, and in both scenes characters are confronted with a literalized psychic split: double-consciousness.

encounters a little girl who looks exactly like her. After the event, she is left temporarily speechless, which prompts her concerned parents to take her to a psychiatrist. The scene where Red and Adelaide first meet is visually and metaphorically similar to the Sunken Place set piece in *Get Out*. The same blue darkness envelops the screen and the actress gets a similar close-up which emphasizes the terrorized Black gaze. Adelaide backs toward what appears to be a mirror, but someone dressed and hair styled exactly like hers already stands there, unmoving, with their back to her. She turns toward the 'mirror' and the next shot is Peele's now signature close-up: she looks directly into the camera as her eyes grow wide in alarm, and the image echoes the shot of Chris crying in Missy's office. We do not initially see what frightens her, but already the parallels between Peele's two films are easily discernible.

Yet again, much like Du Bois, the director makes the Black gaze the cornerstone of questions he raises about identity. In the previous chapter, I explained that the Sunken Place recalls the Middle Passage, a space that visually communicates the original rupture that marks the Black diasporic experience and the ongoing psychic toil that Du Bois identifies as 'double-consciousness' - this is to say, a separation/split or 'two souls, two thoughts...two warring ideals in one dark body'⁴⁷⁹ - that characterizes the Black American experience. *Us* not only portrays this racialized duality, but by placing this scene in a fun house, blurs the boundaries between true

⁴⁷⁹ Du Bois, p. 8.

and false self, revealing the unspoken horror of such a proposition. In this two-ness, this self-estrangement, there must surely also be confusion about one's own authenticity. Which is the real self? Kamilla Elliot analyzes a similar scene in Ann Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), when the heroine lifts a black veil and perceives a body, rather than a portrait, as she expected, and faints. Elliot explains:

The phobia that representation lacks substance and that bodies lack souls is accompanied by an inverse iconophobia in Gothic fiction: that an image may be its *own* original. In contrast to the phobia that the original does not exist but is only an image, this phobia posits the more terrifying possibility that the image does not exist but is always already an original.⁴⁸⁰

By imaging double-consciousness this way, Peele gets at a dimension of this theory Du Bois himself elides in his hopefulness that the double self may be merged into a 'better and truer self.'⁴⁸¹ That is, in the confrontation with the self as colonial image - 'always looking at one's self through the eyes of others'⁴⁸² - how does one distinguish between the original and the image, and how easy it must be to fall prey to the image. Of course, at this point, we do not yet see what Adelaide has witnessed. But we can presume that she has encountered her double; she is surrounded by mirrors after all, and twinned images of her abound in this sequence. Upon entering, she whistles 'The Itsy Bitsy Spider' only to hear it sung back to her from somewhere, by someone, unknown. This scene foretells the doppelgänger and can be read as Adelaide's first brush with her inherited, interior 'two-ness' as a Black child, for the scene literally requires that she behold 'herself' through an outside gaze. The mirror/veil image, upon which this thesis centrally hinges - Irena's encounter with the cat woman in the diner; the zombified Jessica blindly stalking Betsy in the tower; Mama Cecile's original form flashing in the mirror before it crashes into Caroline - does not merely establish a racial difference that does not immediately appear explicit. Crucially, in most cases, these moments highlight the diminished capacity to *see*, which characterizes the white/unveiled characters. However, like Irena, whose horror stems from being faced with her own racialized and alienated image, here again we have a racialized character whose trauma is made visual for the audience: the violence of being called to witness oneself as Other.

By the film's conclusion, this prologue takes on even more complexity. We discover that the woman we have known as Adelaide was born a Tethered, and in the hall of mirrors she switched places with the

⁴⁸⁰ Kamilla Elliot, *Portraiture and British Gothic Fiction: The Rise of Picture Identification, 1764–1835* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2012), p. 266.

⁴⁸¹ Du Bois, p. 9.

⁴⁸² Du Bois, p. 8.

real/overground Adelaide, whom we know as Red. The conclusion fills in the blanks left by the prologue, depicting how the Tethered Adelaide attacked the prime Adelaide and dragged her into the tunnels, leaving her with only her ‘Hands Across America’ T-shirt (which becomes a pivotal image for her un-Tethering strategy), and finally returning to the world above to live her new life as ‘Adelaide.’ This reveal immediately transforms the preceding events. First, several things become clear: we understand now why Red is the only Tethered who can speak in full sentences - the Tethered do not appear to have ever learned language, whereas she was old enough to speak before her kidnapping - and why her voice sounds hoarse (because she was strangled). We understand, too, why Adelaide was so nervous about returning to Santa Cruz. These facts open the film to multiple possible readings, to do with assimilation and even racial ‘passing,’ so that *Us* functions unambiguously as a tale of racialized mobility. The middle-class Black family and the fugitive slave are linked by this social ‘upward’ movement; they are linked by escape, from the past and more. Peele’s film considers the cost. This twist also engenders complicated feelings about ‘Adelaide’ who, in one sense, stole a life, but in another, fled an existence of deprivation. Indeed, the film’s structural and thematic connections to slave narratives coalesce through Red: from her kidnapping, to her escape, to inspiring the Tethered insurrection, she is vividly linked to this literary tradition. If, as Teresa Goddu argues, slavery is the central historical context that produces the Gothic, and against which it responds,⁴⁸³ then Red’s story is essentially Gothic. But Adelaide is the fugitive. As such, the story undoubtedly belongs not to Red but to Adelaide, who personifies the Du Boisian veil and whose fears drive the film.

The Changeling

Adelaide personifies the veil as both a Black woman and a Tethered, but, to varying degrees, she recoils from both. The veil conceived by Du Bois is widely understood to represent the color line, the barrier that characterizes the social chasm between Black and white, what the veiled (Black people) can achieve and what white people can see. Adelaide’s relationship to her double Otherness allows the film to expand its commentary on the aforementioned American technologies of racialization and how the racialized themselves respond to these socio-historical forces. As I have argued, previous mirror/veil images establish the racialized as Other; so the mirror or, here, cinema, operates in these films as a tool of racialization. The characters (and the audience) encounter their racial difference through the mirror. However, in Adelaide’s case (from here on I will refer to

⁴⁸³ Teresa A. Goddu, ‘The African American Slave Narrative and the Gothic,’ in *A Companion to American Gothic* (Oxford: Wiley, 2014), pp. 71 - 83 (p. 71).

these characters by the names they take for most of the film, so the original Adelaide will be identified as Red) the mirror also becomes the site of her escape or survival. Thus, her character opens a path to consider race as theatricality, as performance, which exposes the tentative boundaries upon which oppression is forged.

Shawn Michelle Smith explains the veil as the ‘racist division of a Jim Crow social sphere and the cumulative weight of its psychic rift...[a]s one comes to see one’s self doubly, one also learns to see the world anew. In short, the Veil that produces double consciousness, also produces a doubled, or *second* sight.’⁴⁸⁴ If their childhood meeting in the hall of mirrors is Red’s externalized realization of her two-ness, her (supernatural) initiation into double-consciousness, then by the film’s standards Adelaide has known it all along. In fact, as a Tethered, Adelaide’s entire existence orbits around this two-ness. Furthermore, traces of her veiledness or, rather, her ‘second sight’ populate the film. For example, although it can be chalked up to general paranoia that some sort of karmic justice would redress childhood transgression, Adelaide is the first to sense that something is wrong when they return to Santa Cruz. Just before the Tethered arrive, she tells Gabe, ‘Being here, it, um, it feels like there’s this, um, black cloud just hanging over me, and, uh, I don’t feel like myself.’ Interestingly, this ‘black cloud’ resembles Du Bois’s own description of the ‘shadow of the veil,’ which nevertheless allows ‘we darker souls [to] peer through to other worlds.’⁴⁸⁵ Moreover, within the film’s broader double motif, certain shots extend from Adelaide’s individual perspective: when she watches a house spider crawl between the legs of a toy spider (which both images the double and recalls ‘The Itsy Bitsy Spider’ in the hall of mirrors) or when she removes a red frisbee to reveal underneath a blue circle on a beach mat. This cyclical portrait of duality is poetic: her ‘foresight’ of two-ness is directly related to the two-ness, or the history, that haunts her.

Of course, Du Bois also announces prejudice as a shadow, therefore linking it to the veil and the divide it encapsulates: ‘I remember well when the shadow swept across me,’⁴⁸⁶ he says before describing the incident where a white classmate refused his card, as detailed in chapter 1. In the Gothic tradition, the veil tends to signify mystery, marriage and sexuality, and/or death. But it is also a largely gendered symbol that, as I explain in chapter 3, Fanon proposes can take on powerful political connotations when applied to racialized women. With the racialized already inordinately surveilled, Fanon looks, not uncomplicatedly, to the Algerian War, where the veil operated for the racialized feminine as a mask and developed into a strategic, coordinated political performance under conditions of colonial assault.

⁴⁸⁴ Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line: W. E. B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 41.

⁴⁸⁵ W. E. B. Du Bois, *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Howe, 1920), pp. 14 - 15.

⁴⁸⁶ Du Bois, p. 7.

We begin to see the implications of Adelaide's double-veiledness. First, as a Black woman she automatically inherits the Du Boisian veil, the double-consciousness that Peele mainly negotiates in the realm of the Fantastic. In the film, double-consciousness manifests both supernaturally (through the Tethered) and practically. The economic limits imposed on the Wilsons is revealed through Gabe's friends, the wealthier Tylers. Josh and Kitty, beyond having a strained, seemingly loveless marriage, are both overbearingly materialistic. When they meet on the beach, Kitty smugly reports she has recently had plastic surgery. A later sequence proves how useless all their wealth is when they are attacked by their Tethered: a dying Kitty gasps for their expensive virtual assistant to call the police, but instead the system plays the popular N. W. A. song 'Fuck the Police.' Upstairs, the Tethered Kitty gazes at herself in the mirror and applies lip gloss. Then, she takes her scissors and cuts into her cheek, where prime Kitty presumably had plastic surgery. In yet another double-edged movement, this set piece suggests the Tylers have so much wealth it only serves to enrich their lives cosmetically, and that same wealth has rotted their capacity to survive without it.

But the Tylers' affluence becomes especially notable because it accentuates how much the Wilsons do not have. Gabe clearly competes with Josh by buying a speedboat, only to lament how Josh has outshined him by buying something even newer and more expensive. 'You saw their new car right? He had to do it. He just had to get that thing to fuck with me, too,' Gabe says to Adelaide. Certainly, the Wilsons' modest one-level house cannot compare with the pristine, minimalist mansion where the Tylers live. If the veil operates as a barrier, in this case it reveals that despite their model nuclear family structure, despite all these traces of the bourgeoisie - monetarily (typically) inaccessible services such as therapy and ballet classes, a husband who wears a Howard University sweatshirt (an historically Black university which, within Black American communities signifies an aristocratic milieu all its own) - the Wilsons are still excluded in material ways from many of the economic (and latently socio-political) advantages the middle-class purportedly promises.

But of course the major way the film reckons with Adelaide's veiledness is through her performance of un-Tetheredness, which, given the way the Tethered and Black American identity correlate, comes to mean whiteness. The film broadly illustrates this grotesque compromise, or, at least, begins to hint at it through the figure of Michael Jackson. For Peele, 'Michael Jackson is probably the patron saint of duality,'⁴⁸⁷ and there are several references to the singer scattered throughout the film: the 'Thriller' T-shirt Adelaide's father wins for her at the carnival (Fig.5.5); the fact that the Tethered wear a single glove and red jumpsuits, like Jackson did in the

⁴⁸⁷ Rachel Thompson, 'Jordan Peele explains the significance of the Michael Jackson imagery in "Us,"' *Mashable*, 19 March 2019 <<https://mashable.com/article/jordan-peele-michael-jackson-us-movie/#yByyRItJ3sqb>> [accessed 7 August 2020] (para 7 of 10).

'Thriller' music video. Interestingly enough, the film's core motif - the paper doll stance modeled after the public fundraising event Hands Across America - also bears a lurking connection to Jackson. Talent manager Ken Kragen, who organized that event, was also president of U.S.A. for Africa, the organization behind the song "We Are the World," co-written and featuring Michael Jackson.⁴⁸⁸ Thus, the singer warrants closer inspection, especially since the Adelaides cloak themselves at one point or another in his complicated image.



Figure 5.5: Young Adelaide wears the 'Thriller' T-shirt, which alludes to the film's zombie framework and invites comparisons to singer Michael Jackson, especially when she and the Tethered later don red jumpsuits and a single glove also like Jackson.

In 1986, Michael Jackson had successfully transitioned from the lead singer of the Jackson Five, all-American family boy band, to beloved solo artist. But by the time he died a little over two decades later, he was a hugely controversial figure, plagued by allegations of child molestation and an appearance startlingly disparate from his youth: bleached skin, straight-haired wigs, and chiseled down features. David D. Yuan bluntly calls this physical transformation 'a mask that calls attention to the fact that it is a mask'⁴⁸⁹ (Yuan, 1996, as cited in Janell Hobson, 2012), and Hobson muses on its possibility as a transgressive, even political, masquerade:

⁴⁸⁸ Eric Piepenburg, "'Us' Took Hands Across America and Made It a Death Grip,' *New York Times*, 26 March 2019 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/26/movies/us-hands-across-america.html>> [accessed 7 August 2020] (para 12 of 21).

⁴⁸⁹ Janell Hobson, *Body as Evidence: Mediating Race, Globalizing Gender* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), pp. 53 - 54.

...the vilification [of Jackson] was a visceral reaction to a body that literally transcended the color line, that refused to “know his place” or to “act like a man” in his more feminine transformations. This was a body that served as aspiration to *and* critique of whiteness, as well as an endeavor to destabilize black masculinity. In short, Michael Jackson offered a performative critique of the “passing for white” narrative, in which our “passing” protagonists often dwell among whites and adopt white culture while simultaneously growing radical and antiracist in their message. It is incredibly ironic that Jackson’s “impossibly white” transformations moved in tandem with his more radical expressions as he shifted from the safe messages of racial harmony in songs such as “We Are the World,” “Heal the World,” and “Black and White” to more edgier antiracist songs, including “They Don’t Care About Us” and “Stranger in Moscow...”⁴⁹⁰

Generally, my thoughts on Jackson’s physicality as a function of his persona are far less generous. I think it is impossible to parse the ‘freakery’ (as Hobson calls it) that he visually personified from the ‘freakery’ he reportedly enacted. Although he at least twice evaded conviction for child sexual abuse charges, the vilification of his appearance accompanied other highly publicized eccentricities: including, but not limited to, surrounding himself almost entirely with children, turning his home estate into an amusement park, and the whiteness of his supposedly ‘biological’ children. Hobson and race theorists Michael Eric Dyson and Sylvia J. Martin all make a cogent oppositional case for the layered political subtext his presentation produces, but which conveniently forecloses on his offstage antics. I want to acknowledge these complexities before I negotiate how a specific region of Jackson’s perceived ‘freakery,’ most notably what Dyson describes as the ‘Europeanization of his image,’⁴⁹¹ maps onto the character of Adelaide.

I tend to align most with Charles D. Martin who, in his examination of literary and historical racial passing, explains its formidable threat: “[t]he conundrum of the white or whitening African American body unsettles assumptions about the fixity of racial difference and challenges the easy assignment of identity by a mere gaze.”⁴⁹² Racial passing belies the established bounds that have governed our understanding of race. The most relevant critique of the ‘Europeanization’ of Jackson’s image lies in the questions it beckons about race as a transformative performance. On the one hand, he externalizes a most Gothic equation: the internalization of whiteness in the Black body, or, more exactly, the disruptive racial hybridity that has been at the heart of the genre and this research. But, at the same time, he has sculpted his body into a space where racial trauma, adaptation, and resistance articulate the history of racialization as spectacle. Hobson is not wrong to suggest that

⁴⁹⁰ Hobson, p. 54.

⁴⁹¹ Michael Eric Dyson, *Reflecting Black: African American Cultural Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 48.

⁴⁹² Charles D. Martin, *The White African American Body: A Cultural and Literary Exploration* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), p. 142.

he ‘refused to know his place,’ and I myself have not overlooked how Jackson’s class movement coincides with a (at the very least, corporeal) disavowal of the Black masculine, and that, furthermore, he begins to approximate or bear the influence of his white, wealthy surroundings. Yet again, we see the Black Female Gothic productively position the mask and the veil in tension. We know that camouflage, like the veil, can be deceptively translucent. It challenges the gaze, in other words. Like the political mobilization of the veil during the Algerian War, camouflage has a significant martial function. In that sense, ‘passing’ appropriately subsumes the grotesque consequences of warfare. If, as Fanon and Du Bois have argued, the colonized body exists in a state of war with the objectifying gaze, then ‘passing’ becomes a natural outcome of these conditions, for the racialized body must necessarily transform itself where possible to survive. And nothing so troubles racial hegemonies like racial passing, which betrays the fickle boundaries it transgresses.

It is no coincidence that Jackson makes his first appearance at the carnival. Indeed, his ‘freakery’ was so threatening precisely because it epitomizes in one being the ‘monstrousness’ of duality or, more aptly, traverses seemingly contradictory binaries: all at once, he conjures someone Black but white, male but feminine - and tacitly, human but alien - in the tradition of ostracized, uncontrollable bodies typically placed on display at a carnival. Even though the Adelaides do not physically pass for white, I want to stay with Jackson as spectacle because privately and artistically he does, as Hobson intimates, compose revealing critiques of performing race that becomes usefully (if not deliberately) applicable to Peele’s film.

Sylvia J. Martin writes, ‘while Jackson’s skin treatment engendered suspicion and sensationalism from the media, he also challenged received notions about commensurability between skin color and racial identity, using his body as a way to de-stabilize perceptions about essentialism.’⁴⁹³ This rings true, all the more meaningfully because Jackson’s Blackness is traceable, from his days as a brown-skinned child star with an Afro. To borrow from Sara Ahmed’s essay ‘A Phenomenology of Whiteness,’ ‘[w]hiteness is also a matter of what is behind, as a form of inheritance, which affects how bodies arrive in spaces and worlds. We accumulate behinds, just as what is behind is an effect of past accumulations.’⁴⁹⁴ Jackson did not inherit whiteness; he *became* (visually and even socially) white, and so his destabilization of this order is materially linked to the way his class, privilege, and skin evolved together. Ahmed explains further, ‘Becoming white as an institutional line is closely related to the vertical promise of class mobility: you can move up only by approximating the habitus of the white

⁴⁹³ Sylvia J. Martin, ‘The Roots and Routes of Michael Jackson’s Global Identity,’ *Soc*, 49 (2012), pp. 284–290 (pp. 285 - 286) <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-012-9550-z>>.

⁴⁹⁴ Sara Ahmed, ‘A Phenomenology of Whiteness,’ *Feminist Theory*, 8.2 (2007), pp. 149 - 168 (p. 160) <<https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700107078139>> [accessed 20 July 2020]

bourgeois body...Moving up requires inhabiting such a body, or at least approximating its style, whilst your capacity to inhabit such a body depends upon what is behind you.⁴⁹⁵ In other words, Yuan is absolutely right: Jackson's 'whiteness' could only ever be a mask; as such, his body attests to the colonial condition. He may well be the visual apotheosis of Fanon's 'black skin, white masks' concept. Consequently, as Martin argues, this masquerade resists essentialism: he forever hovers between Black, as a matter of what is identifiably behind him, and white, defying the boundaries and prototypical definitions of both. In his refusal to conform to normative categories of gender, race, or sexuality for that matter, he embodies a multitude of Otherness. Because Jackson refuses to adhere to these conclusive, stratified spheres, racially he evokes at once power and isolation; he is enduringly racialized but also without community. If Blackness claims him, or rather, accumulates behind him, he maintained a crucial distance from it, not simply because he did not 'look' Black, but because his body reflected his economic capacity to distance himself from discernible signs of 'past accumulations.' It is not the whiteness of his skin but his positionality that marks him: not quite white and not quite Black, Jackson summons previous Gothic harbingers of miscegenation like Clelie and Legendre, whose class and racial liminality intersect to ensure for them ultimate alienation.

In light of those characters, it is very interesting, then, that the 'Thriller' music video makes central use of the zombie, given that figure's racial history and innate duality. But another classically hybrid monster, perhaps the quintessential shape-shifter, more urgently frames 'Thriller' as a horror text: the werewolf. In what amounts to an almost 14-minute musical short film, 'Thriller' - directed by John Landis, who also directed *An American Werewolf in London* (1981), and narrated by horror film icon Vincent Price - begins with Jackson on a date. He tells his love interest, 'I'm not like other guys...no, I mean I'm different.' With an ominous shot of the full moon, she watches him transform before her eyes - his ears grow large, his teeth and nails long and sharp, hair sprouts out of his face - but the sequence turns out to be a false alarm. They are actually at the movie theater watching a film called *Thriller*. They leave the cinema and as the song kicks in, the living dead famously burst from their graves to put on a sophisticated dance number in the dimly lit streets. When his girlfriend turns around, Jackson's character is revealed to be one of them. For much of the choreography, he is a conventionally rendered zombie, all gray skin and vacant eyes. However, in retrospect the werewolf looms over all of these events. At the conclusion, Jackson rescues his girlfriend from another apparent dream sequence/illusion where a horde of zombies invade her house. He puts his arm around her, but then he turns and grins over his shoulder at

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid.

the camera to reveal the yellow, thin-slit eyes he had as a werewolf (Fig.5.6).⁴⁹⁶ Dyson writes, ‘Jackson as werewolf indicates the possibility of the radical instability of human nature and reflects the underlining of absolute distinctions between good and evil. The werewolf indicates the possibility of human beings embodying radical forms of evil and inflicting evil on other human beings...the werewolf also indicates the Other, whose very embodiment occasions fear in those he or she encounters.’⁴⁹⁷ Obviously, this explanation of the werewolf squares with so much of the character Jackson projected in and outside of his music. But it also becomes especially fitting then that Peele harnesses the singer, and this particular creative moment, as a talisman for his



Figure 5.6: Jackson in ‘Thriller,’ a horror text that significantly centers two creatures of racial duality: the zombie and the werewolf. But importantly, the video concludes with Jackson as a werewolf.

film on duality. The werewolf, as Dyson describes it here, essentially complicates the physical and moral binary. Human and Other, good and evil, binaries so central to the Gothic, are thrown into disarray because the

⁴⁹⁶ *Thriller*, dir. by John Landis (Sony Entertainment, 1983), online film recording, YouTube <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sOnqjkJTMaA>>[accessed 5 August 2020].

⁴⁹⁷ Dyson, p. 48.

werewolf, a changeable and essentially camouflaged (as in, human without a full moon) creature begins to articulate human nature. In other words, the werewolf may be the most human Other of all.

‘Thriller’ combines two well-theorized symbols of bifurcation - the zombie and the werewolf - both of which invite racialized readings. Critics have argued that, due to a tendency to attribute lycanthropy to genetics or to blood, werewolves, too, frequently operate as a metaphor for racial and ethnic difference.⁴⁹⁸ All this to say, Peele can utilize Jackson so richly because the singer draped himself in archetypal symbols of Gothic Otherness in an effort that speaks equally to the traumatic consequences of American racialization and ‘monstrous’ resistance. The werewolf must do this work where the zombie falls short. The zombie, of course, cannot hide its nature, but the werewolf represents metamorphosis: a being marked as much by its humanness as by its monstrous mutability. If the zombie epitomizes the racialized slave condition, then the werewolf illustrates the instability of the racial social order.

Jackson collapses into Adelaide’s story in some fairly obvious ways. As deliberated above, he unites a performance of ‘whiteness’ inextricable from class but also deeply tied to his appearance. Adelaide does not - cannot - quite perform exactly this way. Instead, she appropriates this legacy of transformation much more subtly, in her movements, her alienation, and the Gothic role she assumes for most of the film. The earliest moments of *Us* establish her socio-economic status, which already seals her in the tradition of the Female Gothic heroine, but what simultaneously becomes clear is her distance from all suggestions of Otherness or racialized identity. It is not solely that she is Black and well-to-do (see, for instance, the Batistes of *Eve’s Bayou*). Wealth, of course, is not enough for a performance of whiteness. But upon closer inspection, her alienation possesses a fascinating psychological valence. For example, though we see admittedly little of their lives before the Tethered uprising, it appears the Wilsons’ closest friends are wealthy white people. Moreover, Gabe’s materialistic competition with the Tylers indicates he views them as the paradigm upon which to model himself. This, too, casts back upon Du Bois’s construction of the veil. Cynthia D. Schrager takes cues from Kenneth Warren’s analysis of *Souls of Black Folks* as a “posture of dissent” against the materialism of American culture’ when she contends, ‘in linking the discourses on race and spiritualism at the turn of the century, both tropes - “materialization” and “the veil” - figure blackness in terms of the spiritual and whiteness in terms of the material.’⁴⁹⁹ Like Schrager, I must acknowledge how this unscientific, entirely poetic calculation from Du Bois is

⁴⁹⁸ Kimberley McMahon-Coleman, Roslyn Weaver, *Werewolves and Other Shapeshifters in Popular Culture: A Thematic Analysis of Recent Depictions* (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2014), p. 93.

⁴⁹⁹ Cynthia D. Schrager, ‘Both Sides of the Veil: Race, Science, and Mysticism in W. E. B. Du Bois,’ *American Quarterly*, 48.4 (1996), pp. 551-586 (p. 554).

problematised by the dubious essentialism it courts. Equating racial difference/oppression with an innate spirituality is somewhat conservative, and, as I have shown throughout previous chapters, leads to some of Du Bois's more unhelpful, usually gendered ideas about the uplift of Black people. But at the same time, I have utilized the veil substantively throughout this thesis because there is some truth in Du Bois's suggestion that this marginalization generates a level of insight exclusively for the maligned. So, too, his distrust of western individualism and capitalism acknowledges how these forces make such oppressions possible. Indeed, although a symbolic device, the veil addresses much of the interior consequences instigated by racial injustice, consequences which resist more scientific or other quantifiable measurements. All this to say, casting the veil as an economic divide steeped in racial difference accommodates the capitalistic aspirations that will always elude the Wilsons as a Black family.

However, one of the more telling sequences occurs the night the Tethered show up on the Wilsons' doorstep. The first thing Adelaide does, much to Gabe's chagrin, is phone the police. Besides Black communities' long, well-documented - not to mention statistically well-earned⁵⁰⁰ - distrust in police (consider again the N. W. A. song that plays in the Tylers' attack sequence), Adelaide and Kitty are twinned in their rush to call upon law enforcement (who ultimately never show), when Adelaide should have far less confidence in them; certainly, the police have proven no more helpful to middle-class Black Americans than impoverished ones.⁵⁰¹ As if to prove this point, the 911 operator tells Adelaide it will take the police at least fourteen minutes (perhaps another allusion to 'Thriller') to reach them. It may seem minor, but it should not be dismissed that Adelaide (a Tethered) wields a historically white defense strategy, one with persistently high stakes for Black people, and for the offense of 'trespassing.' Peele has already evoked the often fatal, real world consequences Black people face when perceived as 'trespassing' in *Get Out*, which, in its prologue, pointedly references the murder of Trayvon Martin.

Of course Red and her family, hands clasped together like paper dolls, ominously silhouetted on the driveway, look portentous, but the moment that arguably cements Adelaide's racial estrangement, albeit humorously, is when the Tethered finally breach the premises thanks to her family's spare hide-a-key, to which Gabe responds, 'What kind of white shit...?' From this it would seem that Adelaide does not simply formulate

⁵⁰⁰ Drew Desilver, Michael Lipka, and Dalia Fahmy, *10 things we know about race and policing in the U.S.* (2020) <<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/06/03/10-things-we-know-about-race-and-policing-in-the-u-s/>> [accessed August 7 2020].

⁵⁰¹ Abby Goodnough, 'Harvard Professor Jailed; Officer Is Accused of Bias,' *New York Times*, 20 July 2009 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/21/us/21gates.html>> [accessed August 7 2020].

her freedom upon assimilating into Black middle-classness, but urgently includes ‘passing’ in her calculus. Because the Tethered stand in for the racialized, specifically Blackness, for Adelaide, survival is predicated on the distance she devises from her un-Tetheredness, in other words, a purposeful distance from racialization. This scene draws deliberate, if seemingly casual attention to that ‘whiteness,’ but the most significant detail of Adelaide’s origins - her kidnapping and enslavement of prime Adelaide - cements this ‘performance’ most powerfully.

Before I consider the final, if chronologically the first, stage of Adelaide’s ‘whiteness,’ I want to point out the other significant dimension of the veil’s capacity: what it conveys about the gaze and spectatorship. This will be paramount to an analysis of the scene where Adelaide and Red confront each other as children, for this scene exemplifies the cyclical dynamic between double-consciousness and Winnicottian looking relations. To return to Shawn Michelle Smith, the veil as a symbol enables us to think about the racialized spectacle and the screen, something Jackson vividly represents when he transforms his Black body into a white one in, perhaps, an effort to adapt to the gaze that racializes him. The two Adelaides play this out with each other, too. ‘The Veil functions as a kind of cultural screen on which the collective weight of white misconceptions is fortified and made manifest,’ Smith writes, ‘The Veil is the site at which white fantasies of a negative blackness, as well as fantasies of an idealized whiteness, are projected and maintained...The Veil is the site at which African Americans are asked to see themselves “through the eyes of others.”’⁵⁰² So the veil resembles cinema, where ‘white fantasies’ of a ‘negative Blackness’ and ‘idealized whiteness’ are materialized. If, as I have established here and as Winnicott suggests, it is important for the Black female spectator to see herself reflected fully, why then should Tethered Adelaide respond to the image of herself with violence? To answer that, we must look to the film’s conclusion, when her true identity is revealed.

As a film about the double, *Us* naturally contains many mirrors. This final sequence, a series of flashbacks, interestingly contains multiple shots of young Adelaide looking into mirrors. In the first, she sits in the therapist’s office looking at her parents’ backs reflected through the mirror. The next shot shows her practicing ballet in the mirror. Her eyes are strangely empty. As I have oft repeated here, Winnicott insists that for the child for whom the mirror/screen is unresponsive, ‘the mirror is a thing to be looked at, but not looked into.’⁵⁰³ Adelaide’s opaque expression as she looks in the mirror suggests she does not quite *see* herself; she is looking at her image but her expression is unmoved, eerily empty. There seems to be no emotion, a crucial

⁵⁰² Smith, p. 40.

⁵⁰³ Winnicott, p. 2.

disconnect present in her eyes as she gazes at herself, not unlike the zombie which the Tethered subtextually evoke. Her mother's voice floats over the scene, ironically saying, 'I just want my little girl back.' We return to Adelaide dancing in the mirror, and this time a sinister smile, not unlike Umbræ's, creeps onto her face. At last we return to the funhouse, where Tethered Adelaide waits, smiling deviously behind a mirror. In the next shot, she reaches out and strangles prime Adelaide/Red (Fig.5.7), and drags her into the tunnels (Fig.5.8). Next, prime Adelaide awakens, chained to the bed. Tethered Adelaide grins cruelly at her captive, as she puts on the 'Thriller' T-shirt and leaves her there. This reveal dramatically and allegorically confirms Adelaide's performance of whiteness in two crucial movements. First, given the very nature of the Tethered, tasked to perform against their will, in deprivation, the actions of their counterparts above, she performs whiteness as a social category that relies upon monopolizing and organizing power relations. Secondly, she reenacts its historical 'birth.' As Joe Kincheloe and Shirley Steinberg write, 'Europeans prior to the late 1600s did not use the label, black, to refer to any race of people, Africans included. Only after the racialization of slavery by around 1680 did whiteness and blackness come to represent racial categories.'⁵⁰⁴ In short, whiteness is constructed upon race, but it is a hierarchy dependent upon exploitation. Power is what matters, as Coates evocatively explains, 'what characterized the differences between black and white America was...a system engineered to place one on top of the other.'⁵⁰⁵ Her literal kidnapping and enslavement of prime Adelaide need not be tied to complexion, for she knowingly



Figure 5.7: Tethered Adelaide attacks and kidnaps Prime Adelaide, a performance of whiteness and act of self-destruction.

⁵⁰⁴ Joe L. Kincheloe and Shirley R. Steinberg, 'Addressing the Crisis of Whiteness: Reconfiguring White Identity in a Pedagogy of Whiteness' in *White Reign: Deploying Whiteness in America*, ed. by Joe L. Kincheloe, Nelson M. Rodriguez, Ronald E. Chennault, Shirley R. Steinberg (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2000), pp. 3 - 30 (p. 9).

⁵⁰⁵ Coates, p. 318.



Figure 5.8: (Tethered) Adelaide's 'monstrousness' is located in her gaze, alternately menacing or unseeing when she looks in the mirror.

exploits this power imbalance. Peele erects the mirror, and thus the screen-gaze dynamic, as central to this socialization because, despite her 'performance,' Adelaide remains a Tethered and so remains racialized symbolically and literally.

Perhaps race may be 'performed' but nonetheless it is a social reality with real consequences. Peele locates the psychic effects here, in the matrix between the gaze and the mirror/screen. Firstly, these shots are all linked by 'psychology,' because Adelaide first flashes back to the therapist encouraging her parents to draw her out with art: drawing, dancing, so on. It should also be noted that we never see this Adelaide make visual contact with her parents; she is either looking at their backs - in the car or in the therapist's office - or they are out of frame. She never appears in one frame with them. She is always disconnected from them, so there is no possibility of Winnicottian reflection. Consequently, if we trace the film's allegory emblematised by her kidnap and enslavement of her double, Adelaide fundamentally does not connect to her own image. On the contrary, she destroys it. She stash[es] it away elsewhere. Of course, the film narratively contextualizes her decision so that on an immediate emotional level her actions are understandable; she is, after all, fleeing her own captivity. At the same time, Peele arranges a sophisticated way of getting at the role the screen/gaze plays in shaping race itself and

the psychic split it imposes upon the racialized feminine. For who can blame the racialized for wanting to un-race themselves?

I have already mentioned Pecola Breedlove in previous chapters, but I bring her up again as Adelaide's literary forebear and a character pointedly modeled after yet another tragic Black woman character, Peola in *Imitation of Life*. More than anything, Pecola wants to change not her dark skin, but her eyes. She is no doubt influenced by her own mother, so swept up in the 'white fantasies' of 'idealized whiteness' conveyed by the movies, that she can find no beauty in herself nor her family. But Pecola understands something about the gaze that cannot be dismissed. She does not simply expect to look different with her blue eyes, but to *see* differently. Far from merely looking white, far from simply passing, she grasps the real locus of power is in the gaze.

The Others

As I have proposed, the double stages its most elemental argument about identity through the looking relations it externalizes. It articulates an encounter with one's own interiority, one's own past. The Gothic allows the film to explore the violent consequences of repression, and the double is essential to this calculus.

As established in previous chapters, the doppelgänger signals the return of various repressed experiences⁵⁰⁶ and Freud identifies it as a prominent theme of uncanniness.⁵⁰⁷ According to Freudian thought, the uncanny emerges out of repressed infantile material. The fear of death during primary narcissism causes the child to produce the double, but when this stage has been surpassed, the double is no longer needed and instead serves as a reminder of the horror it once suppressed: a harbinger of death. In *Us*, a grown Adelaide finds the image of herself, Red, imminently threatening, a herald of the awful past she escaped, and thus Red encapsulates a danger that must be eradicated. Again, such themes evoke the werewolf. Like the double, Barbara Creed reads the werewolf as an uncanny figure, too, for it exposes the hidden: 'the animal at the heart of the human.'⁵⁰⁸ The uncanny/double reveals our innermost fears and our own capacity for destruction. That said, Maisha Wester argues that the Black literary Gothic rewrites the uncanny:

⁵⁰⁶ Steven Bruhm, *Gothic Bodies: The Politics of Pain in Romantic Fiction* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), p. xiv.

⁵⁰⁷ Lucy Huskinson, 'Introduction,' in *The Urban Uncanny: A Collection of Interdisciplinary Studies*, ed. by Lucy Huskinson (New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 1 - 17 (p. 3).

⁵⁰⁸ Barbara Creed, *Phallic Panic: Film, Horror and the Primal Uncanny* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2005), p. 13.

...the notion of the repressed savage/primitive has already been historically inscribed upon the Black body. Consequently, the notion of the return of the repressed as that which is primal fails to inspire trepidation; characters accept savage and grotesque “monsters” as part of (hidden) nature, and flee the cruelty and insanity of the “civilized” world...Black texts, instead, replace the notion of the uncanny as the returned and/or revealed hidden object with the process of repression and moment of hiding. They look at the institutions that marked them as savage, look at the reasons for the hiding and the historical moment of silencing. Here, the uncanny are the motives, the method, and the process behind the Anglo-American trope of uncanniness.⁵⁰⁹

This may well be true of the literary Black Gothic, and these concerns about the methods and processes of repression are generally present in Peele’s film. The ‘moment of hiding’ - Adelaide’s flight from confinement - surely drives this film, although audiences only discover this in the final moments. But I would argue that concepts of the ‘civilized’ and ‘savage’ develop into something more complex here. For instance, Adelaide’s entire arc revolves around the repression of her ‘primitive’ or ‘hidden nature.’ But what makes Adelaide so monstrous is her complicity in structures of oppression; the grotesque act of kidnapping, enslaving, and knowingly participating in the hierarchy that denies the Tethered their agency. In other words, she commits these acts in pursuit of maintaining her position in the ‘civilized’ world where she can continue her masquerade as an un-Tethered. Even as that civilized world crumbles around them, the Wilsons must flee because they themselves represent the old order that has been overthrown. Moreover, rather than disclose her Tethered identity, Adelaide remains hidden to all, except possibly her son Jason, in the preserved nuclear family structure.

That a Black family should survive in a story fundamentally about enslavement, particularly as headed by a doubly racialized matriarch, contains its own element of resistance, and undoubtedly subverts genre expectations. I also want to emphasize here that there is no way for Adelaide, as a Black woman and a Tethered, to wield white supremacy with any real, systemic consequences; she can only ever mimic it, and largely in relation to herself (narratively and symbolically). As I have stated earlier, comparing the Black middle-class to the white middle-class is utterly meaningless⁵¹⁰ (the former in no way possesses any of the same power nor enjoys the same benefits as the latter). That said, the film most certainly does indict the Black bourgeoisie in their aspirations to whiteness. While the savage/primitive has historically been inscribed upon the Black body, the film posits that the Black middle-class belongs to the ‘civilized’ world that has forgotten its origins and so fails to face

⁵⁰⁹ Maisha L. Wester, *African American Gothic: Screams from Shadowed Places* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 28 - 29.

⁵¹⁰ Coates, p. 318.

its complete self. Revealingly, in the home invasion set piece when Adelaide asks Red, ‘What do you want?’ Red shoves Adelaide’s face into the reflecting surface of the table, literally forcing her to confront her own image.

Homi Bhabha uses the *unheimlich* in his conception of hybridity to render the colonized experience of the ‘unhomely’: the uncanniness of the migrant experience, to be caught between two cultures/homes, not unlike the racialized status that Du Bois describes. Bhabha explains the unhomely has to do with the ‘social effects of enforced social accommodation or historical migrations and cultural relocations.’⁵¹¹ David Huddart adds, ‘figures of doubling and halving mark the experience of the colonized.’⁵¹² The colonized/racialized experience the ‘unhomely’ as estrangement or displacement, the sensation that your home is not actually your home as a result of a repression of the past. The sense of the ‘uncanny’ that has been developing throughout Black Female Gothic cinema is a psychological ‘home,’ personified by the racialized feminine. In *Eve’s Bayou*, the uncanny is embodied by the Matriarch Eve, whose heiresses inherit her clairvoyance and access or return to her whenever they demonstrate their psychic abilities. Similarly, in *Get Out*, Missy sends Chris to The Sunken Place, generated by the loss of his mother and a visual doubling of that moment of loss (sinking helplessly before a screen). These texts use the uncanny to symbolize matrilineal birthright or psychic inheritance; the return of the repressed is, here, quite literally a return to the mother, who may be physically (and, in terms of ‘home,’ spatially) lost, but an ever haunting specter. She emblematizes the break with home/origins, and evokes not the ‘primitive’ or socially demonized base desires, but a constant, subterranean conflict with the present environment, fractured by unseen and silenced past horrors. In this way, like Matriarch Eve and Chris’s mother, she also functions as omen (*listen to your ancestors*).

Us wields this trope somewhat more conventionally than its predecessors. The film is filled with doubles, not just the Tethered, but multiple symbols of duality, including scissors, rabbits,⁵¹³ literal twins, and the number eleven. The Tethered arrive at 11:11 P. M. but even more pertinently, near the beginning of the film, a man holds a sign that reads ‘Jeremiah 11:11.’ This scripture carries great weight for the film’s vision of the uncanny. Verse 10 of the King James version of the Bible reads:

⁵¹¹ Homi Bhabha, ‘The World and the Home,’ in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*, ed. by Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, Ella Shohat (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 445 - 455 (p. 445).

⁵¹² David Huddart, *Homi Bhabha* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 80.

⁵¹³ Steve Rose, ‘Jordan Peele on Us: ‘This is a very different movie from “Get Out,”’ *Guardian*, 9 March 2019 <<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2019/mar/09/jordan-peele-on-us-this-is-a-very-different-movie-from-get-out>> [accessed 25 July 2020] (para 6 of 21).

They are turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers, which refused to hear my words; and they went after other gods to serve them. The house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken my covenant which I made with their fathers. Therefore thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will bring evil upon them, which they shall not be able to escape; and though they shall cry unto me, I will not hearken unto them.⁵¹⁴

In verse 11, God warns the prophet Jeremiah that He will turn his back on the Hebrews if they continue to worship false idols, which violates the covenant He forged with their ancestors led out of slavery in Egypt. This generational debt gets directly to the heart of the themes *Us* reckons with: the uncanny double indicates repressed history made foreign, returned to avenge its disavowal.



Figure 5.9: In a classroom in the tunnels, Red explains to Adelaide (off screen) how she galvanized the Tethered.

This trauma is negotiated intimately through the Wilsons and their Tethereds. Upon closer inspection, the rules that govern the Tethereds' operations are not always consistent but such is fiction. Here is what else we learn about the Tethereds: while they resemble their doubles, they also possess their same propensities and gifts, twice over. Zora runs track and announces at the beginning of the film that she has abandoned the sport. However, Umbrae easily outruns her, even though Zora gets a head start and only escapes her Tethered's clutches when Umbrae is interrupted by an unwitting bystander. In the same vein, Pluto, like Jason, has an obsession with fire, and has burned the bottom half of his face. He even wears a mask that alludes to the serial killer Jason of the popular horror franchise *Friday the 13th*. Of course, this also indicates the Tethered inherit their Others' deficiencies, with none of the economic relief or support. So when Gabe adjusts his glasses,

⁵¹⁴ King James Bible Online, Jeremiah 11.10-11 <<https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Jeremiah-Chapter-11/>> [accessed 15 August 2020].

Abraham mimics the gesture before he takes Gabe's spectacles to try on himself. It becomes clear that Abraham's seemingly menacing squinting is because he, too, has poor eyesight.

To be clear, when the Wilsons encounter their Tethereds, it is not the 'savage' or murderous aspects of themselves they must reckon with, but their own racialized histories and displacement. When they destroy their respective Tethereds, they act out their own attempts to preserve their 'place in the sun,' evidence of the violence they ultimately do to themselves, further estranging themselves from the past. Ultimately the Wilsons occupy a liminal space between the Tylers and the Tethereds. They do not have as much as the Tylers, precisely because of the way their history as Black Americans reflects the Tethered: a stateless class whose exploitation affords power to another. Nothing confirms their proximity quite like the space where the film's conflict begins and ends: the hall of mirrors. If there must be a site in the film that performs as the 'haunted' Female Gothic castle, the hall of mirrors comes closest. Not only does this space embody the confinement that the Female Gothic house invariably symbolizes, but it becomes the battleground where the past and present collide, where the two mothers must finally sever their connection.

Traditionally, the Female Gothic addresses the ambivalence toward femaleness by exploring what it means to break the primal attachment to the mother and her womb, both habitat and jailor as Claire Kahane writes.⁵¹⁵ In this case, Red is the last of her family to survive; her children and husband are all dead. So she kidnaps Jason to lure Adelaide into the tunnels. Therefore, the film's climax reenacts these enduring components: separation, confinement, and motherhood. Although the final conflict involves a mother attempting to locate her son - rather than a daughter her mother - the scene still predicates itself on individuation between two women, duplicates, each hoping to establish their dominance.

While the passage from Jeremiah remains most significant to *Us*, this sequence evokes another Biblical scripture: the Judgment of Solomon. Two women, each with infant sons, approached the king. One of the babies had been smothered, and both women claimed the living boy as their own. King Solomon's response was to divide the living boy and give each woman half. The real mother revealed herself when she cried out, preferring to see her child alive as another woman's son than dead.⁵¹⁶ It is fitting in *Us* that the two women should finally battle over the 'son,' when Red makes constant allusions to life in the 'sun.' Given their obsession with fire, Jason/Pluto expand this metaphor. But Pluto's name references the ruler of the underworld Pluto,

⁵¹⁵ Claire Kahane, 'Gothic Mirrors and Feminine Identity,' *The Centennial Review*, 24.1 (1980), pp. 43–64 (p.48) <www.jstor.org/stable/23740372> [accessed 28 June 2020]

⁵¹⁶ Volkmar Fritz, *One and Two Kings: A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), p. 41.

formerly Hades, in classical mythology, and Red does not seem to mourn her biological son's tragic self-immolation. Early in the film, Jason is aligned with these two mothers and the space that defined and imprisoned them. When the Wilsons first go to the beach to visit the Tylers, Jason builds a tunnel out of sand and also walks past the hall of mirrors. Interestingly, when Adelaide entered the hall as a child, it was called Shaman's Vision Quest (underlined by the quote 'Find Yourself') with the facade of a Native American in headdress (Fig.5.10). When Jason comes across it, the funhouse has been renamed 'Merlin's Forest,' although the words 'Find Yourself' remain (Fig.5.11). This rewriting of history epitomizes how the double is harnessed in the film. The European image supplants Native American iconography. Again the double marks confrontation with the violently disavowed past.

Colors are also important because they vividly link Adelaide and Red to this maternal/ancestral dyad: Vision Quest flashes bright red and yellow lights into the dark night, while Merlin's Forest is mostly colored bluish-green. At Adelaide's childhood home we see two photos: the first photo is a portrait of Adelaide, her mother, and Zora - three generations of women - but significantly, Adelaide's mother wears red while Adelaide dons a blue denim jacket. The next photo is an illustration of an adult Black woman in a red dress, and standing beneath her a young Black girl in blue. Back on the beach, Adelaide thinks that Jason is missing (although he has only gone to the restroom at this point) when she lifts a red frisbee off of a blue circle on a beach mat. Of course, these colors possess a myriad of implications ordinarily, but in the context of the film, red/Red is aligned with



Figure 5.10: Shaman's Vision Quest, a portal to the Tethereds' tunnels.



Figure 5.11: Jason walks past the old hall of mirrors renamed Merlin's Forest.

origins, birth, motherhood; it is also political, for the color red is linked to communism, and as Marissa Martinelli and Matthew Dessem point out, it was also famously Malcolm X's nickname.⁵¹⁷

It is worth noting that Adelaide's role as a mother is powerfully developed in the film. Her love for her children infuses many of the film's tensest moments with an emotional current rarely found in horror, where the victims are more often young, unmarried (frequently virginal) women. In one scene, chained to the bed by Kitty's Tethered, Adelaide contorts her body in an effort to save Zora from said Tethered, whom Jason eventually kills. She also seems to grieve or, at least, pay her respects to the dead Tethered children; with a grave visage she watches Umbrae take her last breaths and she does not initially see Red snatch Jason because she watches in horror as Pluto self-immolates. Nothing in the film suggests that this is insincere; to the contrary, it would seem that the Tethered are capable of everything the un-Tethered are: language, love, etc. The only thing that distinguishes their lives is their environment. There is no material difference between the Tethered and their counterparts above except conditions of oppression. Recall that Red is actually human, but seemingly unable to nurture or mourn for her children.

The scene where Adelaide and Red confront each other for the last time takes place in the now empty tunnels, specifically a classroom, where Red stands at the chalkboard (Fig.5.9) and Adelaide lingers back among

⁵¹⁷Marissa Martinelli and Matthew Dessem, 'What Is the Significance of the Doppelgänger Names in *Us*?' *Slate*, 24 March 2019 <<https://slate.com/culture/2019/03/us-movie-tethered-names-red.html>> [accessed 12 August 2020]

the desks: a teacher-student dynamic. The scene is set for Adelaide to face her history. They are surrounded by rabbits (doubles, symbols of fertility) and empty cages. Red explains, ‘We’re human, too, you know. Eyes. Teeth. Hands. Blood...I believe they figured out how to make a copy of the body but not the soul. The soul remains one shared by two.’ She speaks of an event she calls ‘the miracle,’ the moment in which she galvanized the Tethered during a ballet recital performed by the Adelaides as teenagers. ‘At the end of our dance, the Tethered saw that I was different, that I would deliver them from this misery,’ she explains. It seems that essentially she gives the Tethered art. The sequence intercuts between the teenagers - Red dancing in the tunnels and Adelaide on stage - and their fight as women in the present day, a skirmish which Adelaide appears to be losing. By merging these two moments, one major theme the film emphasizes is the power of art. When the adolescent Red finishes her dance, the scene, shot from above, shows the Tethered gathered around her with their arms stretched over her head, anointing her their savior. Furthermore, consider two things: 1) the child therapist Adelaide sees encourages her parents to use art to draw her out and help her begin speaking ‘again’ (not knowing that Adelaide was discovering language for the first time); and 2) Adelaide later gives up ballet at some point.

They are not looking at each other, but this set piece still plays with key Winnicottian aspects of representationality. Winnicott argues that ‘the mother facilitates or makes possible the infant’s realization of inherited potentials through her empathic reflections of her infant.’⁵¹⁸ For the child who does not see herself reflected, her ‘creative capacity begins to atrophy.’⁵¹⁹ Art, therefore, becomes a way to channel interiority and, importantly, to communicate. In every case here, art bridges the gap left by language, the things that are not or cannot otherwise be said. The mother connects with the child through looking, therefore the child realizes its own capacity for connection. Predictably Adelaide, who turns away from her origins and does not, in fact, as the Winnicottian paradigm suggests, seek to see herself reflected, severs this connection once she senses it, and abandons ballet. Furthermore, Red’s dance is also significant because it is both dependent and independent of Adelaide’s: the flashbacks to their dance meaningfully do not mirror each other; their movements are markedly different, perhaps to assert Red’s inherent un-Tetheredness. Others among the Tethered must have overground equivalents who are artists, but it is Red’s originality and creativity that distinguishes her in this moment. In any case, art is what galvanizes the Tethered uprising. Red remarks, ‘I saw God,’ and it is this spiritual awakening, not unlike Malcolm X’s or Nat Turner’s, that inspires her racialized rebellion. Each in their own way chooses separation, individuation from the other.

⁵¹⁸ Mary A. Ayers, *Mother-Infant Attachment and Psychoanalysis: The Eyes of Shame* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 63.

⁵¹⁹ Winnicott, p. 2.

The two Adelaides return to the chambers filled with beds, the same place, we learn later, where Tethered Adelaide left Red when they were children. In the present day, as Red sneaks up behind her, Adelaide turns and impales her. As Red dies, slumped against the bed, she begins whistling ‘The Itsy Bitsy Spider,’ and Adelaide hooks her handcuffs around Red’s throat, again, and snaps her neck. Significantly, both of Adelaide’s attacks on Red are strangulation; they occur at the throat, to silence her. It remains unclear whether Red remembers that she was not born a Tethered, but with her death there is certainly no one left to expose this truth. This continues the film’s underlying theme of repressed traumas, rewritten and unatoned. Like previous case studies where the racialized feminine has not only been unseen or barely seen, but crucially voiceless, silence keeps the past suppressed, effectively erased. This silence robs the silenced of their heritage, leaving room only for misplaced shame. If we interpret Adelaide and Red the way Red seems to - ‘one soul shared by two’ - perhaps neither of them could ever truly triumph. After all, Red, too, is estranged from her origins. But certainly, when Adelaide emerges as victor, the past remains disavowed and its horrors unresolved. Although, here, the uncanny double, the return to the racialized mother/origins, is not a specter - unlike *Eve’s Bayou* or *Get Out* - she still operates as an icon of the lost ‘home.’ And the horror of *Us* is this complete rupture, a ‘matricide,’ an absolute death of origins that leaves Adelaide psychologically disfigured.

When Adelaide finds Jason, he refuses to hold his mother. The last moments of the film particularly resonate for this research where the gaze has been so central. After the flashback sequence exposes Adelaide as a Tethered, the film’s final moments are a long, haunting stare between a mother and her son. They are not in rapport. No Winnicottian connection takes place here. In fact, it is Jason who dominates his mother’s gaze, scrutinizing her, and not because he hopes to find himself in her eyes. Although this moment has led to much speculation about Jason’s own possible Tetheredness - which Peele, for his part, has refuted⁵²⁰ - I tend to think he has surmised somehow that his mother is one of the Tethered. This disrupted connection becomes legacy, as evidenced by this interaction with Jason. Adelaide has not only severed herself from the past, but, to invoke Du Bois, she has effaced her own inherited duality. She defiles her natural state, and thus her alienation within her family continues.

Eventually, Adelaide smiles awkwardly and breaks their gaze, turning to look at the road. Jason, however, continues to stare up at his mother, even after he wordlessly cements their divide and pulls his mask down over his face: a fitting end for a film about masquerade.

⁵²⁰Zack Sharf, ‘Jordan Peele Throws That Popular “Us” Fan Theory About Jason For a Loop,’ *Indiewire*, 20 June 2019<<https://www.indiewire.com/2019/06/jordan-peele-shuts-down-us-fan-theory-jason-tethered-1202151834/>> [accessed August 17] (para 5 of 6).

Conclusion

Adelaide and Red are the most literal representation of the psychic and spiritual torment that Du Bois incisively outlines in *The Souls of Black Folk*: the split or the ‘unreconciled strivings’⁵²¹ that characterize Black life, caught between two identities, and never really home. As a film, *Us* maps the sweeping consequences of Black confinement, upon which America was built, in intimate spaces: the domestic and, of course, the psychology of the racialized feminine. Both *Get Out* and *Us* are slave narratives and, as I have argued, deeply Female Gothic. However *Us* does not engage with the subgenre by proxy; it steeps itself explicitly in the anxieties of a Black woman at war with herself, for Adelaide and Red enliven Du Bois’s description of ‘two warring ideals in one dark body.’⁵²²

Typically, the Female Gothic cases examined in this project have hinged on the denial of the mirror, or seeing oneself reflected. Not only were these racialized women disguised to audiences as white, but diegetically, too, they were alienated by their racial difference, obviously cast out by white society and also somehow estranged from their own kindred. But while *Eve’s Bayou* (1997) shows how meaningful and productive the mirror can be - how it can empower when that image is fully realized - *Us* reveals that reflections can just as often be shallow, too. On an allegorical level, cinematic images of Blackness can be as volatile as white substitutions. Consider that *The Skeleton Key* (2005) offers a more complex portrait of Black womanhood than *Ouanga* (1936) or *Candyman* (1992), both of which feature Black actresses in prominent roles. But thematically, Peele’s second feature also illustrates how the colonial project might arm the racialized against their own image, and thus recalls Evelyn Hammonds’s query: ‘As theorists, we have to ask what we assume such reflections would show.’⁵²³ Like several films before it, Peele’s film suggests that a predictable outcome of the subjection which engenders a psychic split or two-ness in the racialized is this violent disavowal of the self. Certainly this is what Clelie and Irena attempt to do, albeit unsuccessfully.

However, what distinguishes this film from other Female Gothic texts that portray this traumatic repression and self-estrangement is, simply, perspective. In other words, the audience bears witness to a Black woman gazing upon herself, rather than how she appears to a white look, which even *The Skeleton Key* in part

⁵²¹ Du Bois, p. 8.

⁵²² Ibid.

⁵²³ Evelyn Hammonds, ‘Black (W)holes and the geometry of Black female sexuality’ in *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 6.2-3 (Summer-Fall 1994)

<<http://sites.middlebury.edu/soan191/files/2013/08/HammondsBlackWholes.docx>> pp. 301 - 312 (p. 312).

premises itself on. As if to answer Hammonds's directive, both of Peele's films profoundly consider 'what *we* [italics my own] assume such reflections would show.' Where the racialized female double usually threatens to destabilize whiteness, unknowingly breached by the racial Other in *Cat People* (1942) or *I Walked With a Zombie* (1943), Peele's films locate their central fears in Black characters, trapped as they are in Du Boisian liminality. Both *Get Out* and *Us* fundamentally concern Black people looking and finding themselves, in one way or another, menaced by their 'reflections.' Images that should be familiar to them turn out to be alien. In *Get Out*, the Black characters that Chris encounters are often white imposters. In *Us*, the Tethered signify the violent shadow of the American Dream, which the Wilsons desperately covet and which turns them against themselves. Both scenarios propose that to rely alone on what is seen ultimately proves treacherous. Indeed, much of this project has been dedicated to unraveling the power dynamics deceptively attached to the visible and invisible.

All this is not to say that reflection for the marginalized is unimportant or inherently threatening. But crucially, Peele acknowledges the limits of the visual. As Hammonds would put it, 'Mirroring as a way of negating a legacy of silence needs to be explored in much greater depth than it has been to date by Black feminist theorists. An appeal to the visual is not uncomplicated or innocent.'⁵²⁴ I would agree, for when Pecola intuitively discerns in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* that with blue eyes she will not simply appear different but will see differently, what she really understands is that with a blue-eyed gaze she consigns herself to a seductive blindness. Double-consciousness, as Du Bois argues, brings 'second-sight,'⁵²⁵ the capacity to see what the white world cannot: the true horrors 'in this American world.'⁵²⁶ Pecola knows that whiteness modifies the gaze, that these horrors become unseen. Adelaide, too, adopts this willful myopia to accommodate her masquerade and shuts her eyes to the grim realities happening on the other side of the veil or, rather, just beneath her feet. Du Bois himself elaborates that 'seeking to satisfy two unreconciled ideals, has wrought sad havoc...has sent them often wooing false gods and invoking false means of salvation, and at times has even seemed about to make them ashamed of themselves.'⁵²⁷ What becomes clear then, especially in *Us*, is that what is seen cannot be disentangled from the architect of the gaze. So if the colonial project dictates what is visible, banishing the Tethered to the underworld, the racialized to the realm of the unseen, then more than reflection or the presence of Black bodies must be demanded. The veiled - Black people - may inherit a 'second-sight' or heightened consciousness, but whiteness distorts the mirror. Even when Winnicott speaks of the mother as mirror, he does not so much call for

⁵²⁴Ibid.

⁵²⁵Du Bois, p. 8.

⁵²⁶Ibid.

⁵²⁷Du Bois, p. 10.

the image as he does for recognition. What the infant actually needs from the mother is the reflection of his experience and gestures. So, to be racialized and to be seen requires much more than the visual. There must be an understanding of the power imbalance that directs and structures how we see.

To his credit, Peele not only attends to the visual, he purposefully deconstructs the racial underpinnings that have long influenced spectatorship. When the Adelaides meet as children, surrounded by mirrors, only for the episode to end in violence, not empowerment, Peele invokes a rich cinematic tradition (recall the 1947 noir film *The Lady from Shanghai*, referenced in the first chapter), one that also speaks to the history examined throughout this thesis where the explicitly and implicitly racialized feminine is brutally negated to preserve stability. It is important that the racialized image is met with strangulation, with silencing, and that the mere sight of her does not resolve centuries of trauma. Just as Winnicott predicts for the infant of the failed mother-mirror that the mirror becomes a thing to be 'looked at, but not looked into,'⁵²⁸ *Us* makes the mirror the domain of its formidable analysis and articulates the breadth of psychic turmoil engendered by racial subjugation, which shapes subjective realities as much as material. Thus he exposes how the image itself may be poisoned with a tale that not only gives voice to the anxieties born out of the racialized experience, but images this traumatic dissonance and the fragility of the order around which cultural identity is organized.

Where the racialized female double generally reveals how illegible the Black feminine has been made on screen, here she is fully realized: as resilient as she is vulnerable, morally complicated, even complicit in her own subjection. Adelaide hides in the domestic - not unlike Irena or the second Mrs de Winter before her - where she is bound to conform to patriarchal expectations of gendered middle-classness because it insulates her from the Otherness from which she so longs to be free. Throughout this project I have attempted to show how the Black feminine innately haunts the American Female Gothic, where to speak of 'darkness' and confinement within the American domestic means to produce her latently. Like Lemmons, Peele revises this legacy and builds on the cinematic Black Female Gothic with the central pillars we have come to recognize: 1) foregrounding the split Black feminine gaze; 2) the clash between the mask and the veil; and 3) the fractured, antagonistic domestic. Indeed, Adelaide/Red's tale emerges as a quintessential, exemplary case in a lineage that seeks to see and hear Black women, not only when they are 'strong' and sacrificing, but when they are infinitely more complicated, as frightened and self-serving as anyone else. Perhaps this is the real triumph of *Us*: Black women's claim to self-preservation.

⁵²⁸ Winnicott, p. 2.

In *Lose Your Mother*, Saidiya Hartman talks about a tribe in the slave trading hub Salaga, Ghana, where it was forbidden to reveal someone's origins, specifically their slave origins, since the seventeenth century.

Hartman writes, 'It was said that tracing genealogy destroyed the state.'⁵²⁹ Power rarely so transparently concedes what so many films referenced in this thesis repeatedly affirm: history unspoken preserves the dominant order. In other words, silencing the most vulnerable attempts to erase the past: when Irena's ghost disappears before she can translate her story into legacy; when Cisely essentially forgets what happened that fateful night between her and her father; when Adelaide strangles Red one last time. But over and over we have seen, as the Gothic is especially primed to communicate, that historical horrors are bound to resurface when they remain unconfronted. Inevitably the Gothic family, like the Gothic nation, is bound to its buried traumas, doomed to repeat them, because it does not consciously know itself.

⁵²⁹ Hartman, p. 193.

Conclusion

This project was conceived as a theoretical analysis of the barely concealed Black feminine in narratives of fear. Although thinly veiled allusions to racial Blackness as symbol and material history have been well theorized in American literature, I have explored here how cinema uniquely reckons with these themes. Among the few visible, reliably enduring cultural images of Black American womanhood, the Mammy woefully remains the most prominent, certainly in film. She exists primarily as a fictional construct, integral to foundational conceptions of the American domestic. Of course, the reality of Black women's tenure in white households was far more dire than these films usually dared to disclose. Given that the Female Gothic, too, principally locates its anxieties in the domestic, it seemed reasonable to triangulate the largely overlooked Black feminine presence there. Generally, she embodies a host of dark projections, as much for the white space she destabilizes as for her own alienated family/community, which she 'betrays' either sexually (Jezebel) or emotionally (Mammy). In this research, I have delineated the specificity of her entrapment in a genre that, despite its literary origins, often hinges on the seen and the unseen, a thoroughly cinematic proposition that invites a study of the screen and its processes of visualizing the racialized feminine. So long cast out of sight, she proves an immensely rich figure upon closer inspection.

Therefore, this research has been designed to interrogate racialized visibility and spectatorship, using three organizing strategies: 1) the application of the classic motifs of the Gothic - the double and the patriarchal house among them - to trace her presence, and reveal how the American domestic is haunted by the spectral Black feminine, who may not always be seen but inevitably arises in the Female Gothic mode, where these racial and gendered neuroses fundamentally animate the narrative; 2) an examination of the ways the psychic Black

feminine emerges through the racialized looking relations depicted in films that produce an (ideal) Black feminine spectator; by 3) enlisting W. E. B. Du Bois's concepts of double-consciousness and the veil, in addition to Donald Winnicott's theory of the mother's role as mirror, to compose a language for her interiority. Thus, I have charted the migrations of the often disguised Black feminine as conventionally rendered in traditional Female Gothic cinema to contemporary films in the mode where she becomes actualized. Admittedly, Du Bois and Winnicott's theories do not readily accommodate the Black feminine. Just as cinema erases or else substitutes her, likewise in these academic, presumably more objective enterprises, she finds herself subject to a masculinist lens or evaded altogether. Du Bois betrays his many gendered blindspots; and importantly, the spectator is not an infant, nor is cinema essential to healthy psychological development. However, film and popular imagery have so permeated our culture as to be noxious for those it weaponizes itself against. But if it can do such harm, then surely, it possesses the potential to repair its damage. It is imperative, then, to make sense of the dynamic the screen forges with certain spectators using a framework that can meaningfully convey the scope of its injury and its capacity to rectify these traumas.

I chose the Gothic because it has a long, pronounced history with racialization. Several scholars, including Toni Morrison, Teresa Goddu, and Maisha L. Wester, have thoroughly excavated the genre's racial obsessions and contradictions. Furthermore, they all contend that it has been a powerfully productive format for white and Black authors alike. I am not the first to suggest that the genre is alive: an ever changing, mobile force that not only operates as a framework, but encapsulates a discernible energy, with the innate ability to subvert its own conventions. Continually, the Gothic demonstrates that its anatomy (although I have attempted to employ just that in this thesis) matters much less than its character, which, as Ellen Moers puts it, simply 'has to do with fear.'⁵³⁰ As such, the genre functions much like a mirror, exposing the cultural anxieties it turns its gaze upon, as well as reflecting back on itself as a mode, where social - particularly gendered or racial - fears can take any shape or direction: a tool of the powerful or the oppressed. The Female Gothic specifically has been widely identified within feminist scholarship as a space where the vulnerable can, at the very least, articulate their victimhood. For the purposes of this thesis, the genre opens the possibility to disentangle Black women's experiences from Black men, where they have generally been conflated, and which purposefully obscures the intersecting racial and sexual exploitation to which Black women are distinctly subjected.

The American domestic fictions of the early twentieth century already frequently produce the Black feminine as maid and, consequently, as 'mother.' But I wanted to emphasize that even without a 'Mammy'

⁵³⁰Ellen Moers, *Literary Women: The Great Writers* (New York: Doubleday, 1976), p. 90.

figure, the sexual, inevitably maternal implications of certain women characters in Gothic melodramas evince a lurking kinship with her. The gendered Gothic double, given the ingrained racial dimensions of the genre, provides a dynamic wherein white actresses perform a racially coded morality that gives way to racialized femininity. From *Cat People* (1942) to *I Walked With a Zombie* (1943) to *The Curse of the Cat People* (1944), the characters are not only supernaturally Other, their Otherness is signified with the socio-historical language of racial difference. They are either expressly aligned with Black characters and/or communities narratively, or they belong to a group similarly marked by their dangerous non-whiteness. Often these films express underlying anxieties that whiteness can be approximated or penetrated by the sexually threatening racial Other, as in *White Zombie* (1932) or *Ouanga* (1936). The Other ominously represents 'ruined' whiteness, or its potential to be tainted, especially for white women who dare to commit some sexual transgression. Although apprehensions around Black masculinity visibly surface at certain moments, Black femininity becomes the real menace to the patriarchal social order that these films traditionally preserve by the end. This is not to say that Black male sexuality is not also gravely feared, but these Gothic films principally premise themselves on the horror that the Black feminine embodies.

Although I expected to find her configured as a hypersexualized icon of racial and gendered difference, it also became clear that these early, formative horror films contextualize her irreconcilable dualism as not merely a blurring of racial categories, but, even more terrifying, a treacherous plurality that gives way to a formidable (and often necessary) shape-shifting. Consistently, the racialized feminine has employed masquerade to protect her hypervisible body. Thus, she also manages to reveal the tenuousness of whiteness. When these fictions strive so desperately to prove her sinister and cast her out, they, perhaps unwittingly, announce her power. Essentially, the characters in these early films portray an exercise akin to racial passing (as white), if not exactly that. Not only do each of these women characters personify duality, they tend to present, at least socially, as white. Their Othered status must be revealed, either to the characters or the audience. Played by white actresses, these characters are mostly integrated into white communities and estranged from other racialized characters. Even Clelie in *Ouanga* is a biracial woman who must be deemed Black by other characters, for without that, her wealth and light complexion would allow her autonomy that even the white women in the film do not possess. Furthermore, these films constitute the genre's dominant model: a racialized woman is destroyed for her ambitions to whiteness and is ultimately replaced with an acceptable, white female character that the white male hero can safely love. Black Female Gothic cinema, which I have classified through a series of patterns that establish these films in the lineage of African-American discourse and literature - including slave narratives and Du Boisian

concepts of the veil and double-consciousness - would subvert these tropes by visualizing open-ended reflections on racial ‘passing’ and substitution which complicate essentialist notions of racial and gender identity. These films harness the disguised Black feminine for her empowering fluidity, to speak to her well-earned anxieties (depicted in these classical Female Gothic films) and survival measures, which enacts her multiplicity not as a sexual strategy but a performance borne out of her instinctive understanding of modalities of seeing. But before I speak more extensively on the Black Female Gothic cinematic tradition, I also want to emphasize how these earlier, more conventional Female Gothic films configure Black feminine spectatorship, essential to the formation of contemporary Gothic cinema where the Black feminine is explicitly realized.

In the foundational, colonial Female Gothic - which is to say, those Eurocentric films anxious about the intimacy between white and Black communities as discussed in chapter 2 - the doppelgänger bears particularly cruel implications. Whenever the racialized female double sees ‘herself’ or is confronted with herself as racial Other, she reacts with horror. I have argued that much of the time, these women are made ‘monstrous’ simply for not being white; but moreover, the looking relations presented diegetically suggest that her image must necessarily be disavowed. Even she cannot behold her own reflection without recoiling in fear. Whatever the filmmakers’ intentions, these moments speak of, and to, the Black female spectator, conjured within the narrative when these films replicate the dual gaze that Du Bois incisively describes in *The Souls of Black Folk*: ‘always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others.’⁵³¹ These gendered racialized looking relations occur in pivotal scenes: when Irena encounters a fellow cat woman in the diner on her wedding night; when Clelie looks up and sees a faceless woman, draped in her clothes, hanging from a tree. From this we can gather that in these moments where our protagonist regards her double, and thus herself, her gaze has become so distorted that not only does she not recognize herself, she shrinks from her own image.

These films gesture to Black feminine spectatorship in the way the screen disguises and misrepresents Black femininity, even to itself, so that Black womanhood becomes illegible and grotesque. For even as I contend that these texts produce the Black feminine spectator and center around racialized women, most of these narratives unfold from the perspective of white male positionality. Sexual transgression is tied up in their racial transgression; indeed, the former seems to generate the latter in several cases, so to maintain the patriarchal order, the Othered woman must be violently destroyed. Although, crucially, I build on scholarship that has elucidated how threatening womanhood, especially when racialized, is constructed in the horror genre, this thesis hones in on a triad of symbols: the double, the mirror, and the veil. Therefore, this research principally

⁵³¹ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Company, 1903), p. 8.

concerns how Black women are specifically conditioned to regard their own image. By negotiating this relationship as portrayed on screen, major questions about the layered tension between Black women's hypervisibility and invisibility come to the forefront.

Scholars such as Manthia Diawara and bell hooks have extensively analyzed the representational and political challenges that Black audiences face at the cinema. Meanwhile, the critic Jacqueline Stewart distinguishes her research from more theoretical evaluations with anecdotal accounts of Black spectatorship, fictional and historical. I point to a space in between, where a fictional performance of looking, depicting the widely theorized dissonance that shapes racial viewership, doubly acts out colonial film imagery and the dynamic this cinema forges with the implied Black feminine spectator. In other words, these films not only portray Othering conceptions of Black femininity, they replicate the spectatorial Black feminine response to these cinematic and cultural images, gesturing to her experience and the structural forces that already shape her gaze. Even while these films fashion Black femininity as monstrous, this performance dramatizes the violence of 'always looking at one's self through the eyes of others,'⁵³² not just literally because these moments take place between two women on screen, but because they profoundly visualize the horror of being called to witness oneself as Other, not-human. This trauma is often approached and explained theoretically, but these scenes importantly represent Black women's exclusion, again twofold, from the visual, both as characters and viewers. Although these films simulate her experience, they are also weaponized against her, for she finds herself not only denied reflection (as a represented character), but also Winnicottian recognition; the narrative rarely sides with her, and always culminates in her excision and expulsion. She must behold her own negation.

Her cinematic displacement has dense ramifications. The disconnect between the various doubles also incurs distance between the characters and the audience more generally. While the racialized female double encapsulates the racial networks of looking that the moviegoing experience often entails for the Black female spectator, these films purposefully isolate her. On screen these women inevitably meet their demise, but even before that the audience is divided from her because the film signals her horrible difference, emphasized by her own estrangement from herself. In this way, the characters who emblemize Black femininity become the ultimate doppelgänger, alien harbingers of death. Perhaps the heroines of *Ouanga* and *Cat People* emerge sympathetically, but they remain only partially defined, commonly by their singular desperation to integrate into white society, a crime for which they must be punished. Their inner lives, apart from the turmoil caused by their complicated relationship with their racial identity, is never fully developed. They are all alternately

⁵³² Ibid.

hypersexualized and tragic, but otherwise unknowable, for even their ethnic duality only provides them shallow personhood. From the cinematography to their characterizations, the audience is positioned to look at them from a psychological divide. Even the presumed Black female spectator, whose experience this Gothic twinship repurposes, is ultimately alienated by the essential Othering that, diegetically, places these racialized characters outside of the realm of humanity. The racialized female double becomes illegible because these films construct her as largely symbolic. She is an icon of terror, doomed to loneliness and death.

It would seem that neither the screen nor the Gothic are especially well suited to address the social, material, or emotional concerns of Black women. Black and female, doubly ensnared by patriarchy, these storytelling contexts appear fundamentally armed against them. The screen frequently disavows the Black presence to sustain white hierarchy. Meanwhile, ‘darkness’ always haunts the Gothic, which also distrusts the gendered Other (objectives that are not unrelated, for, as mentioned earlier, sexually defiant white women can become ‘less’ white). However, using these cases, I detail how these conditions are just as likely to beget the Black feminine; so committed to hiding her, these efforts inadvertently betray her veiled proximity. Although Blackness is often invisible in these films, its presence can still be credibly perceived out of its absence.

It cannot be overstated how violent negating images can be for Black women as spectators. But these texts are valuable because they broadly portray the cinematic environment that Black women must resist and protest. Importantly, they also complicate visual representation as a solution to this problem. If cinema classically anticipates and prioritizes white spectatorship - even where it narratively produces Black female spectatorship - then the presence of Black characters will not undermine the reigning principle of centering whiteness. The Black characters will simply fold into the institutional looking dynamics that do not fully reflect their humanity. Visibility cannot dismantle a history of erasure and silence. It does not change how vision is structured or how it functions under colonial conditions which determines what is seen and what is not. In other words, it is not empowering simply to make oneself subject to the gaze. The films that do challenge this legacy of Black disavowal on screen often do so because they fundamentally concern themselves with how the gaze operates in dominant culture and how racial difference is constituted. But one cannot rely upon representation or images alone. Consider Clelie, played by the biracial actress Fredi Washington, whose empathetic performance admittedly invites compassion where the script does not. *Cat People*, conversely, presents a far more nuanced, even gracious, portrait of the psychological toll assimilation inflicts upon the racialized, even though Irena’s fate conforms to the standard arc for these tales. It is not enough to see Black actors on screen if the story perpetuates their degradation. In the same vein, imaging the disavowal of Black

women can be productive when the film is not anxiously fixed against her and purposefully centers Black viewership.

Films like *Candyman* (1992) and *The Skeleton Key* (2005) veer away from the traditional structure of the Female Gothic, updated to accommodate the changing roles of women, no longer dependent upon marriage for survival. In the former, the protagonist is an academic who, nevertheless, finds herself bound to a seductive, treacherous Byronic male supernaturally, but also emotionally and sexually. So, too, the Gothic heroine of *The Skeleton Key* finds herself at war with another woman for, quite literally, the soul - rather than the affections - of an ailing, elderly man. Where earlier films shied away from explicitly engaging with the policies and social conditions that confined Black communities to an oppressed, exploitable class, these contemporary horror films openly concern enduring racial divisions in America, where the exclusion of Black women from justice becomes a theme. Both films foreground the essential Female Gothic confrontation with the maternal over romance, in stark contrast to its predecessors, which, despite entailing the maternal, more readily focused on the threat racialized sexuality posed. These more recent cases would also reflect on the legacy of those classical films when the disguised Black feminine either symbolically (in *Candyman*) or literally (*The Skeleton Key*) haunts traditional sites of racial violence, like the housing project or the antebellum manor. That said, *Candyman* is still more aligned with those earlier texts because it prioritizes white spectatorship. It reproduces stereotypical tropes and imagery with its few Black women characters, and clumsily links its white heroine with the Black community she avenges when she is reborn of its symbolic site of motherhood in the Gothic: the haunted house or, in this instance, the haunted housing project. On the other hand, *The Skeleton Key* is about a Black woman supernaturally 'passing' as a white woman. Here again, we have an example of invisibility and visibility troubled by spectatorship politics. Despite the fact that the Black characters do not appear on screen for very long, and the Black actors portraying them never speak, *The Skeleton Key* effectively grapples with the history that persistently shapes Black people's anxieties by centralizing Black and white bodies: the casual violence visited upon the former versus the general protection (except within this narrative) afforded by the latter. This Black conjure couple occupies white bodies for their own survival, and we are shown why when their actual bodies (inhabited by their young white charges) are lynched by their white employers, in the middle of a party no less. Just as the main white character is deceived by appearances, the film skillfully tricks its audiences in a strategy that bears traces of African-American folklore tradition and so privileges Black spectatorship. Meanwhile, in *Candyman*, the white heroine's Black best friend is unceremoniously murdered to accelerate the plot and bring the white heroine closer to the Black villain who is obsessed with her. Other Black women are killed off screen in

an extension of the film's preoccupations with the plight of its white protagonist over the very real crises (economic and environmental) that the Black characters experience. However, both films employ the Female Gothic to convey how patriarchal institutions still endanger women. They reveal, furthermore, that Black women are substantially imperiled by a system that has no stakes in protecting them.

A pattern begins to develop between Kasi Lemmons's *Eve's Bayou* (1997) and Jordan Peele's films *Get Out* (2017) and *Us* (2019). Each film is led by Black characters and narratively prioritizes their gaze. Moreover, these films openly display a fascination with the Black maternal, not as a paradigm through which femininity is framed - like many of its predecessors - but as an individualized figure, whose backstory communicates, with specificity, her own tragic ordeal as well as generational fractures that continually trouble Black familial formations. She is a haunting figure of (communal) grief and loss with the potential to empower her heirs by connecting them to their origins, from which they draw alternative modes of existing and seeing. More specifically, the cinematic Black Female Gothic, as demonstrated by these films, tends to include three major elements: 1) centering the split Black feminine gaze; 2) the clash between the mask and the veil harnessed as a form of resistance; and 3) the dysfunctional domestic which is usually ruptured or haunted by the dispossessed maternal. Having already established that the Female Gothic is haunted by the Black feminine, these films bring her specter to the foreground, where she directly and explicitly impacts the narrative's proceedings, even when she is not physically present, as in *Get Out*. She troubles the Black family/community not because, as Moynihan would argue, she destabilizes the patriarchal nuclear family with her refusal to adhere to gender norms,⁵³³ but because none can be free while she, and all she represents, is condemned to the shadows. In other words, she represents their ongoing confinement. Importantly, spectatorship is diegetically integral to these films' portrayal of Black American existence. Where the racialized female double generally served white supremacist fears around miscegenation and racial fluidity, these three films employ the racialized female double to convey the intrinsic duality which Du Bois argues characterizes Black American life.

Eve's Bayou is rather conventionally Female Gothic with its middle-class family in thrall to a charming patriarch whose reckless, sensual appetite endangers them emotionally and psychologically, and perhaps even sexually. Although the film's conclusion is steeped in grief and anguish, only by embracing her heritage and the mysterious wisdom emblemized by her conjure woman ancestor, does the film's young heroine Eve finally gain spiritual and emotional development. Similarly, Peele's two films to date intriguingly complement Lemmon's

⁵³³ Hortense Spillers, 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book,' *Diacritics*, 17.2 (Summer 1987), pp. 64-81 (p. 66).

feature, for both reenact the conditions of America's slave past. *Get Out* is blatantly a slave allegory where the loss of Chris's mother, which references that historical diasporic split, is his central trauma. In his disconnect from her (from home), he falls prey to the insidious Armitages, who perpetuate an ancestral family business of turning Black bodies into commodities for white consumerism and consumption. Likewise, Adelaide's divide from her own origins and, moreover, her past sins, resembles the repression of American history, rooted in exploitation and genocide. Both films reconstruct Black captivity and explore its sweeping consequences. But even when characters turn away from their past, it always finds them.

The displaced maternal/Black feminine then, in this tradition, encapsulates the slave past that either haunts her Black descendants who resist confronting her (their history) or it can sustain them. But far from a richly symbolic talisman, Black women in this genre are portrayed as dimensional and complicated. Her metaphorical presence indicates that her perpetual entrapment has consequences for all Black people, but she also becomes individual. These films' intersectional approach to Black women as characters imbues them with complexity and originality. Contrary to the tropes and archetypes that Black women are frequently compelled to embody on screen, the women of the Black Female Gothic are, as the genre requires, deeply flawed. They are selfish, cruel, not always especially warm or generous, capable of good and bad mothering, or, alternately, indifferent to children altogether (e.g. Elzora and Red). They are not solely defined by their motherhood nor does it make them morally righteous figures.

But she consistently functions as a model of restorative spectatorship. For example, in *Eve's Bayou*, the doubled looking relations inherited from their once enslaved ancestor, unites and empowers the Batiste women who use their (supernatural) gaze to honor the connections between the material and spiritual realms. It orients them toward truth and conceptions of justice and healing that meaningfully contradict the violent patriarchal and colonial conditions that continue to plague them. In *Get Out*, her body becomes a vessel for white racists, but even then she is the only one of the snatched victims whose true face manages to break through. Put another way, she is the only one who instinctively grasps how to negotiate the mask. In *Eve's Bayou*, Elzora's performance of the mask cements her estrangement from the middle-class respectability politics that drive the townspeople, the elitist Batistes especially. Therefore, she exists outside of the classist, gendered expectations that endlessly trouble women in the film. In *Us*, most of all, Adelaide and Red both intuit that wardrobe and masquerade are political performance, essential to their calculus for survival. It is not simply reflection that makes these representations so valuable, but a thorough recognition of her inherent duality and the structural forces that shape her reality. Her access to certain institutions, for example - middle-class femininity most frequently, which

translates to economic and social survival - depend upon her ability to mask her truest self. Alternatively, masquerade may also protect her from the dominant cultural violence that endangers Black women. Simply put, these films visualize the legacy of Black women's history as property as well as her psychic interiority, and so they lend themselves specifically to her spectatorship. By imaging her personhood and humanity, these films give voice to the fear of disavowal and negation that preys upon her, and presents her efforts to evade this fate, which surrounds her. Sometimes that means showing how she internalizes white patriarchal values which ultimately turn her against herself, like Roz does in *Eve's Bayou* and Adelaide in *Us*. The respective directors of these films did not merely appeal to the visual; they sought to trace the contours of Black spectatorship, forged by centuries of oppression and American film tradition. Black Female Gothic cinema depicts how this legacy prevails in the aftermath of slavery while portraying Black characters with depth. More than symbols or archetypes, these characters are profoundly contextualized by their inherent diasporic two-ness, which, as Du Bois predicts, becomes a 'gift' or a weapon.

The films covered in chapters 1 and 2 establish a cinematic tradition where Black women are estranged from the cinema paradigm that sought to absorb viewers into the narrative space⁵³⁴ because these films played out her alienation and rejection. Even as these texts perform and construct her gaze, they project back to her a 'monstrous' image. The films directed by Peele specifically outline the colonial scaffolding behind her traumatized gaze. *Get Out* visually deploys the language of cinema as a spatial environment to translate the horror of the Sunken Place, where the Armitages' Black victims are psychically trapped while elderly white people wield control over their bodies. In *Us*, the performance of looking that Adelaide and Red engage in, partitioned by the funhouse mirror - emblematic of the screen relations discussed throughout this project - turns into a violent reenactment of kidnap and enslavement, and finally suffocating silence. Essentially, each film is reworking the Female Gothic 'gaze' - mirrored, doubled, veiled - and, with it, the position of the historically (ideal) Black female spectator. In all three narratives identified as Black Female Gothic, this bifurcated gaze becomes her unique power. In her capacity to see and discern what others cannot, she thoroughly understands herself as subject, which gives way to her fascinating, innately political performance of the mask. This is how the racialized female double, at least in the Black Female Gothic tradition, approximates power. It is her mastery of the mask that enables her survival, even when it is the most tragic survival of all.

⁵³⁴ Jacqueline Stewart, 'Negroes Laughing at Themselves? Black Spectatorship and the Performance of Urban Modernity,' *Critical Inquiry*, 29.4 (2003), pp. 650–677 (p. 671).

Finally, in the Black Female Gothic tradition, the Gothic family repeatedly embodies or replicates disastrous white patriarchal practices of family. This structure continually represents the nexus of horror in each narrative, most notably because this hierarchy with stifling gender assignments premised on subjugation naturally incurs exploitation and requires submission of either its own kin (as in *Eve's Bayou*) or the Other (as in *Get Out* and *Us*). Already the Gothic family perfectly articulates social efforts to resolve trauma by repressing it. For example, in *The Curse of the Cat People* (1944), analyzed in chapter 2, the racialized female ghost fortifies the nuclear family while she not only belongs to the unseen realm, but also risks permanent negation when her history remains silenced. Silence keeps the horror of the past suppressed, effectively erased.

In these chapters, I have offered a contribution to existing scholarship by tracing the veiled presence of the Black feminine through an original synthesis of methods: applying what I have deemed the racialized female double to do a close reading of the fictional depiction of racialized and gendered looking performances in cinema, interpreted through a theoretical framework in which I have developed the concept of a corresponding intersectional spectatorship, combined with the application of Female Gothic tropes - the house, the mirror, the double, and the veil - in an effort to illuminate the Black feminine, substituted or visualized, in a genre where she is often overlooked. Though the underrepresentation of Black women in cinema has been widely theorized, my contribution to these studies is merging the theories of Du Bois and Winnicott to outline Black women as characters and viewers in an arrangement that privileges their interiority: the psychological consequences of an infrastructure that denies her full reflection as well as her natural capacity to challenge the power dynamics that relentlessly dehumanize her. The result is that the Black Female Gothic does not just actualize her, but demonstrates how the Black feminine wields the gaze to create herself, disrupting the gender and racial constructions that enslave her. Therefore, I also contribute to the growing studies of Black women's role in narratives of fear by delineating the patterns in cinema that recognize how formidably connected she is to America's horrifying origins and thus bound to its image of itself. This tradition, however, seeks to rescue her, to image her in all her complexity as character, author of her own image, and spectator.

This research proposed to make sense of the chameleon dynamic that allows the genre to operate as both a patriarchal apparatus, where racially or otherwise transgressive bodies find themselves made monstrous and subject to violation, and, equally, a rebellious response to the technologies of Othering which the form first established. Because this project has focused so much on gender, and its representations on screen have broadly been predictably cisgendered, there are certain limits to what this work can achieve. I have not, for instance, been able to speak adequately to the experience of being nonbinary or trans with almost no representation in cinema,

although that is gradually changing. I have not been able to sufficiently address the experience of one's body in discord with their gender or personal identity. One hope is that this project may invite others who are trans or nonbinary to explore their own specific, unique erasure and the horror that this generates.

Ultimately, with this project, I hope to have illustrated how the Gothic powerfully articulates a Black feminine experience, and is, in fact, predisposed to address her gaze in cinema. While Black women still rarely receive dimensionality on screen, I have established the ways the Female Gothic as a framework reveals its capacity to reflect their interiority in the hands of interrogating filmmakers who use its conventions to correct her negation. Although there is much work left to be done, Lemmons' and Peele's films - as well as the recent spate of conscious horror cinema that the latter has, to great extent, inspired - have paved the way for a more thorough and complex reckoning with the genre's legacy where it concerns the portrayal of Black people. Peele, in particular, managed to tell two very different and distinct narratives of contemporary Black life, albeit united under common themes that plainly name the sinister forces that cloud Black identity in America. Above all, the Female Gothic demonstrates its ability to give voice to the marginalized. Though far from uncomplicated, the genre proves itself an exceptional space that provides for the silenced and maligned, not just a language of victimization, but a language of defense.

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