

Gothic legacies: *Jane Eyre* in Elizabeth Stoddard's New England

Anne-Marie Ford

'What do you think of those scenes in *Jane Eyre* where she watches with a professional eye the rising of [Rochester's] passionate emotions, and skillfully prevents any culmination of feeling by changing her manner? – Did anybody ever notice it?'¹ These questions come from a letter, dated 5 May 1860, to the American writer and critic James Russell Lowell, from an aspiring New England writer, Elizabeth Drew Barstow Stoddard. Lowell had recently accepted one of Stoddard's short stories for publication in the American journal the *Atlantic Monthly*, and had sent her a letter advising her on ways in which he felt she could improve her writing style. Her response, commenting on the love games between Charlotte Brontë's heroine and hero, reflects the interest in sexuality evident in her own writing, as well as her admiration for Brontë, whose work seems to have influenced Stoddard rather more than Lowell's advice. He detected in her writing, he said, a tendency to move 'towards the *edge of things*,'² and warned her against it. But Stoddard was captivated by the love games in *Jane Eyre*, and, especially, the daring representation of a sensual heroine who challenged patriarchal power and claimed the right of self-possession. Brontë's exploration of these themes fused elements of Gothic literature with the domestic, so that, as Elaine Showalter argues in *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830–1980*, her writing 'shows an evolution from Romantic stereotypes of female insanity to a brilliant interrogation of the meaning of madness in women's daily lives'.³ The images Brontë conjured up of female entrapment and frustrated desire powerfully engaged and inspired Stoddard. At a time when many other American women writers were producing sentimental or moralistic novels, which tended to reinforce the social and cultural values of the time, Stoddard wrote about the passionate self and lamented that America had no 'Elizabeth Browning, Brontë, [or] George Sand'.⁴

Each of these European writers was an important model for women writers in America, and it is hardly surprising that Stoddard's first novel, *The Morgesons* (1862), displays the influence that Brontë had upon her writing. Both Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Stoddard's *The Morgesons* are written in the first person, and both begin with the heroine as a child, before bringing her, at the age of eighteen, to her first sexual encounter. The heroine's progress from beginning to end is given a psycho-social context by employing what has come to be known as female Gothic, a mode which expresses women's sexual fantasies and fears, as well as their rage at male oppression, and is itself derived from the Gothic writings of late eighteenth-century Europe. Both authors, too, use binary images of fire and ice, in order to reflect the cold outer world of custom and control, at odds with the fervent passions of the sexual self. Brontë's heroine first meets the hero/villain Rochester when out walking on a frosty night, and returns home only to be ushered into a firelit room to encounter him once more. Stoddard's heroine is placed against a snowy, frozen backdrop, contrasted with the firelit warmth of an inn, as she experiences the sexual advances of her would-be seducer, Charles Morgeson. In both novels such symbolic oppositions convey to the reader the inner life and emotional responses of a passionate and unconventional heroine.

Brontë and Stoddard both borrow from, and adapt, the romantic Gothic tradition of, for example, the British writer Ann Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). In addition, Stoddard anatomises the pathology of a repressive regional culture in a style known as provincial Gothic, used by American writers such as Nathaniel Hawthorne in his *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851). Such borrowings and negotiations between British and American traditions of the Gothic are also explored by Sue Zlosnik and Avril Horner in their essay on the work of Djuna Barnes and Evelyn Waugh (Chapter 11). In adapting the Gothic mode, Brontë not only focuses on the sexual nature of women and male oppression, but also on class categories, reflecting a deeply embedded nineteenth-century preoccupation, one that was a focus for Gothic writers, not least Hawthorne. Stoddard employs elements of the Gothic to render the sexually powerful and dominant male, resonant of the slave owners of the American South, as well as current debates regarding women's socio-economic oppression. Brontë and Stoddard both consider contemporary issues through images of embattled females, seeking victory over cultural and social oppression, although they present this victory in very different ways.

Overall, however, in their representations of male oppression, and the

issues they confront, Brontë and Stoddard are broadly similar. The critical introduction to the 1984 reprint of *The Morgesons*, by Lawrence Buell and Sandra Zagarell, notes Stoddard's close intellectual affinity with both Charlotte and Emily Brontë, 'The work of all three displays an interfusion of Victorian social realism with the romance tradition', and continues that Stoddard, like the Brontës, 'depicts . . . social reality with a keen awareness of how kinship, marriage, property ownership, and inheritance intermesh.'⁵ In exploring the way in which Brontë and Stoddard deploy Gothic conventions, I want to consider their common and varied representations of woman's psycho-social oppression, and erotic nature. Furthermore, I will investigate the emancipation of each of their heroines from socio-economic restrictions, and their modes of dealing with the fulfilment of their erotic nature. I will also show the ways in which the transatlantic borrowings of Elizabeth Stoddard create a rich and unnerving novel that refuses to embrace conventional models of femininity. Stoddard's use of British and American Gothic traditions and her engagement with *Jane Eyre* result in an extraordinarily candid and surprising novel, which still resonates with readers today.

The trope of the castle in romantic Gothic, and of the house in provincial Gothic, is used to symbolise the confinement and maltreatment of women socially, psychologically and physically: in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, for example, Emily St Aubert, a beautiful young woman, is confined by her uncle in a remote castle and threatened with the loss of her wealth and her life; and, in *The House of the Seven Gables*, Hepzibah Pyncheon, an elderly spinster, is confined by gender, class, and a series of historical crimes in her family, in a decaying old mansion, living a life of loneliness and poverty. In an age when middle-class culture idealised the home, and the role of the woman as its moral centre, the Gothic was used to reveal the fears and horrors within everyday domestic life. As Kate Ferguson Ellis argues, in *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology*, nineteenth-century Gothic undermined the prevailing belief that the domestic space was a safe one, especially for women. Ellis perceives the Gothic heroine's attempts to escape her prison as a desire to subvert a domestic ideology which was beginning to tyrannise the lives of middle-class women within a capitalist society. Yet she acknowledges, too, 'that popular literature can be a site of resistance to ideological positions as well as a means of propagating them.'⁶ Brontë, through her transgressive heroine, interrogates both gender boundaries and class categories, yet finally surrenders to many of the values of contemporary ideology. Nevertheless, she also creates what Ellis describes as

a space in her text for the appearance of the forbidden, and in this space she places the libidinous, monstrous female, Bertha Rochester. Texts such as Brontë's and the later sensation⁷ novels of, for example, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, present female madness/insanity in its social context, as a reaction to the limitations of the feminine role. Stoddard's novel also investigates such limitations, through images of nervous sensibility and agoraphobia to which her women fall victim. Stoddard also goes further than Brontë in insisting on the heroine's transgressions as a permanently liberating force. Yet the central preoccupations of both writers remain the same: a passionate heroine, threatened by social and cultural codes that seek to deny her the possibility of achieving self-possession. In their use of the home as a place of internment, both offer a template for what Ellis, in *The Contested Castle*, identifies as a space of apparent safety which actually imprisons its female inhabitants.

Thornfield Hall, the building to which Jane goes on leaving Lowood, is a gentleman's manor-house, and although it has battlements round the top, like a Gothic castle, these, Brontë's heroine concludes, 'gave it a picturesque look'.⁸ She is not discomfited either when a tour of the house reminds her of the tale of Bluebeard, a Gothic villain before his time, who brutally murders a number of young wives: 'I lingered in the long passage . . . separating the front and back rooms of the third story – narrow, low, and dim, with only one little window at the far end, and looking, with its two rows of small black doors all shut, like a corridor in some Bluebeard's castle' (*JE*, p. 138). As Jane draws closer to discovering Thornfield's secret, however, she finds that it contains genuinely Gothic horrors: a creature who, at dead of night, attacks a visitor to the Hall, like a vampire, sucking his blood and saying she would drain his heart; a creature who is Mrs Rochester. The wife of Thornfield Hall's master is restrained in a house which is, after all, 'a mere dungeon' (*JE*, p. 244). Thornfield Hall, like Bluebeard's castle, contains within it a dreadful secret, but here it is the secret malevolence and rage not of a brutal husband, but of an imprisoned wife.

Jane's deeper knowledge of Thornfield Hall is echoed in Cassandra's progressive understanding of the house she visits in Belem, the home of the Somers family, into which she eventually marries. Cassandra, like Jane, makes a light-hearted reference to Bluebeard (she and Ben Somers agree it is their favourite fairy story), and she too finds that the house she visits is not without its horrors. Again there is an imprisoned wife, a woman buried alive in the family home. Bellevue Pickersgill Somers, from whose aristocratic father the Somers derive their wealth, is trapped in

time: she is a ‘terrible aristocrat’, who never changes anything in the house, for she is ‘fixed in the ideas imbedded in the Belem institutions, which only move backward’ (*TM*, p. 167). She is also trapped within her own body: having been married at fifteen, she is still producing children more than thirty years later. Significantly, in the Belem scenes she never leaves the house. Here is another entrapped female, a covertly malevolent wife, discharging her rage at her confinement(s) by insidious attacks on others. Bellevue Somers – at the centre of the family, spinning her threads of malice like a spider in the middle of its web – is fixed in this emblem, an image that brilliantly combines the mundane with the horrific: ‘Mrs Somers gave me some tea from a spider-shaped silver teapot, which was related to a spider-shaped cream-jug and a spider-shaped sugar-dish’ (*TM*, p.168). But Bellevue Somers, like Bertha Rochester, is a prisoner, trapped in time and within her own body, she produces (male) heirs to the Pickersgill line, and rarely goes beyond her own front door. Claire Kahane, in ‘The Gothic Mirror’, has written persuasively that such an image in Gothic literature represents ‘the spectral presence of a dead-undead mother, archaic and all-encompassing, a ghost signifying the problematics of femininity which the heroine must confront.’⁹ In *Jane Eyre*, Brontë problematises femininity through images of the deadly Bertha Rochester, vessel of sexual abandon, mad and savage, while Stoddard’s buried mother-figure is Bellevue Somers, the female trapped, and made monstrous, by her own fertility.

Brontë and Stoddard also engage, through their texts, in a debate on the ways in which economic power is denied to the female within a capitalist patriarchal society, during their own historical moment. In their novels they show the female as economically marginalised, oppressed by customs and institutions which deny her power or control. In Brontë’s *Thornfield* and Stoddard’s *Belem* household, emphasis is placed on the corrupting power wealth wields in relation to gender. Both Bertha Rochester and Bellevue Somers represent woman as monstrous being, a being created by socio-economic boundaries of patriarchy and capitalism; an awful warning of what Brontë’s and Stoddard’s heroines might become, if they fail to achieve personal autonomy. In fact, they embody the horrors of a nightmare world, which reflects the corruption of the daytime existence that imperils gender relations. Brontë uses darkness, wild laughter, fire and terror to express the warped relationship between husband and wife at *Thornfield*. Stoddard depicts a world of decay, cobwebs, inertia and dissipation to illustrate the twisted lives of the *Belem* household. Having learnt the horrors of what may befall them, both her-

oines work towards achieving self-possession, and ultimately come into possession of economic power.

The deployment of the Gothic castle or house is echoed in both Brontë's and Stoddard's use of other standard Gothic character conventions, in particular those relating to the villain, the heroine and the hero, the latter usually rescuing the heroine from the villain. *Bluebeard*, Charles Perrault's French tale of 1697, offered a template for Gothic treatment of the husband as villain, in the same way that Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian* (1797), offered a template for Gothic treatment of the father-figure as villain. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, for example, the villainous Montoni is the husband of Emily St Aubert's aunt, and the heroine's legal guardian. Re-enacting the role of the legendary Bluebeard, Montoni torments his wife, imprisoning her when she is ill, refusing her access to either appropriate care or medicines, and eventually taking pleasure in her early demise. Both Brontë and Stoddard were to modernise this classic Radcliffean plot, encoding contemporary concerns about women, subject to unjust internment and denied their identity by their socio-economic position, as well as, in Brontë's case, questioning definitions of insanity. Brontë challenges the social and psychological constructs which limit the female, and explores the images of the divided self that can result. In *Rewriting the Victorians: Theory, History and the Politics of Gender*, Linda M. Shires comments, 'symbolic associations of women with disease were strengthened by the received wisdom that not only were women more prone to insanity than men, they were also more responsible for hereditary transmission'.¹⁰ Although Brontë rejects the notion that the passionate female is diseased in body (and mind), owing to her 'unfeminine' sexual desires, she also confirms the taint of madness and moral decadence as a disease inherited through the female. The savage, sexual Bertha Rochester is, after all, defined as 'the true daughter of an infamous mother' (*JE*, p. 334).

Showalter, in *The Female Malady*, discusses the connections made over time between madness and gender. She argues that women struggling with mental illness are, in part, struggling with the dissatisfactions, anxieties and frustrations they experience in coming to terms with being female in a culture that privileges male experience. Bertha Rochester is depicted as a woman whose lustful nature, apparently inherited from her wanton (and foreign) mother, is the cause of her lunacy. Jean Rhys, of course, in her novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), offered a reworking of these themes in a powerful vindication of Brontë's fictional character.

Stoddard's trapped females also suffer mentally, though perhaps less dramatically than Brontë's, reflecting more prosaically the anxieties, frustrations and limitations of being female. Her heroine's sister, Veronica, is a frail, nervous creature whose fear of her own sexuality limits her ability to engage with life. She reflects the nineteenth-century society Showalter discusses in her critical work, one which 'perceived women as childlike, irrational, and sexually unstable'.¹¹ Veronica's nervous instability is translated, in Bellevue Somers, into agoraphobia. Mrs Somers is a woman for whom reproduction has become a primary purpose, so that she is imprisoned within her own body and also, like Mrs Rochester, entombed within the house of the husband/father.

In *Perils of the Night: A Feminist Study of Nineteenth-Century Gothic*, Eugenia DeLamotte argues that Brontë's Jane Eyre is susceptible to confinement in the same realm as Rochester's wife, Bertha, inhabits. 'A point has been made in Jane's tour of the house that there is more than one little door in the upper storey, as if Thornfield were a sort of Bluebeard's Castle and Bertha's echoing laugh sounded from these rooms, too'.¹² When the existence of his first wife is disclosed, and the marriage to Jane aborted, Rochester attempts to persuade her to live with him, 'happy, and guarded' (*JE*, p. 331), his wife in all but name. This does, indeed, mirror Bertha Rochester's imprisoned existence, his wife in name only. Further, Brontë's second hero/villain, St John Rivers, offers Jane a marriage which (like Bluebeard's) brings death in its wake, as she recognises: 'If I were to marry you, you would kill me. You are killing me now' (*JE*, p. 438). Yet, just as Brontë's hero/villains reinforce Radcliffe's covert questioning of gender roles, Brontë, also like Radcliffe, confirms her belief in the conventions of marriage.

By the conclusion of the novel, Brontë's heroine is celebrating ten years of happy marriage to the hero/villain, Rochester. Brontë makes it clear to her readers that the reason behind Rochester's early and disastrous marriage is the law of primogeniture. As the second son, he inherits no wealth from his father, and is virtually forced by his family into a marriage which will bring him financial gain. Thus, Brontë seeks partly to exonerate Rochester, by showing him as not only repentant but also, like the woman, a victim of social and cultural codes of behaviour. Penny Boumelha, in *Thomas Hardy and Women*, points out that the commodification of the woman was a central concern in nineteenth-century fiction. She reflects that, in Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), Michael Henchard, 'in selling his wife and daughter to the sailor Newson, repeats in a startlingly blatant form the definitive act of exchange'.¹³ Although Rochester's early

marriage contract also places Bertha Mason in the position of bartered goods, Brontë does not explore this idea. Instead, she works towards exonerating Rochester, and draws her heroine and hero/villain into a more or less conventional Victorian marriage, in which Jane is both helpmate to her husband, and mother to his children, and Bertha is seen as the sinful other. Stoddard is less willing to compromise her vision, for although her iconoclastic heroine, Cassandra Morgeson, does conform sufficiently to marry, she becomes neither helpmate nor mother, nor is the sexual woman condemned. Radcliffe's novels, therefore, find a greater resonance with Brontë's in concluding with a conventional marriage between heroine and hero, and in this Radcliffe's novels are ultimately less subversive than they seem.

However, Radcliffe can also be unconventional. She complicates the appeal to her readers' fear and guilt about gender relations by making two of her villains both fascinating and attractive; they are mysterious, charismatic, powerful and melancholy. Brontë and Stoddard adopt, but also significantly adapt, the Radcliffe template. Edward Rochester and Charles Morgeson owe much to the Radcliffe villain: they are father-figures; they are harsh, controlling, intimidating men, with distinct glamour; they are also both married, and, as in a Gothic novel, represent a sexual threat to the heroine, which forces her to flee in the case of Brontë's heroine, and to drive her almost to destruction in the case of Stoddard's. In Brontë's novel Rochester is, in a sense, Jane's father-substitute: he asks, 'do you agree with me that I have a right to be a little masterful, abrupt, perhaps exacting, sometimes, on the grounds I stated, namely, that I am old enough to be your father [?]' (*JE*, p. 165), and his housekeeper, astonished by his plan to marry Jane, exclaims, 'He might almost be your father' (*JE*, p. 293). Rochester is clearly a sexual threat to Jane. It is true the threat of bedroom invasion, typical of the Gothic mode, is realised only in the proxy form of his wife, but Rochester remains a sexual threat because of the erotic charm Brontë gives him, charm much greater than that given to conventional Gothic villains. He tries to conquer Jane not by force, but by play, by the love games he indulges in with her, 'look wicked, Jane . . . coin one of your wild, shy, provoking smiles: tell me that you hate me – tease me, vex me' (*JE*, p. 310). These love games are, in effect, power games, and Jane uses her power, as Stoddard notes, to both arouse and control his passion; 'Yet after all my task was not an easy one', Jane admits, 'often I would rather have pleased him than teased him' (*JE*, p. 302). Brontë also focuses on themes of class division and slavery in her image of Rochester as Jane's master. For Brontë, her heroine's resentment of the

insidious intrusion of economic/male power is indicated in images of 'exotic' slavery, and significant orientalist tropes. Jane remarks: 'I thought his smile was such as a sultan might, in a blissful and fond moment, bestow on a slave his gold and gems had enriched: I crushed his hand, which was ever hunting mine, vigorously, and thrust it back to him red with the passionate pressure' (*JE*, p. 297). However, the language Brontë uses ('crushed', 'hunting', 'thrust', 'passionate') has a powerful physicality which underlines the greater importance of the sexual component in these power games.

Charles Morgeson, like Rochester, is a father-substitute, who, as a distant cousin, has offered Cassandra a home with his family in Rosville for a year, while she attends the local academy. Charles is, also like Rochester, a sexual threat to the heroine, a young girl already excited by the sensual atmosphere of Rosville, the scent of flowers, the glow of jewels, candlelight and fire. Rochester's sexual potency is suggested somewhat faintly by his first appearance, when he rides his horse out of the mists towards Jane. But Charles's sexual potency is underlined forcefully by numerous references to his keeping of wild and spirited horses, notably his most savage horse, Aspen, a fine, black, 'diabolical' creature. And while Rochester's sexual threat is marked by the proxy invasion of Jane's bedroom, Charles's sexual threat is marked by a personal invasion of Cassandra's bedroom. Rochester's actual threat to Jane comes in the form of a bigamous marriage, but also comes to nothing when she adopts the role of the fleeing Gothic maiden; Charles's actual physical threat to Cassandra, however, comes in the form of a possible adulterous liaison and reaches its climax in a nightmare carriage ride, in which the horse, mad and savage, drags the vehicle off the road. Charles is killed, but only after he thrusts Cassandra to safety. In this final act of heroism Charles proves himself to be, like Rochester, rather different from the usual Gothic villain.

The Gothic heroine is generally portrayed as a victim of her own innocence and ignorance, but in their versions there is little doubt that both Brontë and Stoddard again adapt, as well as adopt. Radcliffe, in her novels, had dared to expand the horizons of the heroine, and to suggest that too much innocence was a dangerous thing; indeed, her heroine's achievement of forbidden knowledge was often the key to her survival, unlocking the door of patriarchal imprisonment. Similarly, Bluebeard's secret, which his new wife sets out to discover, is hidden behind a forbidden door. Here lies what Anne Williams, in *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic*, asserts is the secret of a patriarchal culture, the expendability of the

female.¹⁴ If *Bluebeard* is a narrative which demonstrates the need to punish the inquisitive female, in order to maintain male power, *Jane Eyre* and *The Morgesons*, like Radcliffe's novels, are fictional challenges to this order. Both Brontë and Stoddard were able to discover, within the Gothic mode, opportunities to interrogate and subvert social constructs. Their heroines are independent by nature, feisty, sexually responsive, and highly intelligent. Moreover, their determination to interrogate cultural codes, and to claim personal autonomy, work towards images of unrestrained womanhood. These clever and interesting heroines achieve financial independence, and so gain access to a power which is conventionally almost exclusively the possession of men. The heroines are unconventional in other ways, too. Jane is plain, small and quick-witted, while Cassandra's own willing involvement in her impending seduction is a remarkable twist on Gothic conventions. In her depiction of the young and inexperienced heroine, whom she places in the traditional position of the female at the mercy of the powerful male, Stoddard emphasises that female's power. She achieves this by drawing attention to Cassandra's strength of will; as Charles exclaims, 'Cassandra is never tempted. What she does, she does because she will' (*TM*, p. 98). In scenes which reflect the economic/male power of the slave-owning South, and the sexual abuse of the female slave, Stoddard challenges controlling male power with female power. Cassandra glories in her own free will, defying the threatening sexuality of the male by countering with her own sexual desires. Stoddard invokes the traditional frame of seduction, merely to subvert it and to twist her narrative into a different, and startling, form. The heroes, too, run counter to Gothic convention, where they are usually handsome and virtuous young men, who rescue the heroine from the villain. The fair, handsome and virtuous St John Rivers, who shelters and proposes marriage to Jane, after her flight from Thornfield, is really more villain than romantic hero. In fact, he is much more the oppressor, seeking to destroy the female, than the dark, devilish and far from handsome Rochester. St John is cold and sexless, as well as saintly, in his renunciation of the flesh, while Rochester's passionate nature marks him as Brontë's true hero. Hence, Jane's struggle against St John's proposal is given the aesthetic appearance of a regrettable yielding to a seducer. Stoddard's hero, Desmond Somers, conforms to the Gothic pattern even less than Brontë's. Desmond, like Charles Morgeson, is something of a villain, passionate, forbidding, decadent, and self-indulgent (indeed an alcoholic); although, unlike Charles, he has no wish to control Cassandra, is no sexual tyrant, and desires, rather, a woman he can meet on equal

terms. Moreover, Desmond, while marrying Cassandra, does not rescue her any more than St John does Jane. In a way, both authors give their heroines power by allowing them to rescue the hero/villain. Jane rescues Rochester from a life of sin and loneliness. Cassandra rescues Desmond, somewhat unconventionally, by refusing to rescue him; his battle, against the hereditary vice of alcoholism, is one he must fight for himself.

Although the novels are broadly similar, in that their heroines achieve passionate fulfilment and a sense of self-possession, Brontë and Stoddard differ, especially, in the conclusion of their novels. Brontë's work is a more conventional, even pietistic, book. Her maiming of her hero reflects an ambivalence with regard to male power, and a desire to appropriate it for her heroine, who receives an inheritance from her uncle that makes her her own mistress. No comment in the book more emphatically describes the heroine's appropriation of power than: 'Reader, I married him' (*JE*, p. 474). Yet Brontë also conforms to the conventional model of marriage in the narrative. Her heroine gives birth to a boy in the early years of her marriage, a son who continues and replicates the Rochesters: 'When his first-born was put into his arms, he could see that the boy had inherited his own eyes as they once were, large, brilliant, and black' (*JE*, p. 476). The words, 'first-born', suggest that other children followed (Jane is recounting the end of the story, looking back over ten years of married life), and indicates Brontë's adherence to the Victorian ideal of woman as wife and mother, a producer of (male) heirs. As DeLamotte, in *Perils of the Night*, has recognised, 'the final and deep contradiction of *Jane Eyre* remains: while portraying, in a shockingly specific and overt way, the perils of ordinary domesticity and equating them with the worst Gothic nightmare of confinement, Charlotte Brontë nonetheless ultimately defines woman's transcendence as domestic enclosure'.¹⁵

Stoddard, to a greater extent, resists a conventional view of marriage. She also goes a step further than Brontë in marking her heroine's financial independence, for Cassandra becomes the owner of her own house, the old Morgeson family home in Surrey. She has proved, by the end of the story, to be a worthy successor to her great-grandfather, Locke Morgeson, who possessed 'the rudiments of a Founder' (*TM*, p. 9), and bequeathed his property and significant first name to Cassandra's father. The philosopher, John Locke, in his *Second Treatise of Government* (1690), stressed the importance of private property as a central factor in self-determination (although he conceived this ownership of property as a male one), but Stoddard twists the value system into one which empowers the female. Cassandra and Desmond marry, but their marriage is blessed by

neither family nor religion, nor with children. They travel to Europe, staying two years, before returning to Surrey, where they spend the summer at the old family house. Cassandra, connected with the sea throughout the novel, writes the end of the story in her old chamber: 'Before its windows rolls the blue summer sea. Its beauty wears a relentless aspect to me now; its eternal monotone expresses no pity, no compassion' (*TM*, p. 252). Nature is the only God Cassandra recognises, a nature which, at the last, remains indifferent to the joys and pain of her existence. In this respect, Stoddard imitates the natural imagery employed by Radcliffe in her Gothic novels. Radcliffe's heroines in, for example, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian* are placed in landscapes that suggest imminent danger, such as gloomy and barren mountains, precipices and wild and plunging rivers. In *Romanticism and Gender*, Anne Mellor argues that the landscapes of the sublime function in a double way in Radcliffe's novels, so that environments not only reflect danger, but offer a backdrop in which human cruelty and physical violence can flourish. As she points out, Radcliffe demonstrates that 'sublime horror originates not from nature but rather from man', adding that 'In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, *banditti* not only rove among the savage Alps but actually inhabit the homes of the female characters'.¹⁶ In addition, Mellor proposes that, for Radcliffe, the experience of the sublime in nature also 'elevates the perceiving self to a sense of his or her own integrity and worth as a unique product of divine creation'.¹⁷ This is reflected in Stoddard's novel, where her heroine is marked, and empowered, by the divine power of Nature as a superior being, and the wild and passionate sea reflects her inner nature. Cassandra's self-belief mirrors what Mellor sees as 'the positive Radcliffian sublime [which] both inspires and sustains love by giving each individual a conviction of personal value and significance. It thus enables the women who experience it to effect a mental escape from the oppressions of a tyrannical social order'.¹⁸ The reflection of the heroine in the natural is a less dominant theme in Brontë's novel, for whom nature is but one instrument of God's power. But, in their heroines' emancipation from psycho-social and economic oppression, there are many similarities and both writers use notions of the double or mirror image to frame aspects of the rebellion of their heroines.

Brontë's most obvious use of the Gothic double or mirror image involves the two Mrs Rochesters, used to project the female as libidinous and insane or sexually corrupt. As Jane tells her story, she reveals her inner self, her fears, her longings, and her horror of the 'woman as monster', which culminates in her dreaming/waking vision of a vampire-like creature, who

places Jane's wedding veil on her own head, to gaze into the mirror. The compulsion to visualise the self, and to give visual form to the fear of self, is one which Ellen Moers suggests, in *Literary Women*, is an essentially female experience, extending the parameters of female Gothic to include self-hatred and self-disgust, directed toward the female body, sexuality and reproduction. Certainly, both Brontë and Stoddard, in their texts, employ mirror images when their heroine is in a state of great anxiety, fear or excitement, and while Cassandra's horror is the nightmare of female procreation, Jane Eyre is alarmed by female sexuality. As Jane begins to feel a passionate response to Rochester, expressed in thoughts of love and adoration, she experiences alarming events, occurring at night, between sleeping and waking. 'I hardly know whether I slept or not' (*JE*, p. 178), Jane recalls when, upon hearing vague noises followed by a demonic laugh, she ventures into the corridor at Thornfield, and sees smoke coming from Mr Rochester's room. The flames are extinguished, danger averted, but Jane continues to be haunted by dreams which become even more intense as her relationship with Rochester deepens, and she agrees to marry him.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar discuss the manner in which Brontë manipulates mirror imagery to describe the heroine's schizophrenic experience in *The Madwoman in the Attic*. Jane's sense of a splintering self, 'Jane Eyre splitting off from Jane Rochester, the child Jane splitting off from the adult Jane, and the image of Jane weirdly separating from the body of Jane',¹⁹ is confirmed in the mirror image of the spectral other. Gilbert and Gubar figure Bertha as 'Jane's truest and darkest double: she is the angry aspect of the orphan child, the ferocious secret self Jane has been trying to repress ever since her days at Gateshead'.²⁰ It is this dark double who stands between Jane and Rochester, the savage female, trapped and maddened by her imprisonment within the confines of a patriarchal house/culture. In *Jane Eyre*, the reflection of the monstrous woman wearing her veil reveals Jane's unconscious fears of her own sexual longings. Rochester's lunatic wife is reduced, we are told, to savagery by her own insane and wanton nature, though recent, especially postcolonial, readings of the novel give a very different account of Bertha Rochester's condition and its cause. This, society would seem to declare, as Rochester does, is what becomes of the woman who is over-sexed. Rochester tells Jane that his wife 'dragged me through all the hideous and degrading agonies which must attend a man bound to a wife at once intemperate and unchaste' (*JE*, p. 334). Jane is thus confronted by the image which has haunted her, the horror of the libidinous female as mad-woman, uncontrolled and uncontrollable, who must be imprisoned and

denied. Jane refuses to become Rochester's mistress, a replacement for Celine Varens, nor will she risk becoming another Bertha Rochester, insane and imprisoned. She declares she will 'hold to the principles received by me when I was sane, and not mad – as I am now' (*JE*, p. 344). Therefore, in this scene in which Jane is sexually tempted to become Rochester's mistress, Brontë's depiction of her as 'mad' deliberately connects sexual abandonment with an abandoning of reason. But, although the horrifying image of Bertha Rochester is presented as one which might also overtake Jane, that is not to say that Brontë is declaring marriage to be terrifying in itself. Margaret Homans, in *Bearing the Word* does suggest that Jane's fear before the wedding that Mrs Rochester will not 'come into the world alive'²¹ shows that she is fearful of marriage. Gilbert and Gubar also contend that, figuratively and psychologically, Bertha represents that part of Jane's self that secretly wants to tear the veil asunder, and that 'her fears of her own alien . . . bridal image, [are] objectified by the image of Bertha.'²² What Brontë makes clear, however, is that Jane feels it is all too good to be true. When Rochester uses the name Jane Rochester she feels, 'almost fear', but explains that this is because 'human beings never enjoy complete happiness in this world . . . to imagine such a lot befalling me is a fairy-tale – a daydream' (*JE*, p. 287). The day before the wedding she tells him, 'I am not . . . troubled by any haunting fears . . . I think it a glorious thing to have the hope of living with you, because I love you' (*JE*, p. 308), which would seem assurance enough. Her fear is not of marriage, but of her horrific double, Bertha Rochester, whose ungovernable passions mirror her own repressed nature. Brontë dramatises her heroine's sexual conflict by using images of other possible selves, Celine Varens and Bertha Rochester, in order to demonstrate, finally, her difference from, and superiority to, them. Jane's passionate desires are, ultimately, rather less important than her conscience. As Showalter points out, 'what is most notable about Brontë's first representation of female insanity, . . . is that Jane, unlike the contemporary feminist critics who have interpreted the novel, never sees her kinship with the confined and monstrous double, and that Brontë has no sympathy for her mad creature. Before Jane Eyre can reach her happy ending, the madwoman must be purged from the plot, and the passion must be purged from Jane herself.'²³ In this final denial of the sensual passions of her heroine, Brontë is very different to Stoddard, who celebrates the sexual, and even the adulterous, impulse.

Yet Stoddard also makes use of mirror images to examine the divided self of her passionate heroine, literally as well as metaphorically. She depicts Cassandra as an explorer of her own sexual identity, seeing powerful,

dramatic images reflected in the mirrors into which she gazes, and questioning the mirror of her own conscience as she grows towards a knowledge of herself. At a party Cassandra is left alone with Charles, the scene between them is typical of so much of Stoddard, the dialogue both jagged and intense:

‘Cassandra,’ he said at last, growing ashy pale, ‘is there any other world than this we are in now?’

I raised my eyes, and saw my own pale face in the glass over the mantel above his head.

‘What do you see?’ he asked, starting up.

I pointed to the glass.

‘I begin to think,’ I said, ‘there is another world, one peopled with creatures like those we see there. What are they – base, false, cowardly?’

‘Cowardly,’ he muttered, ‘will you make me crush you? Can we lie to each other? Look!’

He turned me from the glass. (*TM*, p. 92)

The mirror images stresses the visual, placing the reader in the position of voyeur. The eroticism in the scene is focused on the heroine’s awakening passion and the male’s desire violently to possess and overpower her. But if the world Cassandra has seen reflected in the glass is a world of cowards who deny their passions, are we to assume that Cassandra, having seen and recognised her impassioned self, intends to indulge her illicit desire? At the close of this scene the reader is given no account of her thoughts or decisions, no clear indication of her intentions.

But Stoddard does offer a view of the inner self struggling to achieve self-knowledge, as Cassandra turns to her conscience. The mirror image of Cassandra as self and Cassandra as conscience is remarkable in insisting that the heroine’s experience of adulterous sexuality is a positive one. Unlike Jane, her passionate desires are of supreme importance and are not subordinated to restrictive religious codes. She relies neither on church nor society to guide her, unconventionally seeking knowledge and understanding from her own conscience:

‘Do you feel remorse and repentance?’

‘Neither!’

‘Why suffer then?’

‘I do not know why.’

‘You confess ignorance. Can you confess that you are selfish, self-seeking – devilish?’

‘Are you my devil?’

No answer.

'Am I cowardly, or a liar?'

It laughed, a faint, sarcastic laugh.

'At all events,' I continued, 'are not my actions better than my thoughts?'

'Which makes the sinner, and which the saint?'

'Can I decide?'

'Why not?' (*TM*, p. 131–2)

The conclusion Cassandra reaches emphasises a sensual nature superior to social and religious laws. In this Stoddard is not only significantly different to Brontë, she is remarkable, as a nineteenth-century writer, in her positive representation of illicit female sexuality, and in describing awakening sexual desire, 'He raised his strange, intense eyes to mine; a blinding, intelligent light flowed from them which I could not defy, nor resist, a light which filled my veins with a torrent of fire' (*TM*, p. 86).

In examining her heroine as sexual being Stoddard, like Brontë, uses the Gothic double, most obviously in the instance of the three Mrs Somers: Bellevue, Veronica and Cassandra herself. Cassandra and her sister, Veronica, are a mirror image of each other, but a reverse mirror image. Cassandra embraces life, accepting her own passionate nature, while Veronica internalises her wildness and strangeness, so that she is finally trapped in a deathly pose of ethereal beauty. As her name suggests, Veronica is an 'image' of idealised woman, frail, child-like, innocent, delicate and dreamy. She is used to refute the cultural and social values of Stoddard's period, in which many writers of fiction depicted such women as the ideal. Cassandra and Veronica are doubled again when they marry the brothers Desmond and Ben Somers. In this way, another mirror image for Cassandra is provided in her mother-in-law, Mrs Somers. The dark secret of this other self is not untrammelled female sexuality, as in Brontë's Bertha Rochester, but her fertility. Bellevue Somers, for Cassandra, is woman as monster, as Bertha Rochester is for Jane. They are, however, different kinds of monster, and this reflects differences between Brontë's and Stoddard's attitudes to female eroticism that in themselves reflect differences between their attitudes to religion and the supernatural.

Supernatural activity in Gothic fiction – notably that involving prophetic dreams, ghostly apparitions, and miraculous events and characters – was used partly to generate mystery, suspense and dread, and partly to thrill, and yet reassure the reader, by challenging, whilst paying lip service to, orthodox Christian piety. Brontë's novel conforms to a pattern in which any deployment of the supernatural in the text is found to support notions of Christianity and God's providence. It assumes, for example,

that adultery is wrong, a damnable sin. It also assumes that there are supernatural, providential agencies at work to help Jane resist committing adultery and to reward her for resisting. Jane has no doubt Providence helped her to resist becoming Rochester's mistress: 'God directed me to a correct choice: I thank His Providence for the guidance!' (*JE*, p. 386). Her prayers during her wanderings, 'Oh, Providence! Sustain me a little longer! Aid! – direct me!' (*JE*, p. 356), lead her, extraordinarily, to the home of her cousins, the Rivers. And it is Providence that explains the quasi-miraculous telepathic communication between Jane and Rochester, after the death of his first wife, that leads her to seek him out once more, a communication Jane clearly reads as reflecting God's forgiveness of their adulterous impulses and His blessing on their union. Although Jane's pilgrimage may be read as a metaphorical expression of actual social ills, Brontë's use of the supernatural essentially confirms an adherence to orthodox Christian moral values. It is no accident that the book ends, not with the happiness of Jane and Rochester in a passionate married relationship, but with the religious austerity of the sexually unimpassioned, unmarried St John, an austerity Jane celebrates as guaranteed to win its heavenly reward.

Stoddard, unlike Brontë, refuses to confirm the conventional, and therefore religious, view of adultery, but acknowledges only the power of nature over humanity. Her principal point of reference throughout the novel is not reliance on God or providence, but self-reliance. In a twist on this aspect of self-determination, in which Cassandra relies on her inner sense of right, rather than the external laws of society, Stoddard shows her heroine bearing an outer mark to signify inner change. In this Stoddard demonstrates enormous difference from Brontë, who marks her villain/hero with 'the scar of life on [his] forehead' (*JE*, p. 461), as a sign of his sins and his purification by fire. Cassandra is left with threadlike scars on her cheek, following the accident in which Charles was killed, but they are a positive mark of sexual experience, as Desmond and Cassandra indicate when discussing how she got them:

'It was in battle?'

'Yes.'

'And women like you, pure, with no vice of blood, sometimes are tempted, struggle, and suffer.'

'Even drawn battles bring their scars.' (*TM*, pp. 183–4)

Cassandra's only regret about her unconsummated affair is that she did not go far enough: 'I was strangely bound to him', she tells Charles's widow, 'And I must tell you that I hunger now for the kiss he never gave

me' (*TM*, p. 123). Stoddard herself seems to have felt that Cassandra should have gone further than a kiss, and would have done so but for a failure of nerve on her own part on behalf of her heroine. In October 1889, when *The Morgesons* was being reprinted, Stoddard wrote to the publisher John Bowen of Charles's and Cassandra's love affair: 'With the capacity between them of a magnetic and profound passion, the pressure of generations of Puritan teachings and examples, prevented it from being in result nothing [*sic*] more than nebulous particles striving in the universe to come together and make a new world'.²⁴ Stoddard did see religion, like Brontë, as the controlling factor which denies the superiority of human passions, but she did not see this as necessarily right. Indeed she uses Desmond's past to demonstrate that a 'fallen woman', a transgressive woman who makes the opposite choice to that of Jane Eyre, need not be reduced, let alone damned, by her experience. Desmond has a talisman of a past love, another mark. At an evening party in Belem, Cassandra notices, 'a ring on his watch-ribbon smaller than I could wear; a woman's ruby ring'. Desmond admits, 'I loved her shamefully, and she loved me shamefully . . . you may not conjure up any tragic ideas on the subject. She is no outcast. She is here to-night; if there was ruin, it was mutual'. (*TM*, p. 199) Cassandra, scanning the women at the party, sees not one sad or guilty face.

Stoddard makes little use of supernatural events in her text, apart from Veronica's prophetic dream, on the eve of her own wedding to Ben Somers, of Cassandra's eventual marriage to Desmond Somers. Stoddard employs the Gothic motif of dream/nightmare, with its shifting boundaries, to describe the sexual longing and anguish of the heroine, parted from her lover. Veronica, as Cassandra's sister/double, experiences the vision, but she brings back into the real world proof of her dream, a red mark on her arm, made by the point of Desmond's knife. The natural rather than the supernatural dominates Stoddard's text. A natural perspective is emphasised in Veronica's keeping of pagan rituals, in which she inaugurates the seasons, and it is also nature that arbitrarily decides who is to survive and become one of nature's elite. The heroine, whose name deliberately rejects the biblical, is her own prophetess, acknowledging her own nature as the wellspring of her existence; nature glories in the power of female agency and, because unconventional, is in tune with the universe. It is true *The Morgesons* does conclude with what seems like religious sentiment, a cry to God, which echoes the Puritanism the novel goes some way to reject: but this is one of Stoddard's characteristic ironies. After Ben's death, in *delirium tremens*, Desmond and Cassandra

question each other mutely (their understanding of the other is so great, words are unnecessary), and, therefore, although it is Desmond who speaks, he says what they both feel. 'God is the Ruler . . . Otherwise let this mad world crush us now' (*TM*, p. 235). A bitter cry against fate is expressed as an ironic belief in God and a challenge to an insane world, where survival is randomly dependent upon nature. Stoddard refuses to uphold religious orthodoxy; to the end *The Morgesons* remains a secular book.

The most singular similarities and differences, then, between Brontë and Stoddard, lie in their image of the passionate female self. Brontë fears the passionate self quite as much as she is thrilled by it, Stoddard, on the other hand, simply wishes to celebrate it. Summed up in the records both writers left of their impressions of the sensual and passionate French actress Rachel, is their bond of sympathy and difference. Brontë records, after seeing her in Brussels, 'Rachel's acting thrilled me with horror. That tremendous force with which she expresses the very worst passions in their strongest essence forms an exhibition as exciting as the bullfights of Spain and the gladiatorial combats of Rome, and (it seems to me) not one whit more moral'.²⁵ Immortalising her as Vashti in her last novel, *Villette*, Brontë describes the Rachel character as a devil, whose passionate power has an evil source, a tigress, madness incarnate, yet also a fallen angel whose 'hair, flying loose in revel or war, is still an angel's hair, and glorious under a halo'.²⁶ In sharp contrast is the article Stoddard wrote for the *Daily Alta California*, dated 5 September 1855, which says,

[Rachel] is so slender that every emotion seemed to sway her to and fro . . . This white clothed figure, frail and lithe, with intense, fiery eyes, and slender trembling hands, fills the scene, the mind, and the imagination. Her fury, her sneers, her pathos and grief, made me excited, wretched and tearful. She is in fact the most wonderful creature I ever saw . . . Were I the lover of this Jewish woman, I would kill myself, because I could not be her master, and she would taunt me if I were not . . . Her voice, too, is beautiful; deep, soft, and sonorous, like the tolling of a far off, deeply mouthed bell. It was not necessary that her part should be rendered into English; her grief and rage she wrote with eyes, and lip, and gesture.²⁷

Both Charlotte Brontë and Elizabeth Stoddard, in *Jane Eyre* and *The Morgesons*, wrote original, powerful texts which trace the journey of the passionate female self. However, their use of the Gothic mode, garnered from both sides of the Atlantic, allowed them to express views that were ultimately quite distinct. Brontë's fear of the erotic desires of the woman

is greater than her longing, and Gothic convention allowed her, and her readers, to enjoy the excitement and thrill of female passion safely. Stoddard, clearly exhilarated by Rachel's performance, as Brontë was thrilled and horrified, was able, in her use of the Gothic, to explore the erotic nature of the woman and to identify with, not deny, the sensual self. Of Rachel's performance, Stoddard notes, 'This no doubt was art; but her person is so in harmony with what she expresses, that you cannot divide art from nature.'²⁸ This simple truth made Rachel a threatening, alarming and heretical image of the woman for Brontë, at the same time as she exemplified, for Stoddard, sensual woman as icon. For, in Rachel's performance, if art was holding up the mirror to nature, it was a nature which, undeniably, celebrated the eroticised woman.

The central contradiction of Brontë's novel, is her determination, at the last, to figure her heroine's transcendence from within the domestic in her role as wife and mother. Although she helps to liberate her heroine through the actions of Bertha Rochester, especially in her violent tearing of her wedding veil, it is clear that the heroine desires to escape into, not out of, marriage. Therefore, her escape from Thornfield, one which Alison Milbank, in *Daughters of the House: Modes of the Gothic in Victorian Fiction*, describes as 'a real Gothic escape, for the courtship of Jane Eyre by Rochester had taken the form of cruel power-games',²⁹ can only be temporary. These games, a combination of both love and power, and, as Stoddard had noted, principally erotic in their charge, do show that Jane is a match for Rochester, but they also show the harsh nature of the male. As she escapes back to Thornfield, and then to Ferndean, Brontë's heroine is implicated in an acceptance of female servitude, for, although the male has been punished by fire, he remains her master. Jane Eyre may be her own mistress, but she desires a conventional union. Stoddard, writing fifteen years later, out of a New England world in some ways less socially restrictive than that of Brontë's native Yorkshire, was to celebrate the sensual nature of her heroine with a marked independence. Cassandra, although married, is neither 'wifely' nor 'motherly', the two conventional roles for married women which Brontë's heroine joyfully accepts. Instead, Stoddard has moved closer 'towards the *edge of things*',³⁰ and has crafted her literary inheritance into a celebration of the woman who is independent, unconventional and self-possessed: a transgressive heroine who finally emerges as possessor of the contested castle of Gothic literature.

Notes

- 1 Manuscript, Library Archives, Harvard University.
- 2 James H. Matlack, 'The Literary Career of Elizabeth Barstow Stoddard,' PhD dissertation, Yale University, 1967, p. 185.
- 3 Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830–1980*, London, Virago Press, 1987, p. 66.
- 4 The *Daily Alta California*, October 1854, Library Archives, Harvard University.
- 5 Elizabeth Stoddard, *The Morgesons and Other Writings, Published and Unpublished*, eds Lawrence Buell and Sandra Zagarell, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984, pp. xviii–xix. Hereafter, *TM*.
- 6 Kate Ferguson Ellis, *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1989, p. xii.
- 7 See Lyn Pykett, *The Sensation Novel: from The Woman in White to The Moonstone*, Plymouth, Northcote House/British Council, 1994.
- 8 Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, London, Penguin Books, 1985, p. 130. Hereafter, *JE*.
- 9 Claire Kahane, 'The Gothic Mirror,' in Shirley Nelson Cooper *et al.* (eds) *The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation*, New York, Cornell University Press, 1985, pp. 334–51.
- 10 Linda M. Shires, *Rewriting the Victorians: Theory, History and the Politics of Gender*, London, Routledge, 1992, p. 36.
- 11 Showalter, *The Female Malady*, p. 73.
- 12 Eugenia C. DeLamotte, *Perils of the Night: A Feminist Study of Nineteenth-Century Gothic*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 206.
- 13 Penny Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy and Women*, New Jersey, Barnes and Noble, 1982, p. 3.
- 14 Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1995, p. 43.
- 15 DeLamotte, *Perils of the Night*, pp. 226–7.
- 16 Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, London and New York, Routledge, 1993, p. 93.
- 17 Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, p. 95.
- 18 Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, p. 95.
- 19 Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1979, p. 359.
- 20 Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 360.
- 21 Margaret Homans, *Bearing the Word: Language and Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1986, p. 303.
- 22 Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 360.

- 23 Showalter, *The Female Malady*, p. 68.
- 24 Manuscript, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester MA.
- 25 Henry Knepler, *The Gilded Stage*, London, Constable, 1968, p. 49.
- 26 Charlotte Brontë, *Villette*, London, Dent and Sons, 1966, p. 235.
- 27 *DAC*, September 1855, Library Archives, Harvard University.
- 28 *Ibid.*
- 29 Alison Milbank, *Daughters of the House: Modes of the Gothic in Victorian Fiction*, London, Macmillan, 1992, p. 144.
- 30 Matlack, 'The Literary Career of Elizabeth Barstow Stoddard', p. 185.

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