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# Women and bodily separation in literature from the Victorian era until today

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Women and Bodily Separation in Literature

From the Victorian Era Until Today

by

DeLisa Leonard

Thesis

Submitted to the English Department

Eastern Michigan University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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in

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Thesis Committee:

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## **Abstract**

The dualities that are often associated with female characters have taken many forms throughout the centuries. In the Victorian era, female characters were often presented as dual natured; oftentimes this division was represented through the use of a madwoman and a heroine. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, this motif was picked up by female poets, who used duality in order to express the disconnect women often feel from their family, their friends, and, especially, their bodies. In today's literature, these feelings of duality and separation are expressed through a literal separation, not between good and evil, but of body and soul. In all forms throughout history, this motif has been used as a representation of the freedom of spirit that all women possess, but that is often stifled by society.

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## **Introduction**

Throughout history, women have found themselves virtually imprisoned by society's ever-present and constantly shifting rules and limitations. Female authors have often utilized writing as a means of escape, creating characters who resist the restrictions imposed upon them by a patriarchal society. One of the ways in which these female authors have sought to illustrate the difficulty in reconciling their public and private self is through the creation of characters who are able to exist both within and without a single body. This split between the public and private self has taken many forms, but oftentimes it is representations of the female body that have been crucial in representing the dualities and splits that have been necessitated as a result of patriarchal cultures. Whether it is through a ghostly familiar or an insane double, women writers have created characters who are not limited in the use of their own bodies. During the Victorian period, these dualities were often associated with madness and the division of good and evil, while early 20<sup>th</sup> century poetry utilized it to represent the need for escape from the oppressions of daily life. More recent literature, however, has drawn on this tradition in more celebratory ways, embracing duality and crafting characters whose souls often leave their bodies behind to exist in another plane. It is important to note, however, that this ability is tied in with the freedom from the male gaze that one experiences in adolescence but is lost as one reaches puberty.

In this thesis, I plan to research this motif of bodily separation in literature by addressing the following:

- I. The beginning of this motif-- its roots in Gothic Literature and the ways in which women authors were using this motif in order to argue against the stringent rules imposed upon them by a patriarchal society.

- II. Literature written at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century that shows how female duality shifts so that the female character is not represented as two separate dual entities (a heroine and a ghost or a madwoman, good and evil) but begins to be represented within one single character separated into body and soul.
- III. Modern women's novels will be discussed, with a close look at the ways in which they have fully embraced this idea, representing the female soul as autonomous, existing both within and without the body, as well as the ways in which this is seen in a new, positive light. Also addressed will be the reasons why a female character in fiction may be represented as losing the ability to exist outside of their body.

The male voice has dominated the written word for centuries. In their writings, male authors constructed female characters who, some argue, were mere reflections of the male author's own ego. Critics such as Simone de Beauvoir and Mary Wollstonecraft have pointed out that male writers used their pens to create a world of duality, where the female is the lesser being, opposite of the man. The woman has been understood to be the "other" in male dominated texts; she is the object of the male gaze and, as such, is a creature to be puzzled over and wary of. In such a world, men occupy a transcendental space whereas women occupy only the physical realm. Simone de Beauvoir writes, "He is the transcendent, he soars in the sky of heroes; woman crouches on earth beneath his feet" (de Beauvoir 676). Here she describes the conventional dichotomy where the men occupy the spiritual while women exist only as a physical body. As soon as women writers took pen in hand, however, they began to use these ideas regarding their otherness and physicality in order to express their hidden desires and deepest thoughts in order to reshape historical thought patterns which limited women to their bodies. In this thesis, I will be examining different periods in which women writers have

written against the gendered idea that the mind and soul belong only to the body. In each period under discussed, I will show how women writers have taken on the definition of their selves as bodies only and re-written the standard patriarchal scripts as they have struggled against the male gaze and societal repression through the motif of bodily separation.

### **The Gaze**

According to *The Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism*, the male gaze is a term that often applies to film criticism and deals with the positioning of the camera and how it creates the “vision of the spectator.” In this way, “women are objectified and exhibited, to be looked at by men in the film – and, correspondingly, by members of the audience” (Childers 173). This idea of the male gaze, coined by Laura Mulvey and which will be discussed later in more depth, demonstrates the restrictions that this type of objectification can place upon women. As Mulvey points out, if a person is relegated to only an object of a gaze, their bodies a thing to be viewed, then they are given little autonomy of thought.

In *The Psychological Development of Girls and Women: Rethinking Change in Time*, Sheila Greene points out that today the media plays as much, if not more, of a role in objectifying women as the “male gaze” did in the past. “Traditionally the institution which oppresses women is taken to be patriarchy. But women are also oppressed in terms of their class, race, sexuality, age and looks. Consumerism colludes with remnants of traditional patriarchy to produce and then feed off the need women experience to be ‘attractive’” (Greene 95). From this we can see that the whole idea of the male gaze needs to be redefined for today’s culture of omnipresent visual media. In the final part of my thesis, I will show that, in fact, it makes sense now to think in terms of a “media

gaze” in which male bodies are also objectified, a fact that makes this topic even more compelling in this society.

### **The Body**

In order to illustrate the ways in which female authors resisted the male gaze, this thesis will deal with the topic of bodily separation and the way in which it relates to feminist criticism as it exists today. I will look at the work of several critics who analyze women and the body, including Kathy Davis and Susan Bordo. In addition, I will take into account studies done on the psychological development of woman, including Sheila Green’s *The Psychological Development of Girls and Women*. These authors all work with the theme of women and the body, but none of them have yet commented on this motif of women and bodily separation in the way that I will deal with it in this thesis. It is for this reason that this thesis is significant in today’s literary community— although the theme is present in many novels, it has not yet become a subject of study.

### **Methods**

In this thesis, I plan to conduct a close reading of a select group of women’s literary texts, from the Victorian period to the present, examining the authors’ language and use of characters to illustrate the ideas of bodily separation. I will also use historical research in order to establish what critics and authors were saying about literature at the times in which the texts were written. Additionally, recent sociological and physiological research on the development of women will be analyzed with regard to how it relates to female authors’ use of bodily separation as a means of escape. In the following chapters,

I will illustrate more clearly the ways in which women authors employ this motif as mode of resistance to unattainable ideals of femininity.

## Chapter 1: Critical Response to Representations of Women in Novels From the Victorian Era Until Today

*No rack can torture me,*

*My soul's at liberty.*

*...Two bodies therefore be;*

*Bind one, and one will flee.*

*-Emily Dickinson*

In order to begin this study, one must first establish what was written and discussed by female authors in the Victorian era. Therefore, it is necessary to look at literary pieces that deal with the ideas regarding women and the body. In this chapter, critical writings by Mary Wollstonecraft, Simone de Beauvoir, Thomas Fick, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Laura Mulvey, and Ruth Salvaggio will be discussed and outlined in order to provide a basis for the argument of this thesis. Each of these critical writings discusses the ways in which female authors create secret selves and dual-natured characters in order to resist the patriarchal restrictions imposed upon them by society and the male gaze.

Mary Wollstonecraft, mother to the author of *Frankenstein*, wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792, a book describing her opinions on the rights that should be accorded to the female gender. For Mary Wollstonecraft, society's restrictions caused women to hide their true selves and "assume an artificial character" (Wollstonecraft 279). This artificial character, according to Wollstonecraft, forces women to act as mindless slaves, and, as such, they are forced to "fly from themselves to noisy pleasure and artificial passions," which is, of course, damaging to women and, furthermore, to society (Wollstonecraft 284). It is the idea that women must fly from themselves, however, that is the most intriguing. Here, Wollstonecraft has given metaphorical structure to the argument presented in this thesis – that women must escape

themselves and, by extension, their bodies, in order to truly act according to their own will and not the will of others that has been imposed upon them.

If a woman is not free, then her mind will atrophy and she is made to “assume an artificial character before [her] faculties have acquired any strength” (Wollstonecraft 279). This atrophy creates women who are consumed only by pursuit of physical beauty and who strive to become only an image, neglecting their minds and their souls until they are as slaves.

Wollstonecraft writes, “Yet the fanciful female character, so prettily drawn by poets and novelists, [demands] the sacrifice of truth and sincerity, [thus] virtue becomes a relative idea, having no other foundation than utility, and of that utility men pretend arbitrarily to judge, shaping it to their own convenience” (283-84). Here, she argues that men, as the dominant figures who influence society’s beliefs and actions, both create and reinforce this image of womanhood, forcing women into molds into which they do not fit. It is this restrictive mold that women like Mary Wollstonecraft and her daughter, Mary Shelley, were arguing against in their work. It is this mold that caused women authors to begin to write of themselves as two separate beings: the public and the private, the seen and the unseen, the real and the perceived. This argument was soon picked up by other women and has been dealt with in many different fictional formats throughout the following two centuries.

In her article, “Myths: Of Women in Five Authors,” Simone De Beauvoir picks up on some of the arguments outlined by Mary Wollstonecraft and takes them a step further. She too argues against the mold forced upon women by showing the ways in which male authors construct women as the Other. That is, the woman in literature is not presented as an autonomous human being, capable of feelings, thoughts, and actions similar to those of the male characters; rather she is constructed as something that is not human at all but rather a type of

creature, changing to befit her position, as well as the needs of men, at any given moment. She can be an earth goddess, a siren, an angel, or an ogress. Whatever the case, “she appears as the *privileged Other*, through whom the subject fulfills himself: one of the measures of man, his counterbalance, his salvation, his adventure, his happiness” (Beauvoir 676). Here, the male author creates an opposite and often untrustworthy creature out of women. However, female authors seized upon this same motif of otherness and used it to their advantage to create characters who embodied their own hidden desires. This is nowhere more apparent than in the novels written in the Victorian era.

In “Authentic Ghosts and Real Bodies: Negotiating Power in Nineteenth-Century Women's Ghost Stories,” Thomas Fick argues that 19<sup>th</sup> century ghost stories gave female writers the ability to acknowledge their belief that women, as the Other, were of a higher spiritual nature than men. These authors created ghostly figures to depict a female consciousness that was somehow separate from their bodies and allowed them to seek justice or enact revenge on those who caused them harm. Fick convincingly argues that these ghost stories allowed the readers to give vent to their desire to act on the wrongs imposed upon them by a society that rendered them powerless. He concludes by stating that “the ‘authentic ghost story’ is not metaphysical fluff or spine-tingling amusement but offers a scheme for using nineteenth-century assumptions about women's spiritual nature to argue for women's action in the physical world” (95). In this thesis, I will be utilizing this argument as it relates to *Jane Eyre* and *Lady Audley's Secret*. In both of these novels, the villains, although not actual ghosts, have become specters and demons who haunt the actions of the heroine while giving vent to hidden anger and frustration.

Another essay, “Infection in the Sentence: The Woman Writer and the Anxiety of Authorship,” addresses some of these same issues. In this essay, Sandra Gilbert and Susan

Gubar deal with female authors' desire to represent themselves, in their true form, on paper. "In the nineteenth century, woman authors were hiding something in their writing" (1534). As Gilbert and Gubar suggest, these woman authors were reacting to a restrictive society and attempted, secretly, to argue back against the ideals imposed upon them: "such women have created submerged meanings, meanings hidden within or behind the more accessible, 'public' content of their works so that their literature could be read and appreciated even when its vital concern with the female dispossession and disease was ignored" (Gilbert and Gubar 1533). This secret, hidden self that is created by such authors is not that different from the ghosts discussed by Fick; indeed, they are two sides of the same coin. Gilbert and Gubar are, like Fick, noting the reasons why women authors of the Victorian era needed to create characters who could enact the true, hidden feelings of most women.

Gilbert and Gubar go on to argue that Victorian woman authors created works that appeared to be one thing on the outside while, below the surface, a second meaning bubbled and churned, subconsciously voicing the anger and desires of the female author. In order to accomplish this goal, the authors created characters who appeared simple but in reality were operating in more than one capacity. In this way, the madwoman or murderess is not simply a villain but is instead "the author's double, an image of her own anxiety and rage" (Gilbert and Gubar 1536).

The use of hidden meaning in writing was a tool for women authors to use against the patriarchal society in which women were subject to the male gaze. In her vital and groundbreaking essay, titled "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey popularizes this idea of the male gaze as it relates to cinema. According to Mulvey, in film, the man is the active force in the story while the woman is simply a passive object to be looked at. Drawing on

Freud, Mulvey uses a psychoanalytic approach to dissect the construction of film with regard to representation of man and woman. Mulvey argues that in a construct where a passive woman “stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other,” men drive all action and women are “bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning” (Mulvey 1173). A woman who is tied in place, Mulvey argues, is in effect castrated – she cannot effect change or meaning upon the world.

Mulvey urges feminists to utilize her essay as a way to understand and fight against the patriarchal world in which they are ensnared:

There is an obvious interest in this analysis for feminists, a beauty in its exact rendering of the frustration experienced under the phallogentric order. It gets us nearer to the roots of our oppression, it brings an articulation of the problem closer, it faces us with the ultimate challenge: how to fight the unconscious structured like a language...while still caught within the language of the patriarchy. There is no way in which we can produce an alternative out of the blue, but we can begin to make a break by examining patriarchy with the tools in provides... (1173)

Here, she is suggesting that women look at the constructs of film and its representations of women in order to understand the roots of their oppression. She believes that by articulating the problem, women can then begin to use the tools of patriarchy against the system. When looked at alongside Laura Mulvey’s essay, it can be argued that the murderess, the madwomen, and the spirit selves that will be discussed in this thesis are all aesthetic strategies for to represent the need for change in culture’s unconscious restrictions on womanhood.

In her article, “Theory and Space, Space and Woman,” Ruth Salvaggio attempts to do as Laura Mulvey urges, addressing the topic of woman writers and their approach to theory. This article is relevant to the argument presented here because Salvaggio discusses the ways in which women authors have renegotiated the long-held ideas of space and body:

It is not that women have not written theory. It is rather that the spatial configurations fundamental to the production of theory are not at all the kinds of spaces occupied and described by women. As women now conspicuously enter the scene of theory, they are variously transforming its spatial contours. They are...blurring and liquefying the boundaries. (261)

The boundaries that are being liquefied are boundaries of both time and space. For the purposes of this thesis, we can look at the space that is being liquefied as the female body. “When women write about space...they envision themselves outside metaphysical traditions that feed the production of theory” (Salvaggio 261). As this thesis will argue, one of the metaphysical traditions that these female authors see themselves outside of is the body itself. Salvaggio’s essay represents just how far this motif has traveled, relating it to the ways that female authors write theory and as well as literature.

Each of these critical writings summarized above deals with the ways in which women respond to the restrictions imposed upon their physical body. Women, it would seem, at times have felt a lack of ownership regarding their physical form or a resistance to being perceived as a physical form only. As a reaction, they have used the motif of bodily separation to express their true selves in different manners, working with the tools they have been given and making them their own. These authors create characters that suggest that women must exist in a divided state – at times divided into good and evil and at other times, into body and soul. This divided state

has led to modern representations of bodily separation, the motif within which women express the hidden part of themselves and within which they can begin to feel free. As will be illustrated throughout this thesis, this motif has been utilized in order begin the process of learning to both own and express oneself truthfully. Beginning with hidden selves, murderesses and madwoman, and transitioning into the separation of soul and body as a resistance to entrapment, modern feminist writers have now begun to celebrate the separation and duality that were once considered to be a sign of insanity. In each instance that will be examined, women authors use splitting as a form of resistance to the Othering of women and the power of the male gaze, although the contours of the splitting take very different forms at different historical periods.

## Chapter 2: How Victorian Authors Represented Feminine Duality

*“There’ll be girls across the nation that will eat this up./ Babe, I know that it’s your soul, but could you bottle it up?” Sarah Bareilles*

As women authors of the 19<sup>th</sup> century struggled to express themselves, they created characters who were both what they should be and what they were told was wrong. The female novelist’s need to express a darker side of herself led to the creation of madwomen, ghosts, specters, and murderesses. These villainous characters represent the dark side of all women, that part of themselves the authors were taught to hide. In their novels, some Victorian female authors represented female characters as possessing dual, opposing natures. Two characters can be seen as part and counterpart to each other in *Jane Eyre*, and in *Lady Audley’s Secret* the duality may be contained within the same woman. By creating these characters, the authors were able to give expression to the repressed part of their selves, and their readers could also subconsciously pick up on small acts of rebellion, getting a secret thrill out of the unconscionable acts committed in these novels. In order to illustrate this duality of good and bad in the female Victorian character, this chapter will look closely at these two novels and discuss the ways in which they represent the dual nature of women in Victorian society. In *Jane Eyre*, we will see the author using two characters to represent the public appearance and private fears of women while *Lady Audley’s Secret* shows duality at its extreme, embodied within one woman who tried desperately to become the perfect lady. This chapter will look at the ideas of the woman as the Other and subject of the male gaze and the duality in female characters, connecting all these ideas to the characters of Jane Eyre and Lucy Audley.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Simone De Beauvoir wrote about the construction of women as the Other, while Laura Mulvey related this idea to how women, as the Other, are

repressed by the male gaze. Some female Victorian authors, living in a repressive society, react to this yet unarticulated idea of the male gaze in their representations of women. This is why we see such characters as Bertha in *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte; while Jane is representative of what the Victorian woman *should* be, Bertha is a manifestation of that part of a woman kept hidden. Similarly, Lady Audley, in *Lady Audley's Secret* by Mary Braddon, is an example of a woman who is able to manifest herself as the male ideal on the outside while her true nature is the very antithesis of this. In this way, they are each creating characters who exist within the male gaze and yet, underneath the surface, they are rebelling against the patriarchal definition of woman.

In *Jane Eyre*, Jane strives to be the Victorian ideal of the good woman. She struggles, from an early age, against the impulses of anger and frustration, striving for a calm and peaceful nature. She asks, "Why could I never please?" (Bronte 27), comments "I was like nobody there" (Bronte 28), and tells the readers "All said I was wicked and perhaps I might be so" (Bronte 28). During her time at school, Jane longs to be like the angelic Helen and squelches any dissatisfaction she feels with her life -- all in an attempt to be what she ought to be. This is a constant struggle for Jane. Like many women, she constantly fights against her true self in order to be the Other that male society wants her to be.

Lucy Audley, from *Lady Audley's Secret*, is another example of the Victorian ideal. Whereas Jane strives to manifest herself as the Victorian ideal in terms of her *character*, Lucy represents the Victorian ideal of *beauty*. With golden curls and a childlike appearance, she is "blessed with that magic power of fascination by which a woman can charm with a word or intoxicate with a smile. Everyone loved, admired, and praised her" (Braddon 12). Unfortunately, Lucy's lovely exterior conceals a sinister soul, which her husband-to-be seems momentarily

aware of when proposing marriage, “Beyond her agitation and her passionate vehemence, there was an undefined something in her manner which filled the baronet with a vague alarm” (Braddon 16). Sir Michal Audley would have done well to heed this alarm. His wife’s hidden nature is selfish, self-serving, and all the more dangerous because of her contradictory appearance. Nonetheless, this character is extraordinarily compelling, both to the fictional characters that surround her and to the real-life readers who follow her every move with salacious fascination.

Although centuries would pass before Laura Mulvey wrote her essay about cinema, it is as if Braddon and Bronte were writing in agreement with her argument. When discussing women’s appearance and ideals of beauty, Mulvey states that reducing women down to “one part of a fragmented body” is stifling and “destroys the Renaissance space, the illusion of depth demanded by the narrative”; therefore, it creates not a woman, but a rather a caricature: “it gives flatness, the quality of a cut-out or icon rather than verisimilitude to the screen” (Mulvey 1176). In this way, what you see on the screen is not an accurate representation of a woman. Braddon and Bronte seem to acknowledge this same idea, realizing that they cannot create a complete woman in a heroine to adhere to society’s standards, and therefore create a double who will embody all that has been left out. It is as Gilbert and Gubar state in their essay on *Jane Eyre*, “In the nineteenth century, woman authors were hiding something in their writing” (Gilbert and Gubar 1534). What was hidden in characters such as Bertha and Lucy was the darker side of femininity, the side that did not always want to do what was right, the side that struggled against the confines of society. Each madwoman or murderess is not simply a villain but instead a double, representing women’s own repressed frustration, and “an image of her own anxiety and rage” (Gilbert and Gubar 1536).

This doubleness of personality, represented through the two characters of Bertha and Jane in *Jane Eyre*, and housed inside the insane Lucy Audley in Braddon's novel, are perfect examples for illustrating the anger and frustration felt by the repressed Victorian women. These female characters were not the male ideal that was forced upon the Victorian audience, but rather complicated and contradictory women, with thoughts, impulses, and ideas of their own. These women do not act in the way that they are *encouraged* to act -- soft spoken and agreeable -- rather they act as they *must*, and express their hidden desires. As these desires are at odds with society, however, the creators of these stories used doubleness and duality in order to represent these "odd" sides of women.

In her article, "Double Gender, Double Genre in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*," Robyn Warhol addressed the idea of doubleness, an idea that embraces "binary oppositions without resting comfortably in either of the two terms being opposed" (857). In order to look more closely at this idea, Warhol focuses on Charlotte Bronte's books *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, and also looks at the analytic method of feminist narratology in order to explain the "impact gender can have upon narrative structures" (Warhol 858). She posits that the Victorian woman novelist "exploits the possibility for doubleness that narratology's categories can bring into the foreground" (Warhol 858). Warhol believes that Bronte has created this doubleness in her characters in order to subvert society's ideals about women at that time. This subversion, according to Warhol, is accomplished by the Bronte's refusal to create a character that fits into one specific category, a refusal to create a woman who is "either a narrator or a character...linked to a subversive impulse against a Victorian insistence on being either masculine or feminine, either male-identified or female-identified in life and in writing" (Warhol 871).

Warhol's essay addresses the idea that women authors were consciously attempting to fight off the categories imposed upon them by an oppressive society. The idea of doubleness takes this argument even further by addressing not only the different categories one woman inhabits in a novel but also the ways in which two separate characters could be used to demonstrate the two sides of the Victorian woman's personality – both the outward mask she presents to the world and the parts of herself she must keep hidden.

Jane's doubleness begins early in the novel. Much critical attention has been given to the scene in the red-room and its effects on Jane, for it is to this experience that Jane returns in times of fear. It was here that she first felt terror and anxiety, here that she learned she must not rely on others but on herself. Most importantly, this scene can be marked as the beginning of Jane's duality. When she is first forced into the room, Jane tells us, "I was a trifle beside myself; or rather *out* of myself" (Bronte 24). Her terror overwhelms her, to the point where she comes outside of herself. When she later re-awakens to consciousness, Jane has changed, something else has been born of her and she is able to stand up to the vile Mrs. Reed, again feeling as if part of herself is existing outside of the body. Jane tells us, "Ere I had finished this reply, my soul began to expand" (Bronte 48) and, after she unleashes this expansion of her soul on Mrs. Reed, she is told, "You've got quite a new way of talking" (Bronte 50). Therefore, it is early in the novel that Jane's duality is established. From this point forward, she is constantly at odds with herself and that part of Jane that left her body in the red-room will later be manifested in the physical form of Bertha. Furthermore, it is in this scene of the novel that Jane begins to express the idea that her soul may be able to separate from the body – an idea that will become even more important in the twentieth century.

Lucy's doubleness also begins early on. As she begins to mature, Lucy becomes aware of her beauty and realizes that it is a tool she could use. She tells Robert, "As I grew older I was told that I was pretty – beautiful – lovely – bewitching...and began to think that in spite of the secret of my life I might be more successful in the world's great lottery than my companions" (Braddon 345). The secret of her life that Lucy refers to is her mother's insanity and the strains of it that she believes live in her own body. By constructing a perfect outer shell, Lucy has set up the parameters of her dual nature at a young age, contrasting the insanity in her blood with the beauty on her face. She makes the choice at a young age to disguise herself, to pretend to be what she is not. Robert contemplates Lucy's choices, "But how terribly that narrow pathway had widened out into the broad high-road of sin" (Braddon 294). The narrator, Robert, wonders if Lucy would have been able to have a different life had she not chosen to be selfish and self-serving. For Lucy, and perhaps for the readers, however, this was not a choice she could actually have made. Society forced its will upon Lucy, and her actions were a result of her attempt to fit within the mold set for her by others. As Mary Wollstonecraft had warned in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, Lucy's attempt to conform to the male ideal has kept her from her potential and made her like the human creature Wollstonecraft speaks of who has become "weak and depraved" and "an irrational monster" due to the wearing away of true virtue and intelligence (Wollstonecraft 279).

In her essay, "Plain Jane's Progress," which later became a chapter of *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra Gilbert talks about dual nature and the female character's constant struggle against herself as she attempts to hide her anger and frustration. Speaking of Jane, Gilbert writes that "despite Miss Temple's training, the 'bad animal' who was first locked up in the red-room is, we sense, still lurking somewhere, behind a dark door, waiting for a chance to get free"

(Gilbert 483). No matter how valiantly Jane struggles to be obedient, there is always something in her that wants to be free and fight against the roles imposed on her. This can be dangerous if unchecked, as illustrated by Bertha's actions when Jane's wedding approached. As if acting out Jane's fears regarding her union with Rochester, Bertha appears to destroy the wedding veil symbolizing the marriage. Gilbert writes about this scene and its connection to the split in Jane's personality:

On the morning of her wedding: she turns toward the mirror and sees 'a robed and veiled figure, so unlike my usual self that it seemed almost the image of a stranger' reminding us of the moment in the red-room when all had 'seemed colder and darker in that visionary hollow of the looking glass than in reality'. In view of this frightening series of separations within the self – Jane Eyre splitting off from Jane Rochester, the child Jane weirdly separating from the body of Jane – it is not surprising that another and most mysterious specter, a sort of 'vampire' should appear in the middle of the night to rend and trample the wedding veil for that unknown person Jane Rochester. (491-92)

Here, Bertha has acted on Jane's fears regarding her impending marriage but also notable is the similarity that Gilbert and Gubar note between this scene and the scene in the red-room. In each of these two passages, Jane experiences a split in herself. In the red-room, the split was between body and soul, and in this scene it would seem that the part of Jane that left her body found a new home in Bertha.

While "Plain Jane's Progress" mainly discusses Jane's separation and desire for escape from herself throughout the novel, the author's findings can also be applied to Lucy:

Escape through flight or escape through starvation: the alternatives will recur throughout *Jane Eyre* and indeed throughout much other Nineteenth- and Twentieth-century literature by women. However, there is a “third, even more terrifying alternative: Escape through madness.”

(477)

This alternative is one that was also taken by our other ‘double’ character, Lucy Audley. Lucy’s outward beauty and compliance with the Victorian ideals of womanhood disguise her true nature. By her own confession, Lucy is insane. She tells Robert, “You have conquered a madwoman!” and then later attributes her murderous nature to her insanity; “I killed him because I am mad!” (Braddon 340-41). Lucy’s double nature is dangerous and, too long hidden, ready to lash out at any male who comes too close.

Both Lucy and Bertha are dangerous, especially towards the male characters. Their violence, however, is not the violence of men. Rather, they manifest terror and fear in ways that often seem ominous and unearthly. They are referred to as specters and fiends. In this way, we can see that the double nature of women was often represented through sinister and otherworldly imagery. This leads us to a discussion of one of the most compelling characteristics of the Victorian novel: paranormal occurrences and the character of the ghost. Not all nineteenth-century ghost stories concerned the supernatural in a literal way, but instead, “the supernatural is frequently the natural in masquerade” (Fick 82). Jane’s specter turns out to be all too real a person, making Bertha an example of this type of literary tool, and, as Fick argues, she is a way for the reader to see Jane’s repressed desires and emotions. Bertha appears at the times when Jane is the most frightened or conflicted.

An example of this can be found when Jane contemplates the nature of women and the difficulties she has in following society's dictates for her sex, saying "women are supposed to be very calm generally; but women feel just as men feel" (Bronte 116). She is frustrated by her inability to be what she ought to be, and it is, therefore, significant that it is at that moment when Jane switches her discussion to the ghostly sounds in the house: "I not infrequently heard Grace Poole's laugh: the same peal, the same low, slow ha! ha! which, when first heard, had thrilled me" (Bronte 117). It is also significant that the laugh of Bertha (though Jane does not yet know it is her) thrills Jane. "Jane first hears the 'distinct formal mirthless laugh' of mad Bertha, Rochester's secret wife and in a sense her own secret self" (Gilbert and Gubar 482). She hears the sound of her double, that part of herself that is struggling to vocalize itself. Fick would agree that it is noteworthy that Jane hears Bertha when she is considering her own position as a woman. He states a story like this is "paradigmatic of a number of nineteenth-century women's ghost stories because it points to the problematic relationship between body and soul for nineteenth-century women writers, and to significant tensions in Victorian American thinking about gender relations and social action" (Fick 83).

Although Fick seems to be speaking about Americans, this tension between gender and social action can be applied to *Lady Audley's Secret*. There is not a ghostly apparition in this novel, and yet Lucy herself seems to be a spectral character. This is illustrated by the painting of Lucy, described in great detail by Braddon. Lucy's portrait, "so like and yet so unlike" her, depicts her as a type of evil specter (Braddon 72). She has "a strange, sinister light" in her eyes and her pretty mouth has a "hard and wicked look" so that overall she has "the aspect of a beautiful fiend" (Braddon 72). Alicia comments, "We have never seen my lady look as she does in that picture: but I think that she *could* look so" (Braddon 73). Through this description more

than anywhere else in the novel, Braddon has created a separate self for Lucy. The portrait is her true mirror, where her soul has been captured, and, through it, she has become separate from her body. Therefore, Lucy embodies Fick's statement that "the veiled ladies of the authentic ghost story are their own exhibitors, playing bodily force as if it were disembodied" (Fick 84).

Lucy is a sinister character whose dual nature has been formed through tragic circumstances. Always shadowed by her insane mother, Lucy is abandoned by her husband, left to care for a child she does not love, and at the mercy of her shiftless father. In response to this, Lucy chooses to adopt a dual nature. Though this is not a ghost story, Fick's argument about the spectral character can be applied to Lucy's hidden nature. "The authentic ghost story renders in dramatic terms the nineteenth-century woman reader's desire – if not always her ability – to act forcefully in the realm of the body politic" (Fick 95). Although there is no ghost, Lucy has created this sinister part of herself in response to the circumstances forced upon her by society. She cannot operate happily within society's boundaries, and so she steps outside them. This was a step required not only of the female characters but also of the authors who created them.

Creating characters with dual natures caused these female authors to appear at odds with society and, "to many critics and scholars, some of these literary women look like isolated eccentrics" (Gilbert and Gubar 1533). Their work, however, achieved a higher goal. "Publicly presenting acceptable facades for private and dangerous visions, women writers have long used a wide range of tactics to obscure but not obliterate their most subversive impulses" (Gilbert and Gubar 1534). Through their work, they were smashing "the mirror that has so long reflected what every woman was supposed to be" (Gilbert and Gubar 1536). These dual characters were the start of a movement that continues on through today.

As Ruth Salvaggio argues in “Theory and Space, Space and Woman,” women authors have begun to renegotiate the spaces of the female body within literature, rewriting themselves as “at once ‘here’ and ‘elsewhere’” (Salvaggio 275). In today’s literature (as will be discussed), women are at once in the body as well as out of it, and it was the Victorian authoress who began this process where women authors write themselves as existing both within and without their bodies. If not for writers such as Charlotte Bronte and Mary Braddon, we would not have arrived at this place in literary history. These female authors reacted to the strict boundaries forced upon them and were brave enough to begin the processes of expressing the true nature of women. Through the use of specters, fiends, and murderesses, these women expressed the hidden desires and frustrations of their sex. It is through the writing of women such as these that females first began to express their own voice and to take their first tentative steps towards the celebration of their duality and differences.

### Chapter 3: The Tradition of Separation Continues

*My body is a cage that keeps me*

*From dancing with the one I love*

*But my mind holds the key*

*-Arcade Fire*

As the nineteenth century ended and the world was ushered into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, women writers gained a firmer foothold in the literary world. Unsurprisingly, they continued to write about the issues confronting women as they struggle to achieve and maintain equality. Poets such as Mina Loy, Adrienne Rich, and Muriel Rukeyser wrote stirring poems that take close looks at marriage, motherhood, and the journey that women must take as they attempt to create a fulfilling life for themselves. These poems present a picture of women's frustration as they attempt to juggle the different areas of their life and remain true to themselves. This struggle often causes a woman to feel pulled in many different directions at once, and, after a while, she can feel as if she has been torn in two.

In poetry from this time, this feeling is represented as a woman's emotional detachment from her own body – her desire to transcend the physical housing that holds her spirit in chains. This chapter will discuss this separation from the body and the ways in which it is represented by women authors in twentieth-century poetry and literature. Also discussed are possible real-world solutions that are offered as a way of re-unifying the woman's body and spirit in order to allow for a better future for everyone.

The nineteenth-century woman author's use of ghostly projection seems to have evolved somewhat for the women authors and poets of the twentieth-century. As I will argue in the following pages, however, the same idea is still present in their poetry – the woman as separate

from her body. This is a theme that crops up in the poetry of Marianne Moore, Muriel Ruckeyser, Adrienne Rich, Caroline Forché, Mina Loy, and Rita Dove.

Again harkening back to Ruth Salvaggio, we will see that the female writers of the twentieth century are “blurring and liquefying the boundaries” (Salvaggio 261) through their poetry. These poets portray the woman as separated (or longing to be) from her own body and, therefore, breaking away from the traditional construct of the body and its physical limitations. In varied ways, each of these authors suggests that women are able to exist both inside and outside of their body in times of great stress. This is a variation of the theme of doubleness and bodily separation as it was presented in the Victorian era and represents a way in which this motif has changed in its usage over the centuries as female authorship and feminism progressed. No longer, it seems, are women being talked about as separated into good and evil, but rather they are torn between their body and their soul. However, the motivations for bodily separation are remarkably similar. Here, these female poets talk about the constraints of society as they begin to articulate a critique of the confining male gaze. The female body, it seems, has become even more objectified until women feel that they must separate from their physical self in order to feel peace.

For the poets of the twentieth century, there seems to have been a point in time in which society’s influence was not felt: childhood. As a woman grows into puberty, however, she is in danger of becoming imprisoned inside her body, chained down and restricted. In reaction to this, women authors created characters, who, like themselves, long for complete separation and often express a desire to be invisible or to be nothing. For some characters, it is not until a woman approaches old age and death that she is finally able to re-establish the freedom of spirit that she experienced in her youth. This freedom from the body that is experienced in childhood can,

however, sometimes be re-created through dreams. In the following paragraphs, examples of each of these situations will be examined and discussed in greater detail.

Salvaggio addresses the representation of women as existing separate from their bodies, in an in-between place. She notes that women authors draw on these places and utilize them in their work. “Yet even as various structural theorists were speaking of ‘total unities,’ many of them were also beginning to speak of spaces within and between, spaces that brought into question the very definition of boundary on which any enclosed space depended” (Salvaggio 266). The boundary questioned is, at times, the body itself. As a child, these poets seem to say, the female is able to exist both with and without her body. She is not subject to time or weighed down by anything.

In the section of her poem “Anglo Mongrels and the Rose” titled “Illumination,” Mina Loy presents the girl Ova in such a manner:

Ova is standing alone in the garden  
alone in the garden  
The high skies  
have come gently upon her  
and their  
steadfast light is shining out of her  
She is conscious  
not through her body but through space  
(lines 1-8 )

The author’s repetition of the word “alone” creates a feeling not of loneliness, but of peace. She is alone, away from the noise and chaos of the world, and it is because of this that Ova is able to experience the world around her in a way that others cannot. This idea is reiterated a few lines

later: “She knows not Time” (14 ). Ova experiences life not through her body but through space. Hers is a spiritual experience, elevated out of the mere physical world that most people dwell in.

However, for most, this ability to experience life through space rather than the body does not last. Adrienne Rich presents this change in her poem, “Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law:”

“You all die at fifteen,” said Diderot,  
and turn part legend, part convention.  
Still, eyes inaccurately dream  
behind closed windows blackening with steam.  
Deliciously, all that we might have been,  
all that we were— fire, tears,  
wit, taste, martyred ambition —  
stirs like the memory of refused adultery  
the drained and flagging bosom of our middle years.

(8.1-9)

Here the loss of the ability to separate from the body and experience life through spiritual means is presented as a type of death, emphasized by the author’s line spacing. Once the woman has reached maturity (fifteen), she is left in her “middle years” to mourn over the delicious dreams of what could have been and will never be.

Muriel Rukeyser also addresses this cycle in section five of “Waterlily Fire,” titled “The Long Body.” “This is the long body: into life from the beginning,/ Big-headed infant unfolding into child, who stretches and finds/And then flowing the young one going tall, sunward/And now full-grown, held tense, setting feet to the ground” (Collected Poems). Here, she tells us that as the infant evolves into a child, he or she grows upwards, towards the sun. This description, which

uses words such as “unfolding” and “flowing,” evokes imagery of a person floating upwards, able to fly and not anchored down by anything. The possibilities are endless. As children reach full grown maturity, however, they become “tense” and they must set their “feet to the ground”. It is women who seem to feel the hardship of this anchoring the most.

Many of these poems describe maturity for women as a time of loss. The girls, illustrated in their youth as free and eager, gradually morph into women who are tied down by life’s concerns, anchored to a ground that they are not always comfortable with. This restraint causes much sorrow, and the woman may eventually grow to hate the body that now seems to ensnare her. The cares of everyday life become stifling, and a wish to be alone leads to a wish to escape from everything and even, as will be discussed in Rita Dove’s poetry, to become nothing. The body is the cage in which she is trapped.

In “Marriage,” Maryanne Moore describes a situation in which a woman, newly trapped in her own body, increases the weight of her own anchor by entering into marriage. “I should like to be alone”;/to which the visitor replies,/“I should like to be alone;/why not be alone together?” (lines 31-35). Here, as in “Anglo Mongrels and the Rose,” the repetition of the word “alone” suggests a desire for peace. The poem goes on from here to describe the ever-growing restrictions that are placed upon the woman as she continues through her life. Love, marriage, children – these things that are supposed to bring joy to a woman’s life can become constant reminders of her inability to escape. Every time she tries to return to the moment in her life where she was able to experience the world in a purely spiritual manner, separate from those around her, there is an obligation that confounds her attempts.

Rita Dove illustrates this idea in her poetic novel *Thomas and Beulah* in the stanzas titled “Daystar:”

she wanted a little room for thinking  
but she saw diapers steaming on the line,  
a doll slumped behind the door  
so she lugged a chair behind the garage  
to sit out the children's naps.  
Sometimes there were things to watch—  
...  
...Other days  
she stared until she was assured  
when she opened her closed her eyes  
she'd see only her own vivid blood (61)

Here, words such as “slumped,” “lugged,” and even “naps” denote exhaustion. Beulah is desperate for escape but she does not wish to escape to any other *place*. Instead, she wants to see only herself and nothing else; she expresses a desire for complete isolation.

Directly following the previously described scene that recorded Beulah's momentary escape from motherhood, Rita Dove enlarges this idea and elaborates on Beulah's desire to be freed from her daily life:

... Later  
that night when Thomas rolled over and  
lurched into her, she would open her eyes  
and think of a place that was hers  
for an hour— where  
she was nothing,  
pure nothing, in the middle of the day.  
(61)

As emphasized by the line spacing, what Beulah desires most to be is nothing. She is searching for a complete release from her family, from her life, from herself. The demands upon her time and attention that have replaced her dreams of travel have caused her to long to escape everything because all that she sees around her is a reminder of pain.

Within this train of thought, the release from body is a release from pain. However, for the most part, this release can be achieved only through death. In *Thomas and Beulah*, Dove writes, “Her body’s no longer tender, but her mind is free” (62). As Beulah ages and approaches death, her mind is slowly freed from all constraints. Another image like this is presented again in the stanzas from the same poem titled *Pomade*, “She simply turned/one day from slicing a turnip into a pot/when her chest opened and inrushing air/knocked her down” (66). Willemma, Thomas’ hardworking sister, is dying here but instead of feeling pressure or being stifled, her death is represented as an in-rushing of air. In this way, Dove invokes imagery of a seal being broken on a vacuum, thereby allowing fresh air to circulate. This imagery is not sad but rather reads as exhilarating. Death is a release, an excited change that returns the woman to her rightful state as part of the air and not the earth.

It is certainly frightening to think that women can only become their true selves upon death, but these authors are in no way suggesting that this is the case. For them, it is only the separation from the binds that tie women down that need to be escaped. As society so often constrains women through the body— in terms of appearance or public actions – it is the body that becomes a representation of that which needs to be escaped. If these binds can be escaped, women can reach their true potential, as represented in poetry by a state of being separate from the body. Rich takes this idea on and suggests that, in sleep, women come closest to being able to reach that spiritual state:

Sleeping, turning in turn like planets  
Rotating in their midnight meadow:  
a touch is enough to let us know  
we're not alone in the universe, even in sleep:  
the dream-ghost of two worlds  
walking their ghost-towns, almost address each other.

(“Twenty-One Love Poems” XII.3-8)

In sleep, these women are nearly able to enter each other's dreams; they can “almost address each other.” In addition to suggesting that women can communicate outside the physical world, poems such as this hint at the need for women to aid each other in the search for enlightenment. For these poets, all women are connected to and part of each other. For example, Forché examines what happens when one woman fully embraces the life and circumstance of another:

In the window of my earlier life, it is often winter, a glass white with my own  
breath

and rubbing it clear I see only my own reflection

It was years before my face would become hers, yours, and hers, others, facing  
each other through days, pain, the prisoners' visiting window.

(“The Angel of History” 16)

The speaker of this poem has spent a great deal of time trying to understand the pain of several women. As she learns of their experiences, a bond is formed and they become part of her, their reflection blending in with her own in the mirror.

Rich also addresses this idea:

Your silence today is a pond where drowned things live  
I want to see raised dripping and brought into the sun.  
It's not my own face I see there, but other faces,  
even your face at another age.

(“Twenty-One Love Poems” IX.1-4)

Here, lack of communication is represented as a pond that holds many things that should be brought to light. The negative effects of this silence include other women as well, and the only way to fight against the “drowning” of these things is through communication.

Communication with other women, it would seem, is the key to woman's re-unification with her body, which, for these authors, is the ideal state to which they long to return. One of the ways in which women can begin this communication is through their writing. This, these authors seem to suggest, could be the solution that would allow the female to reclaim her body completely, which would mean that rather than seeing the body as a cage that needs to be escaped, it could become a tool for self-expression. Salvaggio makes this point, quoting Helene Cixous, “‘Woman must write her body,’ Helene Cixous says, ‘must make up the unimpeded tongue that bursts partitions, classes and rhetorics, orders and codes, must inundate, run through, go beyond the discourse with its last reserves’” (Salvaggio 275).

This writing has proven difficult in the past. In her article, “When We Dead Awaken,” Adrienne Rich deals with the division of spirit that keeps women, in part, separate from their own bodies. She writes of a time in her life where she struggled with her own identity and her writing. In section XX of “Twenty-One Love Poems,” Rich imagines herself attempting to speak to a woman she can “discern” in the Hudson. This woman is “drowning in secrets, fear wound round her throat/ and choking her like hair” (XX, 6-7). Rich writes of this woman with deep

sympathy, saying that she loved her and wanted to reach into the water and speak with her but could not. As she says in the poem, “I was talking to my own soul” (XX 12). Therefore it is no accident that this woman appeared as a separate entity. For her, just as for Jane and Lucy, there was a division of her spirit. This division was caused by her inability to feel at peace with herself and her place in society.

Rich urges women to push through the silence in order to attain reunification but is aware that it is not an easy task. “The awakening of consciousness is not like the crossing of a frontier – one step and you are in another country” (Rich 27). With this in mind, it seems no accident that Rich writes of once feeling adrift and then re-imagines herself at that time as a woman drowning in polluted water. For this reason, it seems that Rich believes that if one becomes too afraid and turns back, that person is always in danger of returning to that drifting place of fear. Though she is now past that stage, the reflection of that woman is, hauntingly, always still there.

It is this reflection that Rich is urging us to remember but not return to when she says, “much of women's poetry has been of the nature of the blues song: a cry of pain, of victimization, or a lyric of seduction” and then adds, “I think we need to go through that anger, and we will betray our own reality if we try, as Virginia Woolf was trying, for an objectivity, a detachment” (Rich, 28-9). Working through the anger, the pain, and the victimization will allow women today, as well as future generations, to move onto something better. If they are able to do this, then perhaps women’s bodies can be “taken back by women who will again use their bodies as agents of transformation” (Salvaggio 275-76). It is just this idea of transformation that the authors of late twentieth-century literature have begun to expand upon, using this theme of body and soul separation to discuss youth and aging as they relate to the male gaze in ways that are relevant to present society.

## Chapter 4: The Tradition Continues: Women and Bodily Separation in Today's Literature

*"I'm bigger than my body allows."*

*-John Mayer*

This thesis has already discussed the representations in literature that suggest women exist in a divided state, first divided into good and bad and then into body and soul. From this springs the idea that the soul is free and separate from the body, which can often become little more than a cage that grips one firmly to the ground. Whereas the poets discussed in the previous chapter presented the separation of body and soul as dissociation from the body, generally brought on by fear or pain, today's authors have taken this idea of bodily separation one step further. Today, this motif is presented as not only a coping mechanism, but as a natural part of a woman's life. In addition to serving as a survival technique in times of pain and fear, the soul flying from the body is a natural and even celebrated occurrence that is enjoyed even by children. That enjoyment is then pried from them by the ever imprisoning gaze of society.

Today's literature has taken the work of past authors, both utilizing and expanding upon the motif. In *Caramelo*, Sandra Cisneros' character, Celaya, experiences a vast array of emotions throughout the novel, including pain, fear, and a longing to escape, culminating with a haunting by her dead grandmother. Throughout the novel, Celaya discusses her out-of-body experiences with the audience. She tells the readers that as children, all girls are able to exist separate from their bodies, in a sort of in-between place. During puberty the female begins to become more solidly connected to her body, and Celaya seems to mourn this loss. As the poets we have previously discussed suggest, she looks for escape through dreams. She says, "A dream is a poem the body writes. Even if we lie to ourselves in the day, the body is compelled to speak

its truth at night" (Cisneros 201). For her, dreaming is a time when one is alone and finally able to truly hear their own desires. "Why is it sadness always comes and gets you when you lie down? Maybe it's because we talk too much in the day, and we can't hear what the heart is saying. And if you don't pay attention, then it talks to you through a dream" (Cisneros 272). This language echoes the poems of Adrienne Rich, who longed for escape from her body through dreaming.

As will be later discussed, Cisneros speaks in depth about this need to be separated from her body. For her, the body is only a shell that houses the soul. She writes, "The soul never ages, the soul, that ball of light tethered to that nuisance the body" (Cisneros 149). For Celaya, and for Cisneros, this ability to separate her soul from her body is not a bad thing; rather it is an ability possessed by all women but which is repressed by society and the restrictions it places upon women.

This same idea is present in Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. This novel mixes in Haitian myth and legends, showing that, for Sophie, the idea of bodily separation is not odd at all. She says, "I grew up believing that people could be in two places at once" (Danticat 208). In another part of the novel, we read of a woman who left her body at night to fly around the world. "The men were singing about a woman who flew without her skin at night, and when she came back home, she found her skin peppered and could not put it back on. Her husband had done it to teach her a lesson. He ended up killing her" (Danticat 150). This excerpt illustrates both the idea that a woman is able to separate from her body and the idea that she may choose to do so in order to escape the male domination that so often brought her pain and even death. In this novel, the separation from the body was a way in which an individual woman can

leave behind the body that she has been taught was dirty and become something more than herself.

In *Cat's Eye*, Margaret Atwood uses the motif of bodily separation to represent a method of escape. Elaine Risley has to deal with being the odd one out in her community. Falling in with a group of girls who treat her terribly, Elaine feels isolated and lonely, dealing with abuse from her friends as she attempts to find a way to act normal. One of the coping mechanisms that Elaine utilizes is separation from her body, both through a type of self-harm and through fainting. As Elaine ages, she is able to look back on the stages of her life with greater clarity, reflecting on the good and the bad, but mostly upon the ways she coped with her struggles to fit in. Discussing the changes she went through, both on a physical and on an emotional level, Elaine says of herself, "I vary. I am transitional" (Atwood 5). Throughout the book, she does vary, from one state to the next, both within and without her body, as she attempts to find herself.

In *The Golden Compass*, Philip Pullman demonstrates just how far this motif has travelled. In the beginning, it was mainly women authors who dealt with the idea of women and bodily separation, but Philip Pullman has adopted this motif for his own uses, creating a world in which the soul and the body are both visible entities, existing side-by-side. In Pullman's world, one's soul lives outside of the body, in a physical form that is visible to all, an animal that is called a dæmon. Rather than alluding to this possible separation of body and soul, Pullman simply creates a world in which it is an out-and-out fact! The body and the soul are two beings, forever connected, as the "Dæmons could move no more than a few yards from their humans" (Pullman 195) and yet separate. In this world, the body and the soul are able to exist as equal part of one whole and they are forever linked.

Although in this Pullman's world, this motif applies to both male and female characters, it should be noted that the women in this novel are clearly the focus. Lyra, the protagonist, is special – the child of prophecy. Additionally, she is the only character who is an adolescent throughout the novel. She is not a woman; she is only a girl and therefore has not experienced the repression that society imposes upon adult women. It is through her that we experience the ideas regarding the separation of body and soul and therefore, it is the female perspective on the separation of body and soul that is presented in the novel. Additionally, Pullman has created even more powerful women in the form of witches. Witches, who can only be female, possess extreme power and privileges that others do not enjoy. For example, they can separate body and Dæmon (soul) more completely than anyone else, sending their Dæmons miles away from their bodies when needed. Therefore, this book is interesting both because it presents both a male adaptation of this motif and a representation of a girl who only exists as a child.

This chapter will look at these four novels, in order to illustrate the current use of this motif. These novels have been chosen because of the ways in which they represent the different situations wherein authors choose to separate a female character from her body. The idea that women are able to exist outside of their body – that they, at times, *must* separate themselves – is one that has been illustrated time and again over the years. In the beginning, authors used this motif to create characters who were victims of madness or rage, but now many authors are claiming that this ability is one that should be embraced. Through the use of the motif of bodily separation, the idea that women possess a type of “otherness” is becoming a point of power and pride.

## The Freedom of Adolescence

Much discussion regarding the male gaze has been presented within this thesis; however, this gaze is a constraint that children seem to be free of. Charlotte Bronte, Mary Braddon, Adrienne Rich, Mina Loy, Carolyn Forché, and Muriel Rukeyser all discuss the time after they have become aware of society's constraints, the time *after* they have become part of the male gaze. It is only now that authors have begun to discuss the time that comes *before* a girl becomes aware of this gaze. In literature, this time is represented through a freedom from the body's restrictions; authors describe this as a separation of body and soul. For example, in *Caramelo*, Celaya remembers fondly the time before she became "stuck" inside her body. She remembers that time, before adolescence, when her soul was not caged within the body but rather was free. Throughout the novel, Celaya discusses her out-of-body experiences with the audience:

before my body wasn't my body, I didn't have a body. I was a being as close to a spirit as a spirit. I was a ball of light floating across the planet. I mean the me I was before puberty, that red Rio Bravo you have to carry yourself over. I don't know how it is with boys, I've never been a boy. But girls somewhere between the ages of, say, eight and puberty, girls forget they have bodies. It's the time she has trouble keeping herself clean, socks always drooping, knees pocked and bloody, hair crooked as a broom. She doesn't look in mirrors. She isn't aware of being watched. Not aware of her body causing men to look at her yet. There isn't a sense of the female body's volatility, its rude weight, the nuisance of dragging it about. (433)

This description perfectly encapsulates what it is to be innocent and free. For Cisneros, this is the ideal state. As a result of this "forgetting" of the body, Celaya isn't aware of being watched and

this is why “she is a being as close to a spirit as a spirit” (Cisneros 434). For Cisneros, this ability to forget, or leave, the body is not a bad thing; rather it is an ability possessed by all women, a birthright which has been taken from them as they succumb to society’s pressures. Here, she is describing herself as a girl, existing in the time *before* she became aware of the male gaze.

*The Golden Compass* gives us a heroine who exists only in the time Cisneros discusses in the previously quoted passage, the time *before* adulthood. Whereas each of the other novels discussed here begin in the childhood of the heroine and end with her adulthood, this book both begins and ends with Lyra as a girl. When her dæmon, Pan, becomes a bird and flies, “Lyra exulted in it, feeling with him as he flew” (Pullman 153). We see the world through her eyes and confront everything with her innocence. We are aware, as she is not, of the changes that will come with her entrance into the adult world. Therefore, we can see that, as will happen in each of the novels discussed in this chapter, there will be a change that confronts Lyra. For her, her soul will always be separate from her body, but a transformation still awaits her. In her world, when one is a child, the Dæmon changes form, but when one ages, this ability is lost. Pullman writes, “as people became adult, their Dæmons lost the power to change and assumed one shape, keeping it permanently” (49). Lyra expresses some anxiety about this day, an anxiety felt by most women as they grow (which will be discussed later), although she does not fully understand.

For Danticat’s Sophie in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, the time before becomes the time when she lived in Haiti with Tante Atie. Living in relative innocence, Sophie expresses the same freedom from her body as Celaya, “I sank deeper and deeper into the bed and lost my body in the darkness” (Danticat 17). It is when she was young that she was taught to believe “people could

be in two places at once” (Danticat 208). For Sophie, it seems to be taken for granted that one’s existence is not confined to only one form, one body, one place, but rather is a fluid thing.

*Cat’s Eye* deals with this idea as well. Discussing her childhood, Elaine says, “Until we moved to Toronto I was happy. Before that, we didn’t really live anywhere; or we lived so many places it was hard to remember them” (Atwood 22). Here, she expresses happiness, again located in a time *before*. Elaine speaks of her brother and her parents as though they were an extension of her self, and she does not feel physically attached to a single place, but rather seems to feel a fluidity in her existence. It is not until her family moves to Toronto that Elaine begins to feel anchored and it is not a feeling she enjoys, telling the reader “I feel trapped” (Atwood 340). In order to cope with these feelings, as well as the stress of trying to fit in with the girlfriends she had so longed for, Elaine begins to seek escape willfully, in a way that seems natural to her:

I begin to spend time outside my body...At these times, I feel blurred, as if there are two of me, one superimposed on the other, but imperfectly. There’s an edge of transparency, and beside it a rim of solid flesh that’s without feeling...I can hear what’s being said to me, but I don’t have to pay attention. My eyes are open but I’m not there. I’m off to the side. (Atwood 185)

Here, Elaine is using the ability to step outside of herself as a means to cope with the stress that has come with the new life thrust upon her. This reason for leaving the body, in order to cope with pain, fear, and stress, is one that we are familiar with after reading the poetry discussed in previous chapters. This particular reason for separation will now be discussed again as it relates to the literature of today.

## **Pain and Fear**

This next section deals closely with the same topics as those discussed by the 20<sup>th</sup> century poets. For past authors, separation from the body is caused by pain and fear; nevertheless, it is important to realize that, for today's authors, this motif represents a method of escape – it is a means of reaching safety and is therefore a blessing. In addition, this motif is also explored more thoroughly and outlined more carefully through the examination of the attitude towards the body and the reasons a young girl may grow to despise it.

Greene writes, “As a girl's body turns into that of a woman she confronts the meaning of what it is to be an adult woman in her culture. Theorists...have argued that this realization constitutes a crisis for many young women, expressed in eating disorders or a loss of confidence and voice” (85). As she notes, the extreme fear and pain caused by the desperate need to understand and conform to society's norms constitute a crisis for many women. This crisis of identity and hatred of one's body is often expressed through self-mutilation and an attempt to control, or separate from, the body.

Green also states, “There is reason to be concerned about the way girls and women in the West are being encouraged to think and behave towards their bodies... there is a sense in which young women and older women are increasingly behaving towards their own bodies as though they are indeed texts or slates or personal/public material to be molded, carved, or etched” (Green 93-94). Here, the carving Green refers to is physical carving, through cutting or self-mutilation.

In *Cat's Eye*, this etching is enacted by Elaine through a literal stripping away of her body:

In the endless time when Cordelia had such power over me, I peeled the skin off my feet... I would begin with the big toes. I would bend my foot up and bite a small opening in the thickest part of the skin, on the bottom, along the outside edge. Then, with my fingernails, which I never bit because why bite something that didn't hurt, I would pull the skin off in narrow strips. I would do the same to the other big toe, then to the ball of each foot, the heel of each. I would go down as far as the blood. Nobody but me ever looked at my feet, so nobody knew I was doing it. In the mornings I would pull my socks on, over my peeled feet. It was painful to walk, but not impossible. The pain gave me something definite to think about, something immediate. It was something to hold on to. (Atwood 120)

Here, by pulling the skin from her body, Elaine believes that she is giving herself something to hold on to – pain. Atwood refers to this need for pain increasingly throughout the novel, discussing the intense pain that Elaine inflicts upon herself in times of stress, and it is interesting that this pain is always connected in some way with the body she is increasingly discontented with.

In *Cat's Eye*, Elaine is the victim of emotional abuse at the hands of her friends, but this is not the only type of abuse that causes one to hate his or her own body. Physical and sexual abuse are common causes for this type of self-hatred:

Early experience of physical or sexual abuse will very often have an impact on the girl's sense of her body and views of the body as ally or enemy may be rooted in traumatic early experiences or in negative commentaries on the body and its functions as somehow dirty or unsafe. (Greene 81)

Viewing the body as an enemy may often lead to hatred of one's appearance or even simply cause one to mutilate the body.

Sophie experiences this type of abuse at the hands of her mother during the virginity tests that were regularly conducted. As a result of this violation, Sophie begins to see her body as dirty and sinful. In order to put a stop to the testing, Sophie makes the decision to violently tear her hymen. "My flesh ripped apart as I pressed the pestle into it. I could see the blood slowly dripping onto the bed sheet" (Danticat 88). Here, she vividly describes this mutilation of her body. Later, she tells the reader about the damage she had caused to herself. "I had spent two days in the hospital in Providence and four weeks with stitches between my legs. Joseph could never understand why I had done something so horrible to myself. I could not explain to him that it was like breaking manacles, an act of freedom" (Danticat 130). For Sophie, this pain was freeing, both literally, as it put a stop to the testing, and figuratively, as she felt that acting violently upon her own body somehow freed her from the constraints of her culture by removing the confinement of virginity. In addition, Sophie has come to dislike her body, to view it as distasteful and dirty, and so she carries out this act of violence upon the body that she hates as a type of revenge.

In *Caramelo*, this distaste for the body is illustrated by Celaya's mother, Zoila, who feels the weight of a body she loathes, pulling her down. "And she tired, exhausted, dragging the body around the dance floor, this body, with its nagging need of washing and feeding all its necessary hungers, this *her* inside the borrowed pink blouse with its stained armpits and the skirt held together with a safety pin" (Cisneros 225). Zoila's discontented relationship with her body is illustrated by the irritation she feels and the need to pull it around with her. This is interesting because the body is described almost as if it is a weight one must contend with and not the

essence of the woman herself. Perhaps it is a response to this perceived weight that causes the authors to choose these types of situations as a time to demonstrate the separation of body and soul by allowing their characters momentary escape in times of such pain.

The way that Elaine deals with Cordelia and her crew of cruel friends is to leave her body and escape the pain they caused. When the abusive treatment from her friend Cordelia becomes too much to bear, Elaine finds an interesting way to deal with it – she faints:

I hear another sound, coming over the sound of the heart like an approaching wind: a rustling, like poplar leaves, only smaller, drier. There's black around the edges of my eyes and it closes in. What I see is like the entrance to a tunnel, rushing away from me; or I am rushing away from it, away from that spot of daylight. After that I'm looking at a lot of overshoes, and the floorboards, stretching into the distance, at eye level. My head hurts. 'She fainted,' somebody says, and then I know what I have done...I'm beginning to feel that I've discovered something worth knowing. There's a way out of places you want to leave, but can't. Fainting is like stepping sideways, out of your own body, out of time or into another time. When you wake up its later. Time has gone on without you. (182)

Later, Elaine also notes that, when she faints, she is separate from her body: "The sky closes to a pinpoint and a wave of dry leaves sweeps over my head. Then I can see my own body lying on the ground, just lying there...But I'm seeing all this from above, as if I'm in the air, somewhere near the GIRLS sign over the door, looking down like a bird" (Atwood 184). Soon, she realizes that this "something worth knowing" can be beneficial to her. "The next time Cordelia tells me to stand against the wall I faint again. Now I can do it almost whenever I want

to. I hold my breath and hear the rustling noise and see the blackness and then I slip sideways, out of my body, and I'm somewhere else" (Atwood 185). For Elaine, this leaving is a simple thing, not at all frightening or difficult, but rather a way to escape and deal with the struggles she faces on a daily basis.

In *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, Danticat uses Sophie to describe several instances where women separate their souls from their bodies. Sophie says of herself, "I had learned to double while being tested. I would close my eyes and imagine all the pleasant things that I had known" (Danticat 156). Here, Sophie is again describing the virginity tests and its effects on her psyche. Doubling, she explains, is when a person is "one body split in two: part flesh and part shadow" (Danticat 156). In effect, Sophie is leaving her body in order to cope with the pain and fear. In some ways, this doubling never stops. Sophie tells the reader, "...After my marriage, whenever Joseph and I were together, I doubled" (Danticat 156). This final quote demonstrates the fact that Sophie is still struggling with her body and the perceived dirtiness it encapsulates. She cannot bear to be intimate because she cannot separate her husband's touch from the testing that violated her as a child.

Next, there is a woman in Sophie's therapy group, a female who has undergone female circumcision. In a letter to the one who mutilated her, she writes, "Dear Taiwo. You sliced open my soul and then you told me I can't show it to anyone else. You took a great deal away from me. Because of you, I now carry with me an untouchable wound" (Danticat 202). Here, this woman is discussing how she was taught to hate her own body. It is interesting, however, that she also mentions the soul, as if he has wounded not just her body, but something more as well. This wounding causes a sort of permanent splitting, one that is also experienced by Sophie's mother. When her mother was raped, she was driven to a permanent separation of body and

soul, a hatred of the thing that should belong to her. In the following quote, Sophie is speaking of her mother, “‘I am very worried about her state of mind,’ I said, ‘It was like two people. Someone who was trying to hold things together and someone who was falling apart’” (Danticat 218). Through these women we can see that Greene’s discussion about an adolescent’s hatred of her body can continue to haunt a young woman through adulthood. In literature, a young woman who grows to hate her body also grows to view it as a restraint and, therefore, she loses the childhood innocence that allowed her the freedom to let her soul fly free.

### **Losing the Ability to Fly**

Once a girl reaches a certain point in her life, usually located around puberty, her world changes drastically. In these novels, this change is represented by the loss of the ability to leave the body. This loss of ability, it seems, is due to the objectification of women and the negative stereotypes associated with the woman under the male gaze. In the book *Embodied Practices: Feminist Perspectives on the Body*, editor Kathie Davis discusses this gaze, the idea of otherness, and the impact this has on women. She writes:

The female body becomes a metaphor for the corporeal pole of this dualism, representing in nature, emotionality, irrationality and sensuality. Images of the dangerous, appetitive female body, ruled precariously by her emotions, strain in contrast to the masterful, masculine will, always the ‘other’: mysterious, unruly, threatening to erupt and challenge the patriarchal order through ‘distraction from knowledge, seduction away from God, capitulation to sexual desire, violence or aggression, failure of will, even death’ (Bordo 1193:5). In short, the female body represented all that needed to be tamed and controlled. (5)

This representation of the female body is one that is familiar to many. According to this male-dominated idea, the female is elementally flawed, in need of guidance, and prone to failure. With such representations and ideas, can it come as any surprise that many women view their bodies with alarm and even hatred?

Cisneros has pointed this out as well. Celaya claims that, before puberty, “there isn’t the world to bully you with it (the body), bludgeon you, condemn you to a life sentence of fear” (434). After puberty, along with the newfound awareness of the body, a girl reaches a terrible crossroad when entering into adulthood. Cisneros refers to it as “...that red Rubicon. The never going back there” (Cisneros 434). The phrase “never going back there” implies a crossing and a loss, a breaking of a tie, the crumbling of a bridge.

Before beginning to look at the ways in which these novels represent the loss of the ability to separate from the body, it is necessary to look at some theories as to why this loss occurs. Mainly, as Greene and Davis both note, this loss is created by the rules of womanhood that are still forced upon girls and women as they age. As in the Victorian era, women are still striving to be what they are told they ought to be as they try to hide what they really are. Women are told that to be happy and successful, they must seek out marriage and children, that these things are what identify them. Greene writes:

In life span developmental theory there has been a strong tendency to define a woman’s life cycle in terms of her role in reproduction. Thus the major events and turning point of women’s lives have been seen in terms of her arrival at womanhood, at menarche, her becoming a mother and the cessation of menstruation at menopause... These, the three M’s – Menarche, Motherhood and Menopause – are often presented as the major markers and defining moments of a woman’s development. Far less attention

therefore is given to her finding her own identity, or, to paraphrase Levinson, becoming her own woman, finding a job or retiring. Yet all these events and processes are widely discussed as important life events for men. (79)

She argues that while men can often ignore their bodies, or speak of them as machines that help them on their path to success and glory, conversely, “women...in accounts of all life stages, talk about how they feel about their appearance and their bodies and very often about their feelings of bodily inadequacy” (Greene 79).

As they reach adulthood, women focus not on developing an identity or nurturing their own needs and desires, but only on their appearance in order to conform to the world’s views of what they should be. Davis notes this, stating, “Feminist research in cultural studies has provided a vision, showing how cultural images in the media normalize women by presenting images of the female body as glamorously affluent, impossibly thin and invariably white (Bordo 1993)” (6). As they reach maturity, women’s focus shifts to the body and only the body. They begin to conform, to seek only the needs of others and slowly begin to be controlled by outside forces.

In *The Golden Compass*, this loss of autonomy is represented through the “settling” of the dæmons. As noted earlier, in Lyra’s world, when one is a child, a dæmon can change form and shape, but, as one ages, this dæmon settles into one single form. Lyra, a pre-pubescent girl, feels anxiety over this:

“Why do dæmons have to settle?” Lyra said, “I want Pantalaimon to be able to change forever. So does he.”

“Ah, they always have settled, and they always will. That’s part of growing up. There’ll come a time when you’ll be tired of his changing about, and you’ll want a settled kind of form for him.”

“I never will!”

“Oh, you will. You’ll want to grow up like all the other girls.” (167)

Here, an adult is telling Lyra how she should act and feel about becoming a grown woman. She is being trained to believe that she must act as others act. Although Lyra is now certain that she will never want to be what she is told she must be, the male adult who is speaking is certain that she will one day give in and conform, as all others do. Even though both male and female dæmons settle, it is significant to note that it is through Lyra’s eyes that we experience this phenomenon and it is through her feminine perspective that we experience her fear and trepidation regarding this loss of freedom.

In *Cat’s Eye*, it is suggested that not only will this change occur, but also that one will forget that they ever felt differently. Cordelia and the rest of Elaine’s tormentors send her under the bridge where she falls through the ice and is stuck, waist deep in the water. Elaine barely survives, only freeing herself from the ice after her friends have left her behind. It is this frightening experience that steals the last of her innocence and forces her into adulthood. With this transition, Elaine has lost the ability to leave her body. She has grown up, all at once, and notes “I’m tired of being a child”(Atwood 217). As she enters the adult world, however, she seems to forget that she once had the ability to leave herself. With adulthood comes forgetfulness, “I’ve forgotten things, I’ve forgotten that I’ve forgotten them...I’ve forgotten all the bad things that happened” (Atwood 215). She even forgets the experience that nearly killed her.

Standing over the edge of the ravine where she fell in the water and nearly died, Elaine says “I have an uneasy feeling, as if something’s buried down there, a nameless, crucial thing, or as if there’s someone still on the bridge, left by mistake, up in the air, unable to get to the land” (Atwood 216). Like Adrienne Rich’s *Twenty-One Love Poems*, this nameless thing is actually herself, and what she is now lacking is the ability to release herself from the male gaze, from the body that the world sees. Without this ability, she is now contained within her skin. She says, “I am happy as a clam: hard shelled, firmly closed” (Atwood 215). If she is closed, nothing can get in, but nothing can get out either. Her body is firmly closed; her soul is now locked within. “I dream that I can’t move. I can’t talk. I can’t even breathe. I’m in an iron lung. The iron is clenched around my body like a hard cylindrical skin. It’s thin iron skin that is doing my breathing for me, in and out. I’m dense and heavy...” (Atwood 268).

*Caramelo* notes this loss of control when discussing a woman’s fears during pregnancy and through her impatience with the heaviness of her own body. Speaking of her pregnancy, she says, “How could she explain to her husband it was more than a loss of control of her body, but also, her life” (Cisneros 191). Here, it is not that the woman described does not want or love her unborn child, but rather that she has begun to fear that her only identity is now that of a mother or a wife and that she is, or at least wants to be, more than just these two labels. As she is trapped inside her body, she can only identify with what is present and does not see herself as anything other than a shell.

Cisneros develops this idea in other ways throughout the book. For example, as Celaya grows into womanhood, she is no longer the spirit she describes her girlhood self as, but solid flesh and blood only. When she has her first experience at love, with a boy named Ernesto, Celaya truly begins to realize her corporeality. “I’ve always been a daydreamer, but all I need is

for Ernesto to look at me and remind me I'm not a ball of light, a dust mote spiraling in a sunbeam" (Cisneros 368). He pushes her fully into her body, and she describes this as, "All the parts of me coming back from someplace before I was born" (Cisneros 382). She is pushed back until she exists only in that one space.

Once she exists only inside her body, Celaya notes "For once, I feel as if there's not enough of me, as if I'm too small to contain all the happiness inside me" (Cisneros 383). She is happy with Ernesto, but, in loving him, in seeking to be only what he desires her to be, she has forgotten who she really is and, therefore, she feels inadequate to express all that she wants to say. Later, this will lead to trouble and, eventually, when Ernesto leaves her, Celaya says, "I'm as evil as Eve" (Cisneros 387), demonstrating that she has finally succumbed to the ideas society has pressed upon her, hating her body and her sexuality. Here, as in each of these novels, we can see that once a woman comes fully under the male gaze, she begins to see herself in a negative light, evil, ugly and misshapen. She will now forget the freedom of her youth, forget her own dreams and instead seek to become what society tells her she must be.

### **A Room of One's Own Becomes a Prison**

Cisneros, Danticat, Atwood, and Pullman each express frustration through their characters, representing the need for the development of personal identity through feelings of imprisonment within the body. After puberty sets in for their characters, these authors begin to speak through their characters of a longing for freedom, just as the poets of the 19<sup>th</sup> century previously did. As described in the previous chapter, this longing is for a place to think, to be alone, to be wholly oneself, or, as Virginia Woolf put it, the longing for a room of one's own.

When speaking of women authors such as Austen and Bronte, Woolf notes the lack of respect and privacy women were accorded. She says, “If a woman wrote, she would have to write in the common sitting-room. And, as Miss Nightingale was so vehemently to complain, – ‘women never have an half hour...that they can call their own’ – she was always interrupted” (602). Woolf claimed this lack of privacy and peace, along with society’s negative view of women writers, had a negative impact on the writing they produced. “She will write in a rage where she should write calmly. She will write foolishly where she should write wisely” (Woolf 603). How can a woman accomplish anything worthwhile if she does not have a space to call her own?

Today, this idea of a room of one’s own can also be applied to the body, as these women may have a room of their own, but they do not have a body of their own. Danticat notes this when she speaks through Sophie’s Tante Atie, saying, “Your mother and I, when we were children we had no control over anything. Not even this body” (20). This lack of control leads to the need for the soul to be free from the body and, when that need is denied, the longing for escape is expressed through a longing for a place of peace.

These authors express the fact that society, with its emphasis on appearance and perfection, has appropriated the body. Society has taken our bodies from us, turned our flesh into a cage, and forced our youth to seek escape from the ever-watching world. Atwood writes, “Last year I was hardly ever home, by myself, after school or on weekends. Now I want to be” (Atwood 128). Sophie, before she mutilates herself, also experiences a similar lack of privacy. Her mother tells her, “‘You’re not going to be alone,’ she said, ‘I’m never going to be further than a few feet away. Do you understand that?’” (Danticat 46). Later she adds, “‘I will never let

you go again” (Danticat 49). These words, meant to be a comfort, instead become a harbinger of the very thing Sophie would seek to escape.

Likewise, for Celaya, the constant presence of her family becomes overwhelming, and the desire to be alone with her own thoughts, her own emotions, is all consuming:

To wake up sad and go to sleep sad. Sleep a place they can't find you. A place you can go to be alone...It's a way of being with yourself, of privacy in a house that doesn't want you to be private, a world where no one wants to be alone and no one could understand *why* you would *want* to be alone...That's enough sleep...People drag you like a drowned body dragged water-sodden from a river. Force you to talk when you don't feel like it...  
(Cisneros 364)

Celaya wants peace and quiet, a place to think and a place to be outside of society's constraints. In adolescence, before society forced them within the gaze, a girl's body was her room, a place for her soul to rest after flying free, but, once she has become a woman, the body is a cage, forever holding her within the world's view. The world will not look away again until she has reached old age.

### **Letting Go Again**

Aging is one thing that women are taught to be afraid of because “in the West, we live in an age-fearing society” (Greene 92). Aging will steal your looks and will make you invisible, for if a woman is not looked at, who is she? “Elderly women are invisible, not only in the media but also in the pages of many feminist texts” (Greene 144). As we age, we are conditioned to believe that we will be considered less beautiful and, therefore, less likely to attract attention.

As the gaze of the world shifts away, many women become fearful. Atwood writes, “I’m verging on grubbiness. *Letting yourself go* is an alarming notion: it is said of older women who become frowzy and fat, and of things that are sold cheap. Of course there is something to it. I am letting myself go” (295). This letting go is something that had always terrified her as a child, much as growing up had seemed a terrifying thing:

I haven’t thought much about grown-up women’s bodies before. But now these bodies are revealed in their true, upsetting light: alien and bizarre, hair, squishy, monstrous... This frightens us. Whatever happened to them [these women], softening them, causing them to walk rather than run, as if there’s some invisible leash around their necks, holding them in check – whatever it is, it may happen to us too. (Atwood 97)

Cisneros discusses aging in terms of death, noting the effects it has on the body, “The body takes its time dying. It starts rotting from the inside out, like a tree filled with worms. A horrible smell like a dead rat stuck in the wall.... That’s the horror of the body giving up, just giving up, and the nuisance of that collapse, gradual and steady” (Cisneros 342). Here, Cisneros acknowledges the fear and disgust that is often associated with death, and, by association, aging. For these authors, however, there is also something else that occurs as one ages, and that is a return to the spirit and the recovered ability to exist outside of the confines of the body.

This second view of aging is also discussed by Greene. She notes that while it was previously believed that menopause was a kind of partial death, our views are changing:

Although the general perception of the middle-aged or menopausal woman is negative, women’s actual experience at this stage of life can be positive. Valory Mitchell and Ravenna Helson (1990) argue that in their sample of US college

graduates aged 26 to 80, women in their early fifties were the most satisfied with life. (92)

This shift in ideas is presented in *The Golden Compass* by the witches, who are beautiful and alluring, and are also old. “I am three hundred years or more. Our oldest witch mother is nearly a thousand” (Pullman 314). Additionally, we see this positive view represented in *Cat’s Eye* when Elaine sees two older women on a plane:

They seem to me amazingly carefree. They have saved up for this trip and they are damn well going to enjoy it, despite the arthritis of one, the swollen legs of the other. They’re rambunctious, they’re full of beans; they’re tough as thirteen, they’re innocent and dirty, they don’t give a hoot. Responsibilities have fallen away from them, obligations, old hates and grievances; now for a short while they can play again like children, but this time without the pain. (Atwood 445)

Here, we see that aging can be viewed in a positive light as well, and often brings its own benefits. In these novels, it also signifies a return of the ability to leave the body.

When Elaine returns to Toronto after years of absence, she becomes aware of her own aging process and recalls her earlier fears. She says, “But since coming back here I don’t feel weightier. I feel lighter, as if I’m shedding matter, losing molecules, calcium from my bones, cells from my blood; as if I’m shrinking, as if I’m filling with cold air, or gently falling snow” (Atwood 13). Here, we see that as a woman ages, she is able to become separated from her body. In a way, it makes sense, as many believe that our soul lives on after the body dies and that there is a permanent separation of the two. For these authors, however, there also seems to be a significant connection between the aging process and the removal of a woman from the male gaze.

For Celaya's Grandmother, Soledad, the aging process, and even death, is freeing:

The Grandmother only became visible when her body changed and garnered the trophy of men's attentions... And then when she was no longer vain and cared about taking care of herself, she began to disappear... In her forties she was most acutely aware of this shift of herself... and there was some relief to that, some calmness as if a knife had been put away. Now that she was ill, with her breathing heavy and her consciousness rising and falling, she became aware of that familiar feeling of shedding her body once again... She was turning invisible. (Cisneros 347)

Although again we see the negative word "invisible" associated with an older woman, there seems to be a release also associated with this. No longer worrying about the world's opinion, Soledad feels relief. It is as if she is finally free from a confining gaze. Here, Cisneros has noted not only the male gaze that affected Soledad, but also the freedom that the shifting of that gaze brought with it. Even though she is dying, she is also able to feel the freedom that comes with the shedding of her body.

Although this shedding was something that both Elaine and Soledad once feared, Cisneros points out pleasant release in positive terms:

That's what she felt now as she was dying and her life was letting her go. A salt water warmth of well-being. The water lifting her and herself floating out from her life. A dissolving and a becoming all at once. It filled her with such emotion, she stopped thrashing about and let herself float out of her body, out of that anchor her life, let herself become nothing, let herself become everything little and large, great and small, important and unassuming... Everything, everything.

Wise, delicate, simple, obscure. And it was good and joyous and blessed.

(Cisneros 348)

Here, death is described as a peaceful occurrence; however, not many of us would choose death as the final escape if we had any other options. Indeed, this seems a grim outlook. Waiting for death in order to be rid of containment certainly does not seem like the best option. Fortunately, these authors seem to suggest that it is not our only choice.

### **Fixing the Problem**

If it is our imprisonment within the gaze that leads to this entrapment within the body, then how does one escape? Is it possible for women to lead a fulfilled life in which they do not feel restrained within their own bodies? It would seem that the authors of these novels believe so. As Greene said, for women, “far less attention therefore is given to her finding her own identity, or, to paraphrase Levinson, becoming her own woman, finding a job or retiring” (79). This idea of identity seems to be one that has been adopted by these authors, whether consciously or unconsciously, as the solution to the problem. If girls can seek out their own identity, their own voice, and seek to help others locate theirs, then perhaps we can escape the one imposed upon us by society.

In *The Golden Compass*, this solution can be found in the witches. They are special, different from the others in Lyra’s world. Only women can be witches, only women have their powers. One of the abilities they have is the ability to separate more fully from their bodies than even the others in their world. “The witches have the power to separate their selves from their dæmons...If need be, they can send their dæmons far abroad on the wink or the clouds, or down

below the ocean” (Pullman 164). In this way, they escape the pain that Lyra and her friends experience when their daemons get too far from them.

In addition, they have another ability that is even greater – the ability to be true to themselves. When discussing the sacrifices made in order to survive, the witch Serafina Pekkala says, “A witch would no sooner give up flying than give up breathing. To fly is to be perfectly ourselves” (Pullman 309). The witches are able to do what it seems we are often unable to accomplish– be their selves. They also refuse to let themselves be controlled and manipulated by the world, “How could you insult a witch? What would it matter if you did?” and always look out for each other’s interests, “If a witch needs something, another witch will give it to her” (Pullman 309). Here, it is suggested that women should fight the idea of acting according to the restrictions placed on them by others and should assist other women as they attempt to do the same.

This ideal is echoed throughout the novels presented here. In addition, there seems to be an outline for the ways to accomplish this. First, women must confront their past and move beyond it. Elaine returns to the bridge where she nearly died in order to confront the demons of her past. Like Celaya, she cannot return from the Red Rubicon; there is no going back, but she can move forward by confronting the past. When there, she imagines she once again sees Cordelia, the instigator of her pain. “I know she’s looking at me, the lopsided mouth smiling a little, the face closed and defiant. There is the same shame, the sick feeling in my body, the same knowledge of my own wrongness, awkwardness, weakness; the same wish to be loved; the same loneliness; the same fear. But these are not my own emotions any more. They are Cordelia’s; as they always were” (443).

A woman must remain true to herself and to the women around her. In this way, she will gain and keep her identity and retain control of herself and her body. Celaya accomplishes this by doing as her Grandmother asks, “You’ll tell my story, won’t you, Celaya? So that I’ll be understood?” (Cisneros 408). And, though her father tells her not to, though the world tells her to be silent, Celaya speaks. She tells the story of her Grandmother, her mother, her aunts, and herself. In so doing, she owns herself again.

Danticat speaks of this in the Afterword of *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, through a letter to Sophie:

Your body is now being asked to represent a larger space than your flesh. You are being asked, I have been told, to represent every girl child, every woman from this land that you and I love so much...I have always taken for granted that this story which is yours, and only yours, would be read as such...And so I write this to you now, Sophie, as I write it to myself, praying that the singularity of your experience be allowed to exist, along with your own peculiarities, inconsistencies, your own voice. (236)

Through this letter, Danticat is telling women to keep their voices, to speak aloud about who they are, what they have experienced and, in so doing, to help each other. For her, it is never too late to start, even if one has a rough start. Sophie’s mother tells her, “You and I, we started wrong...we are allowed to start again” (Danticat 162).

So it would seem that these authors are telling us to do as Helen Cixous urged us to do so long ago, to write our bodies, to follow Virginia Woolf’s urging and kill the angel in the house who urges us to be what we are told we must be and to look to others who have come before us to show us the way. For, even though they may be flawed, these women who first began to write

are like the stars Elaine speaks of at the end of her story, “It’s old light, and there’s not much of it. But it’s enough to see by” (Atwood 445).

## Chapter 5: Conclusions and Further Research

This thesis has sought to demonstrate the motif of women and bodily separation as a reaction to the pressures of society and the male gaze. Attention has been given to the ways in which authors have chosen to represent this separation, whether female characters were divided into good and bad, as in the Victorian era, or into body and soul, as in today's works. The motivations of these authors have been discussed, as can be interpreted through the texts and through critical essays that discuss topics relating to these issues. The main focus has, however, been on the reasons why this motif has been employed, and that reason always circles back to the struggle that women face between what they *ought* to be and what they actually *are*. For example, when women are expected to be good and kind, female authors will use this motif to give voice to the part of them that does not fit properly into that mold. If a woman becomes objectified into nothing more than a pretty face, then female authors will seek to give voice to the part of them that cannot be seen and may not be all that attractive. In all ways, these authors seem to be screaming out to their readers, "There is more to women than meets the eye. What you see is not *all* you get." These authors are not, as some may claim, expressing a hatred of the body, though they may be expressing a disconnection between what the world claims they are and what really exists.

Although this thesis has looked in depth at several novels that employ this motif, this is in no way a comprehensive study of the topic. Countless other novels also express this idea of bodily separation. In addition, there is more that can be studied regarding this motif of bodily separation as it relates to women. What follows are suggestions for further avenues of study that may increase our understanding of this motif.

## Further Research

### Aging

The representation of aging women in literature is an area that deserves further investigation. As discussed, society often regards aging with a sense of fear, especially in women. For example, women who reach retirement age often worry about their new place in the world, and this worry can often be exacerbated by the lack of identity development that Greene argues is a problem for many. If a woman was taught to focus not on identity development, but on looks alone, then what happens when age steals beauty? This crisis of identity is often what leads to a feeling of disappearance or invisibility. This removal from the gaze has both negative and positive side effects. The authors presented here seem to be interested in this phenomenon, and it is my contention that representations of aging in literature deserve further investigation.

One avenue that deserves further examinations concerns the idea of disappearing or becoming invisible. Cisneros, for one, seems use the word “invisible” to describe not a negative disappearance but a positive escape accompanied by new knowledge. In fact, it is interesting to note that *each* of these four novels presents a positive view of older women. In *The Golden Compass*, the witches are venerated for their wisdom and considered sexually desirable, while the older women in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* present a picture of safety and stability. In *Cat’s Eye*, Elaine finds a picture of happiness in the friendship of two elderly women, and it is only after her grandmother reaches an old age and passes on that Celaya is able to connect with her ghost. In each case, these women possess wisdom that younger women lack. As such, they are able to teach valuable lessons to those who are willing to listen.

Further research into this topic should be conducted in order to discover what emotions the authors who create these older female characters are expressing. Expressions of fear should

be compared to the relief and freedom that is felt when one is free from the male gaze. These representations should be analyzed according to their authors as well. For example, how do these expressions of fear and relief regarding aging differ based on the age of the author? Do young authors write older characters differently from a more mature author? A look at this topic could reveal some interesting insights.

### **Horror Movies**

The horror movie genre has been studied at length with regard to the male gaze and the objectification of women. Perhaps it then comes as no surprise that the motif of bodily separation occurs within this medium. Movies such as *Silent Hill* and *An American Haunting* both employ this motif to tell their stories.

In *An American Haunting*, a family is terrorized by a ghostly apparition. Most affected is the daughter, Betsy. Violent nighttime visitations are paired with the sighting of a pre-adolescent girl, along with a recurring voice urging Betsy to *remember*. In the climactic finale, it is revealed that the ghostly apparition is in fact a piece of Betsy's own soul, killed by the father who raped her. This movie relates to our topic not only through the separation of body and soul, but also through repeated references to the loss of youth and innocence inflicted upon Betsy. The girl who haunts her is a symbol of her pre-adolescent self who was killed by the rape. This fits the mold for this motif as it has been discussed in this thesis.

Another such movie is the gory and violent *Silent Hill*, based upon a previously released video game. In this movie, a young girl, also on the cusp of womanhood, experiences nightmares that cause her to walk in her sleep. When her adoptive mother takes her to seek out the source of her nightmares, they find a city that is terrorized by an evil entity. Just as in *An American Haunting*, it is revealed that the dark spirit is in fact a part of the girl's soul that died when

fanatical members of the town tried to destroy the girl's physical body. In this case, part of the girl's soul has left the body and taken on its own physical form, literally splitting the young girl into two beings, one good and one evil

These are two examples of movies that utilize this motif in different ways. In *Silent Hill*, the bodily separation is represented in a way that closely mirrors those presented in Gothic literature, where the division is between good and evil, as well as body and soul. In *An American Haunting*, the division is closer to that represented in modern literature, where the out-of-body experience is utilized as a method of protection and a reaction to trauma.

This topic is interesting and deserving of further research because it represents an evolution of the horror movie genre. Traditionally, horror movies are said to be male centered, where the female character is merely a prop or object to be manipulated according to male fantasies. What, then, does this new development suggest? These women, who are demonstrating a centuries old motif, are no longer one-dimensional and flat but strong and fully developed. Again, as in the literature, there is more to these women than meets the eye and they are presented in a more active and less passive manner. What has brought about these changes? Why is this motif now being used in this genre? Is there something that is accomplished through this motif that cannot be accomplished otherwise? Further research should be conducted in order to answer questions such as these.

### **Male Authors/Characters**

The final suggestion for further research is perhaps one of the most interesting: the developing use of this motif by male authors. For the purposes of this thesis, only female characters were analyzed, as this motif seems strongly utilized by females as they attempt to gain control of the body that the male world appropriated. None of this research should suggest,

however, that male authors have never used a motif such as this in their own writing. For example, *Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson utilized this motif to describe the good and evil that lies within all men. Nonetheless, I would argue that this motif, as it is used by male authors, has begun to mutate from what it once was into something else entirely. Today, we are beginning to see male authors use this motif with increasing regularity and in ways that resemble more and more the ways in which it has been previously utilized by females: as a reaction to a restrictive societal gaze.

If we again consider Greene's comments that consumerism has begun to play a large part in the objectification of women, we can then consider that men are now affected by this as well. Whereas women were once expected to be the ones who worried about their appearance, we can now see that the media has begun to target men as well. Commercials directed towards a male audience are no longer exclusively pushing cars and hyper-masculine imagery but have begun to sell body sprays, hair gels and dyes. Women were once the main target for beauty products, but now more and more companies are shifting their focus to men. With this new trend has come an increased emphasis on male appearance, as well as the negative consequences that go along with bodily objectification. Anorexia and bulimia among males is on the rise. With this in mind, I would again suggest that the term "male gaze" should evolve to reflect this evolution. It would seem that our literature already has.

The movie *Fight Club*, adapted from Chuck Palahniuk's novel, deals with this shift. In *Fight Club*, the nameless hero meets Tyler Durden and, together, the two of them form a Fight Club to combat what they see as a de-masculinizing world. Quotes from the movie seem to agree with Greene's comments on society's impact on self-esteem:

Advertising has us chasing cars and clothes, working jobs we hate so we can buy shit we don't need. We're the middle children of history, man. No purpose or place.... We've all been raised on television to believe that one day we'd all be millionaires, and movie gods, and rock stars. But we won't. And we're slowly learning that fact. And we're very, very pissed off. (Fight Club)

This statement illustrates some of the same concerns that have affected women. When society tells you what you should be or feel and sets impossible standards, discontent follows. In this case, the main character creates an alternate personality in the form of Tyler Durden— a hyper masculine form of what he wishes he could be. Tyler says, “All the ways you wish you could be, that's me. I look like you wanna look, I fuck like you wanna fuck, I am smart, capable, and most importantly, I am free in all the ways that you are not” (Fight Club). This quote demonstrates the same motif that has been discussed throughout this thesis! Much like Jane Eyre, the main character is separated into two bodies, one that is what he should be and one that acts out his inappropriate, often violent, desires.

As media pressure continues to grow, we can again argue that the male gaze has grown into something that affects not only women, but men as well. This is a trend that deserves further investigation as it seems that male authors are beginning to express the same sort of anxiety over their bodies as women. Research should be done to see in what ways men are using this motif to describe male anxieties. What anxieties are the same among genders? Which are different? How has this motif been adapted? When did this adaptation begin? Further research could locate and assist in dealing with these new anxieties by giving a clear picture of the ways in which they affect men.

## Conclusion

In summarizing this research, one final observation should be made about the four novels analyzed from today's literature – the appearance of the photograph and the power it possesses. In each of these novels, mention is made of pictures – and the revealing power they possess. In *Caramelo*, it is what is not in the photo that is important. When looking at a picture of her grandfather, Celaya is able to spot an invisible presence in the picture that seems to haunt the photo: the presence of her Grandfather's mistress. In *Cat's Eye*, photos of Elaine as a child, capture her in a carefree moment before her hellish descent into puberty. *Breath, Eyes, Memory* makes mention of the fact that pictures can capture a soul, and *The Golden Compass* uses photographs to reveal the magical difference between children and adults. In each case, the photograph is a tool for truth telling, a way to look at what is really there, even beyond the physical.

The literature discussed here has done the same. What has emerged through the centuries of writing is a picture of women as they really are – their fears, their frustrations, their hopes, and their dreams – as they attempt to cope with society's pressure. Through these writings, we have a photograph that tells of the disconnect that is often felt between the body and soul, but we also have a picture of the need women feel to express that hidden and unidentifiable part of themselves that can only be expressed in the terms of the invisible and the untouchable. These authors are expressing something that is immortal, and it is this immortality that allows these women, both authors and characters, to continue to share the story of their greatest hopes and fears with women today.

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