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Submissions

This periodical is only as substantial as the material it contains: therefore, we more than welcome any contributions that members of the academic community might wish to make. Articles we would be most interested in publishing include those addressing Romantic literary studies with an especial slant on book history, textual and bibliographical studies, the literary marketplace and the publishing world, and so forth. Papers of 5–8,000 words should be submitted by the beginning of April or October in order to make the next issue, if accepted. Any of the usual electronic formats (e.g. RTF, Microsoft Word, WordPerfect, HTML) are acceptable, either by post or e-mail. Submissions should be sent to Dr Anthony Mandal, Centre for Editorial and Intertextual Research, ENCAP, Cardiff University, PO Box 94, Cardiff CF10 3XB, Wales (UK), *mandal@cardiff.ac.uk*.

Writing for the Spectre of Poverty
Exhuming Sarah Wilkinson's Bluebooks and Novels

Franz Potter

I

In 1803, a curious account was appended to a short Gothic tale that appeared in the *Tell-Tale Magazine*; it was published anonymously and narrated the distressing and dismal 'Life of an Authoress, Written by Herself'. It was published as a

> warning [to] every indigent woman, who is troubled with the itch of scribbling, to beware of my unhappy fate […] and beg her to take this advice; that, whatever share of learning or wit she may have, if she has nothing better to recommend her to public favour, she must be content to hunger and thirst all her days in a garret, as I have done.[1]

The unfortunate 'authoress', after a series of distressing circumstances, had found herself alone in London and determined to subsist as a writer of novels. Reduced to her last five guineas, by 'scribbling night and day' she finished a four-volume novel. She approached a bookseller, but the naïve 'authoress' was greatly shocked at his terse response:

> A novel! Nothing of this kind is *now* read, I assure you. Novels are a drug; a mere drug: they are as dead a weight upon our hands as *sermons*. Surely, Madam, you must know that this kind of writing is perfectly exploded! No such things are read now-a-days. (p. 32)

Distressed to the find the novel out of fashion and further reduced to poverty, the authoress is compelled to

> undertake the most slavish of all employments, that of translating […] for the booksellers. The life of a galley-slave is even preferable to my state of slavery: I am a beggar, without enjoying air and liberty: I have the confinement of a servant, with the regular diet and wages which a servant receives, and am condemned to perform a severe task, by a certain period of time, which, when with the utmost difficulty it is performed, I am often obliged to transcribe the whole work again […] To add to my distresses, I have written myself almost blind, with continually poring on the old authors I have been so long engaged with; and have, besides, from the constant posture of writing, contracted a disorder in my

> lungs, which, I imagine, will soon put an end to a life of pain and misery. (pp. 33–34)

The 'authoress', concluding her own tale, admonishes other women to 'apply themselves sooner to the *spinning-wheel*, than the *pen*, that they may not be pining, with hunger and cold, in a wretched garret' (p. 34). The 'authoress' in this case was Sarah Wilkinson and her life and texts illustrate the unique diversification of Gothic fiction that occurred during the first three decades of the nineteenth century. Her vast output of varied fiction—some twenty-nine volumes and above a hundred smaller publications—illustrates the demanding conditions 'trade' authors, who produced fiction as part of a profitable industry rather than an art form, endured living by the pen.[2]

Born on 14 December 1779 to William and Hannah Wilkinson, Sarah Carr Wilkinson, like many of her contemporaries including Eliza Parsons, Charlotte Smith and Frances Burney, 'lived by the pen'; but unlike these authors, she never had the comfort of literary or economic success. Her life was unmistakably difficult and fraught with hardship and illness. Little is known about Wilkinson's early life or education, apart from that she was 'selected by Mrs. [Frances] Fielding as one of the young persons who read to her mother Lady C[harlotte] Finch when deprived of sight'.[3] Charlotte Finch (1725–1813), daughter of Thomas Fermor, Earl of Pomfret, was the Governess of the children of King George III between 1762 and 1792. The relationship between Wilkinson and the Pomfrets would indeed last throughout her long life; many of her works are dedicated to members of that family. However, the publication of three textbooks for schools strongly suggests that she was well educated and was perhaps a governess or educator.[4]

Sarah Wilkinson's literary career began in 1803 with several short works appearing in Ann Lemoine's *Tell-Tale Magazine*, a periodical specialising in short stories that were simultaneously sold as bluebooks: typical examples include *The Subterraneous Passage; or the Gothic Cell* and *Lord Gowen; or, the Forester's Daughter*. Robert Mayo, in *The English Novel in the Magazines 1740–1815*, speculates that the amount of 'short stories' published by Wilkinson in the *Tell-Tale* suggests that she was actually the 'editor' of the magazine, though there is little evidence beyond an extraordinary production of sixteen 'tales' to substantiate this claim.[5] Between 1803 and 1806 she published at least sixteen bluebooks with Lemoine including *Horatio and Camilla: Or, the Nuns of St Mary* (1804) and *The Water Spectre; or, An Bratach* (1805); most of these bluebooks, but not all, appeared in the *Tell-Tale Magazine*. However, Wilkinson's literary relationship with Lemoine was not exclusive, and she simultaneously published at least nine bluebooks with five other publishers: for example, *The Ghost of Golini; or, the Malignant Relative. A Domestic Tale* (1820) was published by Simon Fisher; *Zittaw the Cruel: Or, the Woodman's Daughter* [n.d.] with Mace; *Monkcliffe Abbey* (1805) with Kaygill; *The Spectre; or, the Ruins of Belfont Priory* (1806) with J. Ker; and *John Bull; or the Englishman's Fire-side* (1803) with Thomas Hughes.

Sarah Wilkinson, however, did not confine herself entirely to bluebooks. In 1806 she published *The Thatched Cottage; or, Sorrows of Eugenia, a Novel* by subscription with Thomas Hughes. The novel is dedicated to Mrs Frances Fielding (1748–1815) and the subscribers include the Princesses Sophia (1777–1848) and Amelia (1783–1810), the Duchess of Gloucester, the Margravine of Anspach, Lady Mary Coke (to whom Horace Walpole inscribed the sonnet which fronts *The Castle of Otranto* (1764)), Lady Crespigny, the Right Honourable Earl of Pomfret, and perhaps, most intriguingly, a Mr Scadgell.

The financial success of the her first novel enabled Wilkinson to commence in the library business in Westminster at No. 2 Smith-Street; and the following year she gave birth to a daughter Amelia Scadgell, though it is unclear whether or not she married Mr Scadgell. It was about this time when the name on many of her publications began to appear as Sarah Scudgell Wilkinson. There is no proof that the misspelling of her name, however, was an attempt to use a pseudonym. Many of her works which appear with Scudgell are published by Dean & Munday; other publishers did not adopt the middle name.[6] Achieving relative success with her library, Wilkinson continued to publish novels including *The Fugitive Countess; or, the Convent of St Ursula, a Romance* (1807), *The Child of Mystery, a Novel* (1808), and *the Convent of the Grey Penitents; or, the Apostate Nun, a Romance* (1810). The modest success of her novels, however, was offset by the failure of the library sometime after 1811; to survive, Wilkinson was compelled to take lodgers into her home, an arrangement which lasted some years 'till overwhelmed with losses by lodgers due to sickness and domestic troubles', she returned to teaching and living by the pen (RLF, 10 February 1824).

Wilkinson began teaching at the White Chapel Free School on Gower Walk, sometime after 1812; and writing for periodical publications ('Torbolton Abbey' in *New Gleaner* in 1810), and only occasionally publishing Gothic bluebooks such as *Priory of St Clair; or, Spectre of the Murdered Nun* (1811) and *Edward and Agnes* (1812), both with Arliss. After 1812, however, she began to exclusively focus on writing children's books; these included

> a vast number of books, of which she can pretend no merit but their moral tendency amongst the later ones, are local geography, William's Tour, or, a peep into numbers, Jack and his Grandmother, or, Pounds, Shillings, and Pence, Moral Emblems, Aunt Anne's Gift, Mary and her Doll, or, the new A, B, C, and the whole forming a set for the nursery and may be purchased at Mr. Bailey's 116 Chancy Lane [...] (RLF, 15 November 1820)

In 1819, Wilkinson returned to the Gothic, publishing the novel *The Bandit of Florence* (re-titled *New Tales* (1819) by the publisher Matthew Iley). That same year, on the recommendation of a Mrs Lovell, the Headmistress of the White Chapel Free School, she was engaged to be the 'Mistress of the [Free] School at Bray in Berkshire, at a very good salary, coach and a house to live in and my child to be with me and expect to be sent for with every prospect of being comfortable for life' (RLF, 1819). But her health, which had been steadily

declining since 1816, forced her to resign just nine months later; cancer had developed under her right arm.

Wilkinson returned to Westminster in May of 1820, but deprived of a constant income, she again turned to the pen, publishing at least seven bluebooks, four Valentine Readers,[7] serving 'several persons regularly with periodical publications and some small shops with small books wholesale which is at present until I can get some employment to occupy my time and only means of subsistence' (RLF, 15 November 1820) and also publishing *Lanmere Abbey*, in two volumes, re-titled *The Spectre of Lanmere Abbey; or, the Mystery of the Blue and Silver Bag, a Romance* (1820) with William Mason. Later that year she opened a parlour which sold small books and pictures for children (RLF, 15 November 1820), but found it increasingly difficult to procure books and almanacs. The small profits from sales were barely enough to support herself and Amelia.

In March 1821, however, Wilkinson's desperate situation was somewhat alleviated; she was engaged by the publishers Dean & Munday to 'conduct' a part of the *Lady's Monthly Museum*. Her small parlour, though, continued to fail, and in a letter to the Royal Literary Fund she bitterly lamented that she was not 'able to earn enough by a business I follow independent of my pen to procure the most common necessaries of life' (RLF, March 1821). In June she lost both her business and her home and was again forced to support herself with regular periodical publications, bluebooks and Valentine Readers. For the next decade, she had no permanent home, but was forced to occupy boarding houses.

Unfortunately, Wilkinson's difficulties only continued to increase, an accident of a shutter blowing in high wind, which broke two segments of glass, causing an unexpected debt of one pound nine. Unable to pay, she was summoned to court, and advised to 'expect nothing else but confinement and to be taken from [her] home and Daughter' (RLF, 12 December 1821). In desperation she again petitioned the Royal Literary Fund for assistance, but they twice rejected her plea. Increasingly frantic, she sought out a former patron, Lord Pomfret, who interceded on her behalf with two letters, but only upon receipt of a letter from her daughter Amelia Scadgell did the Royal Literary Fund vote her two pounds.

But as Wilkinson's ill health continued, more for the want of necessities (proper food, clothes and medical attention), than from illness, she persisted in writing bluebooks, short pieces for periodicals, children books and 'moral' novels. Unable, however, to support herself, she complained:

> I have not the least income for me and my child and my only certain dependence half a guinea a month derived from the Ladys Monthly magazine, called the Museum, repeated confinement from illness during the last twelvemonths has not only rendered my poverty more severe, but compelled me to part with my wearing apparel,

> also expecting every hour my few remaining goods to be seized for arrears of rent [...] (RLF, 11 December 1822)

Her distress, however, was further increased as she was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1824 and forced to write, once again, to the Royal Literary Fund for assistance, this time for an operation at the Westminster Hospital. Augmenting her misfortune, her new manuscript entitled *The Baronet Widow*, in three volumes, had not yet been published—

> a novel but of strict moral tendency dedicated by permission to Lord Pomfret, and having several copies of his Lordship and other noble families I have fair prospect from the produce should God think it proper to spare my life to be enabled once more to commence in the Book trade—the failure of a Bookseller with whom I had made arrangements has caused a fatal delay to me, of at least two or three months but it is now placed at a most respectable house. (RLF, 14 January 1824)

These unfortunate circumstances combined to compel Wilkinson to solicit actively the support of her publishers in obtaining assistance from the Royal Literary Fund. Most of her applications after 1824 were endorsed by individual publishers and two separate letters were subsequently included in her petitions:

> The Publishers & c. c. whose names are Undersigned begs permission to recommend to the consideration of the Honourable Society that confers the Literary Fund, Mrs. Sarah Scudgell [*sic*] Wilkinson as a deserving Unfortunate individual, deprest by a long and increasing illness, and the poverty attending thereon. Also esteeming her worth their notice, from her Abilities and general deportment while in their occasional employ as a writer of Original works, Abridgements, c. c.
>
> Dean and Munday, G. Martin, Hughes, Dimanche.
>
> (RLF, 1824)

The obliging publishers included a Mr E. Langley (whom she had known for eighteen years), Thomas Hughes, George Martin, Dimanche, and Dean & Munday—all of whom continually supported Wilkinson's application, specifically underlining her illness and poverty. Another intervention, this time by Dr Holland and Sir James Mackintosh, assisted in placing her daughter Amelia with a Lady residing in Henley on Thames (RLF, 14 January 1824).[8]

During 1825 Wilkinson's cancer worsened, and frustration mounted at continued delay in the publishing of her novel. The same publishers sent another letter of support to the Royal Literary Fund, not only underlining her illness, but emphasising the decline in the bluebook industry.

> Gentleman, The undersigned Publishers beg to recommend to your consideration Sarah Scudgell Wilkinson as a respectable industrious person of considerable abilities who has been occasionally employed by us during a long series of past years but latterly owing

> to the introduction of a small period works in which no original matter is required the line of literature in which she principally engaged has been completely stagnated which has materially tended to increase her distress.
>
> Signed: Mr. Langley, Hughes (35 Ludgate) and Dean and Munday.

Wilkinson's applications increasingly point to the significant decline in the general book trade and the distress this induces: 'I need not point out to you that the depression in the Book trade and consequently scantiness of employ in Juvenile works has been great […] *Forsake me and* I *perish*' (RLF, 12 December 1825). Her application was again endorsed by Dean & Munday and George Martin. Once more, she attempted to find work outside of the book trade, taking embroidery lessons, in the hope that it would eventually enable her to procure a more substantial subsistence.

However, the state of Wilkinson's health continued to decline between 1826 and 1827; she underwent two more operations at St George's Hospital. During these difficult times she was 'chiefly employed in poetry for the composers of music which I have derived small endowments' (RLF, 8 January 1828). That same year the consequences of the 1826 book trade crisis cost Wilkinson her one constant employment:

> she long conducted a part of the Ladies Museum a magazine published by Dean and Munday, Threadneedle (for a series of years) and by its discontinuation was denied of a Guinea a month which added to the stagnation of trade and the introduction of cheap periodicals where no original matter is required has materially tended along with her personal afflictions to a state of poverty she did not in the least anticipate […] (RLF, 12 Februrary 1828)

In her last application to the Royal Literary Fund in 1830, Wilkinson was overwhelmed by illness and poverty, 'incapable of procuring the merest trifling employment', but had recently finished *The Curator's Son* 'a novel of moral and improving tendency' (RLF, 12 April 1830).[9] It was endorsed by Dean & Munday, E. Langley, George Martin and Mrs Wellington (her landlady, to whom she owed three months' rent). Sometime after April 1830, destitute and ailing, Sarah Wilkinson became a resident of St Margaret's Workhouse, Westminster. She died 19 March 1831, aged fifty-two. In 'The Life of an Authoress', written twenty-eight years earlier, Wilkinson had once expressed the fond hope that a hospital for 'decayed' authors would be established:

> I remember to have read in a periodical paper, some years ago, a proposal for building an hospital for decayed authors, which gave me real satisfaction; as I was in hopes some part of so charitable an institution might perhaps be appropriated to the relief of decayed authoresses likewise. If the aged, the sick, and the blind, are universally esteemed objects of compassion, how much more so are those who have so intensely used their understanding for the

> benefit of others, that they are thereby rendered unfit for every self pursuit! How many sublime geniuses (as a celebrated writer remarks) do we daily see, who have so long feasted their minds with pierian delicacies, as to leave their bodies to perish with hunger and nakedness (p. 28).

For Sarah Wilkinson, living by the pen was not only financially fraught, but physically burdensome. She continually sought to break away from living by the pen, whether it was through teaching, running a library, a parlour, or the needle: the pen never brought the financial reward or personal success she had so desired.

II

The Bluebooks

Sarah Wilkinson is primarily remembered as the author of well over one hundred 'short tales', chapbooks, or bluebooks, at least fifty of those, Gothic. The majority of these bluebooks were composed between 1803 and 1812; and, after 1820, published with at least twenty-five publishers. Wilkinson's most important attribute as a bluebooker was the ability to construct clear and simple story lines free from dense subplotting that often encumbered Gothic novels. Her bluebooks are derived from a mixture of Lewisite horror and Radcliffean terror with equal proficiency and familiarity with both branches of Gothic fiction. What Wilkinson does is to blend the pleasing aesthetics and the enticing suspension of terror found in Radcliffe and the rapidity of horrifying shocks distinctive of Lewis. Her heroes and heroines are archetypal Radcliffe: not only are they noble, they are sensitive; prone to appreciate the aesthetics of ruins, quick to haughtily dismiss any suggestions of the supernatural; nevertheless, they are predictably positioned in a Lewisite landscape of spectres and blood. Her stories, though, never divest themselves of the genteel trappings of the Gothic in favour of gratuitous horror. In *The Spectre; or, the Ruin of Belfont Priory* (1806), for instance, it is the noble Theodore Montgomery and Matilda Maxwell, compelled to reside in the haunted Belfont priory, who are confronted by two horrific, albeit noble, spectres, yet the hapless Harmina in *The Castle of Montabino; or, the Orphan Sister*s (1809), the daughter of a jeweller, though confined to a turret, never sees a ghost. In *The Mysterious Novice; or, Convent of the Grey Penitents* (1809),[10] for example, the narrative is clear and compelling, nevertheless, it possesses an overwrought, abbreviated style and a simple clichéd setting. However, this example does not justify the common complaint that 'horror in all of the shilling shockers is rapid, crude, and where Sarah Wilkinson's bloody pen is involved,—an arrant act of Gothic plundering'.[11]

On the contrary, Wilkinson's handling of horrific wandering spectres (murderers and murdered), like those whose 'body [was] covered with wounds, and one large gash in his forehead, from which the blood still appeared to flow in copious streams',[12] is measured and leisurely, never hurried or vulgar. While Sarah Wilkinson is at her most Gothic in bluebooks, it is in these works that

she also comes the closest to parodying the mode. For example, in *The Eve of St Mark; or, the Mysterious Spectre. A Romance* (1820), published by J. Bailey, the heroine, Margaret, daughter of the Steward of the De Clifford Family, utilises well-known Gothic strategies (for instance, the animated portrait) to deceive her parents about her attachment to the Earl De Clifford. The character of Margaret was readily identifiable to the readers of Gothic fiction: 'Margaret was very romantic, and well skilled in all legendary tenets, nor was there a tale of horror or interest on the shelves of the circulating library in the next town but what had passed through her fair hands.'[13] As Jane Austen gently derided Catherine Morland's longing for 'Gothic' adventures in her visit to the Tilneys' country home in *Northanger Abbey* (1818), Wilkinson's Margaret is similarly portrayed as unable to discern fiction from reality, steeping herself in local legend and tales of castles.

> Margaret frequently dressed her head so as to resemble the picture, and, in fact, almost fancied herself a Lady Bertha. She sighed for the young Hubert of the Glen Cottage, a lover as romantic as herself, but, of course, wished for a happier denouement of their love, and that Hubert of the nineteenth century might not prove like his name-sake of old, and stab the resemblance of Bertha to the heart should her truant fancy prefer another. (p. 6)

A working knowledge of Gothic motifs, however, allows Wilkinson (and Margaret) to exploit and exaggerate the familiar experience of the animated portrait:

> Accordingly, at the appointed hour, the earl assembled his family in the room so long known as Lady Bertha's; some were very loath indeed to come, and their footsteps moved very tardily, but my lord would be obeyed, and no one was excused except Mr. Cavendish, from this domestic assemblage. Earl De Clifford heard some of them whispering that there ought to be a clergyman present. 'You are mistaken, my good friends,' said he, 'I am not going to exorcise the spirits in a common way; such a charming creature must not be treated like a common ghost. No, I will woo her for a bride—descend, my gentle Bertha, and fill these adoring arms.'
>
> Obedient to his call the lovely figure stept out of the frame upon a table that stood close to it, from thence on a chair, and thence, by the aid of a foot-stool, to the ground.
>
> Her ladyship descended with cautious slowness, when most of the domestics took to flight, precipitating one another down the back stairs, without ceremony, as if they thought the old saying held good, of woe be to the hindmost—as for those that remained, their good sense led them to perceive a happy termination to the romance of real life.
>
> Lady Bertha glided to the outstretched arms of the earl, while the canvass shewed that the painted figure had been cut out and

> a niche behind the frame had opportunely served to place in its room a breathing resemblance of the angelic form.
>
> 'I will not banish this fair spirit from the castle,' said the earl, 'I cannot think of enriching the red sea with her; no, she shall reign in this mansion its adored, its benevolent mistress. Look not so anxious, my good friends,' continued he, addressing Mr. and Mrs. Oakley; 'Margaret is my legal wife.' (pp. 23–24)

This is a rather coarse version of the 'explained supernatural'—in which the Earl sets his wife up as a spectre to thrill his neighbours. Wilkinson here seems to be offering a more pragmatic approach to the Gothic, relying on readers to discriminate between reality and romance.

Significantly, Wilkinson wrote at least seventeen adaptations and translations: one implied 'translation' from German, *Albert of Werdendorff; or, the Midnight Embrace. A Romance from the German*, and one from the Spanish *Love and Perfidy; or, the Isolated Tower from the Spanish* (1812). Both of these bluebooks were published by Angus & Son and not translated at all, only marketed as such. On the other hand, *Therese; or, the Orphan of Geneva; an Interesting Romance* (1821) was translated from Henri Joseph Brahain Ducange's 1821 original and *The White Pilgrim; or, Castle of Olival* (1820) from the French novel, *Le Pélerin Blanc*; both were published by Dean & Munday.

As well as novels, plays, operas, and melodrama were deftly adapted into bluebooks by Wilkinson: in fact, she redacted at least seven such productions. Among these is *The Wife of Two Husbands Translated from the French Drama and Formed into an Interesting Story* (1804) published by Lemoine, which claimed to be a translation from the French drama of the 'La Femme à Deux Maris' by René-Charles Guilbert, though upon textual comparison I found that it is actually a redaction of the English translation of 'The Wife of Two Husbands; A Musical Drama' by James Cobb. *Inkle and Yarico; or, Love in a Cave* (1805) published by Lemoine, was redacted from the opera of the same name by George Colman the Younger (1762–1836), while *The Travellers; or, Prince of China* (1806) published by Lemoine is a redaction of the opera 'The Travellers' by Domenico Corri, libretto by Andrew Cherry, first performed at Drury Lane on 22 January 1806. *The Water Spectre; or, An Bratach. A Romance*, is founded on the popular melodrama by Charles Dibdin (1768–1833), as performed at the Aquatic Theatre, Sadler's Wells (1805) published by Lemoine. *The Ruffian Boy: Or, the Castle of Waldemar, a Venetian Tale* (1820) was based on the popular melodrama, itself taken from Mrs Opie's celebrated tale of that name, published by J. Bailey; while *Conscience; or the Bridal Night. An Interesting Venetian Tale Written from the Tragedy of J. H.* (1820) was adapted from the tragedy of James Haynes and published by Dean & Munday. Wilkinson also adapted two versions of Matthew Lewis's melodrama 'The Castle Spectre' publishing *The Castle Spectre; or, Family Horrors* in 1807 with Thomas Hughes, and *The Castle Spectre; an Ancient Baronial Romance* in 1820 with John Bailey.

Wilkinson not only adapted dramas, she redacted 'popular' novels including: *The Pathetic and Interesting History of George Barnwell. Founded on Facts. Carefully Abridged from Mr Surr's Celebrated Novel* (1804) published by Lemoine. John Bailey, who published her adaptation of *The Castle Spectre,* also published another redaction of Lewis's *The Monk: The Castle of Lindenberg; or, the History of Raymond and Agnes* in 1820. It appears that Wilkinson was probably commissioned by Bailey to produce redactions of Lewis, as these made up the bulk of works published with him.

Dean & Munday, on the other hand, published Wilkinson's redactions of other 'popular' novels (non-Gothic) including: *The Pastor's Fireside; or, Memoirs of the Athelstan. Abridged from the Popular Novel by Jane Porter* (1822), *The Pirate, or the Sisters of Burgh Westra: A Tale of the Islands of Shetland and Orkney Epitomized from the Celebrated Pirate of Sir Walter Scott* (1820) and *Waverley; or, the Castle of Mac Iver* [*sic*]*: A Highland Tale, of Sixty Years since from the Pen of the Celebrated Author of 'Kenilworth' &c.; Epitomized from the Original* [n.d.]. What is interesting about the redaction of these novels is that Wilkinson includes the author of the original work in the title indicating that there was no attempt to hide or disguise the fact that these were redactions. The title's inclusion, in fact, was as much a selling-point as its abridgement.

The Novels

Wilkinson also wrote novels and while she found no critical (and limited financial) success with her novelistic attempts, they are however, useful insights into the Gothic novel from the view point of a bluebook author. Her novels demonstrate a clear assimilation of bluebooks into Gothic novels as a direct consequence of the tremendous outpouring of such productions in the early nineteenth century.

Of all Wilkinson's novels *The Fugitive Countess; or, the Convent of St Ursula, a Romance* (1807), most clearly illustrates this assimilation of bluebooks into the form of a legitimate Gothic novel. Like Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), Ann Radcliffe's *Sicilian Romance* (1790), and Eliza Parsons's *The Castle of Wolfenbach* (1793), *The Fugitive Countess*, centres on the crimes of the past which return to threaten the present and is essentially a novel of retribution and reconciliation. As in all of her novels and most bluebooks, the central figure is a rejected wife, Magdalena, Countess of Ottagio, who unwittingly discovers her husband's crimes and is forced to become a fugitive in the Convent of St Ursula. Throughout the novel, Wilkinson is fascinated by the possibilities of adapting bluebooks for their simple and straightforward moral story unhindered by complicated subplotting. In *The Fugitive Countess*, Wilkinson not only develops simple subplots which would eventually compose the matter of her bluebooks, she carefully integrates a well-known drama she had earlier redacted into the text. The flexibility of the bluebook plot was such that it could be utilised by Wilkinson and reworked into subplots that often

diverted the readers' attention from the main story, affording Wilkinson the appropriate opportunity to moralise and educate.

The novel centres on Magdalena, who is tyrannised and victimised by her cruel and capricious husband, the Count Ottagio. Like her aristocratic progenitors, Magdalena is a victim of her father's debt, her husband's greed and the duplicity of an evil agent, Stefano. Similarly, she shares with her antecedents formidable morals which are only second to her (obligatory) compassion for the sufferings of others.

The Fugitive Countess opens with Magdalena in extreme distress. The Count is attempting to murder her, for it would seem on the onset that the Countess's morals are not only in doubt, but in serious danger. The bitter exchange between the Count and Countess immediately draws the readers' attention to a pronounced moral division, common in Wilkinson's works, between a husband and his wife:

> 'Spare me—for heaven's sake—for your *own* sake—spare me!—Plant not the horrors of unavailing remorse within your bosom; should you be allowed to escape the vengeance of your fellow creatures, and your crimes remained concealed from human knowledge; yet, remember, there is, above, an all-seeing eye, from whom no secret is hid. O strike not, suspend your uplifted arm—I have yet another plea to offer—*Innocence*.'
>
> 'Innocent!' repeated the Count, with a malignant sneer,—'then you are better prepared to meet your impending doom.'[14]

For Wilkinson, the issue of moral disparity within a marriage, is invariably the basis for an immediate and often permanent separation. A well-timed knock at the door distracts the Count, allowing a disguised Magdalena to flee the Castle of Ottagio to seek sanctuary in the Convent of St Ursula under the protection of her maternal aunt, Lady Viola Del Serina.

The horror of secret, arranged, or forced marriages is another theme commonly found in Wilkinson's novels and bluebooks. For Wilkinson such marriages will inevitably remain loveless where 'the first duties, next to chastity, in a female is filial and connubial obedience; and nothing more hateful in her than a spirit of argument and contradiction' (II, 28). Like Lady Emily de Cleve in *The Subterraneous Passage; or, Gothic Cell* (1803) and Rosalthe di Zoretti in *The Convent of the Grey Penitents; or, the Apostate Nun* (1809), Magdalena has been forced into a marriage with the Count of Ottagio to whom she feels both 'aversion' and 'horror'. In Wilkinson's bluebooks such as *The Subterraneous Passage*, her characters are often delivered by deception into the hands of a nefarious suitor: Emily de Cleve is kidnapped by Dubois, the leader of banditti with the assistance of Madam Rambouillet, Emily's governess. Rambouillet and Dubois were partners in vice; Dubois wanted Emily's money and Madam Rambouillet wanted the daughter out of the way, that she might not hinder her designs on the father, the Marquis de Cleve. Marriage is forcibly performed with Emily the unwilling partner: 'In vain she shrieked, and implored for mercy: no friendly

hand was near to give her aid; and the servile priest performed the office in spite of her resistance, and pronounced them man and wife'.[15] Similarly, Magdalena's father, the Count di Verona in *The Fugitive Countess*, having squandered her inheritance at the gaming table, has arranged to settle his debt with Ottagio by offering the hand of his daughter. However, unprepared to counter Magdalena's aversion to the Count, Di Verona challenges his daughter to prepare for the loss of his life (and soul) as consequence of what he bitterly terms her 'caprice'. In a dramatically staged confrontation, the Count di Verona contemptuously invites Magdalena to 'exult over the ashes of a parent' (II, 9–10)

Despite deploring forced and arranged marriages, Wilkinson fundamentally supports the traditional importance of duty within that marriage, a quality which Magdalena (despite her name) not only upholds but strictly separates from affection. Throughout *The Fugitive Countess*, Wilkinson clearly delineates between Magdalena's duty to her husband and her love for the Count, and she extends this throughout the novel in her refusal to disclose the crimes of her husband, which would free her from her hated marriage vows. Safely secreted in the Convent, the Countess is able cautiously to unveil the Count's crime through a series of fragmentary documents and personal histories. The first disclosure, in fact, is related through Magdalena's servant, Laura who fled the castle with her mistress.

The suddenness and gravity of Magdalena's flight overwhelms the 'fugitive' Countess, who almost immediately succumbs to illness. During the long hours, Laura's attention shifts to the book-press where she searches 'for some work of imagination, that should be adapted to her taste, which it must be owned rather bordered on the romantic' (I, 19). For Wilkinson, the most unassuming and obvious method of reintegrating the bluebook is through the inclusion of a fragment of manuscript. The fragment's ominous opening naturally reflects the Countess's position as a 'fugitive':

> The storm sill raged—the gusts of wind were repeated with, if possible, increased violence—Eudora pressed her babe to her woe-worn breast—'Alas! my child, but for thee,' exclaimed the wretched mother, 'the warring elements might pass unheeded—the drenching rain—the lightning's glare—the thunder's tremendous peal—could not affect a wretch like me. The storm within my breast makes me callous to that without. (I, 21)

The overtly moralistic plot of the inset tale centres on the consequences of Eudora's seduction, betrayal and the deception of Lord Willibald. '[S]educed from the paths of virtue, to the precipice of vice', Eudora and her young son Willibald, endeavour in vain to remind him of his promised pledge just days after his wedding to the Heiress of Passenger. In anger, he murders both the baby and Eudora and eventually takes his own life. The fragment ends with a typical Wilkinson punishment of the lecherous and 'unnatural Baron':

> Every night, at the exact hour Eudora was murdered, the isolated castle is supernaturally illumined;—lord Willibald, the self-de-

> stroyed Baron, can be distinctly seen through the gothic windows, by those who have the courage to gaze thereon, flying from chamber to chamber,—pursued by the shrieking Eudora, clasping her infant to her bleeding bosom, and demanding heaven's vengeance on the head of their destroyer. (II, 60)

The moral of the tale is simply: '[b]eware, lest a vile villain's insidious arts should destroy both thy body and thy soul' (II, 42). Wilkinson's fragment, concentrates on the quick administration of morality and the horrific.

Wilkinson's use of personal histories, like fragmentary documents, are essential to reveal the Count's crimes; therefore, individual histories are only disclosed in order to influence the present as well as underlining the moral. According to Wilkinson, to elucidate the mysteries attending to Magdalena's behaviour, it is requisite to inform the reader of her history. Raised by her father, Magdalena was initially educated by a governess and then sent to the Convent of St Ursula. Like Emily in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and Elena in *The Italian* (1797), Magdalena initially appears unsociable, if not withdrawn, and is attracted to the demanding life of the nuns, even contemplating taking vows. Her aunt, Viola, the abbess, however, while sympathetic to her desires, admonishes her to avoid such a life and in doing so narrates her own story.

The abbess, as a young woman, although the elder of two sisters, was forced into the convent, due in part to the fact that her mind was of a more serious nature than her worldly sister.—'My *boudoir* was filled with select authors, globes, and drawing utensils. I wrote essays on various subjects, poems, &c. &c. corresponding with the tone of my mind, which was unfortunately sensitive to a painful degree' (II, 91–92). Though disappointed, Viola thrived until an accidental meeting with Horace Beverly, the brother of Sister Frances. Love inevitably followed as did an escape from the convent. Fleeing to a castle, Viola was discovered by her father instead of her lover. Horace, imprisoned by the Count Del Serina, eventually dies and Viola is returned to the Convent.

The Abbess's story, like the fragment, is intended by Wilkinson as instructional. The tale anticipates Magdalena's most distressing challenge, that of unfeigned filial duty to her father. After several years of disinterest in his daughter, the Count di Verona, arrives to take Magdalena to Ottagio castle. As I have already indicated, Magdalena was offered to Ottagio in lieu of Verona's debt. On the night of the wedding, Magdalena discovers the Count and his accomplice Jacintha as they enter the library, and, following, she watches them descend through a trapdoor in the chapel. Resolved to discover their secret, the following night she descends down the trapdoor and discovers Thomasina, the housekeeper, who promises to reveal their secret. The Count's dreadful secret is, of course, that the Count's first wife, Lady Clementina di Lusini, and their daughter, Adeline are alive, immured in a subterraneous dungeon. The plot element of the imprisoned wife is familiar enough in Gothic romance; it had been much utilised writers in the eighteenth century and was in common use in nineteenth century Gothic. To a contemporary reader, this scene would

have recalled memories of many others: perhaps the key scene in Sophia Lee's *The Recess* (1785), or Ann Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), in which Julia discovers her mother, Marchioness Mazzini, imprisoned in the deserted wing of their decaying mansion.

Wilkinson, it appears, was particularly practised in the confinement of distressed females: in *The Subterraneous Passage* Emily de Cleve discovers Madame Dubois, the wife of the murdered Count Dubois, imprisoned by her brother-in-law to obtain her property and, in *The Priory of St Clair; or, the Spectre of the Murdered Nun,* Julietta, a young nun, is kidnapped from her Convent by the Count de Valve, and imprisoned in the dungeon beneath his castle until her ignominious death. Similarly, Clementina di Lusini's distressful tale, as related to Magdalena, parallels many of Wilkinson's bluebook plots. Clementina's tale, narrated over several trips to the subterraneous dungeon, confirms Magdalena's suspicions regarding the Count and prefigures certain elements in Magdalena's future or textual past. The tale is an adaptation of an earlier Wilkinson bluebook *The Wife of Two Husbands* and a subplot in Eliza Parsons's *Mysterious Warnings* (1796). Wilkinson's *The Wife of Two Husbands* (1804), which (as previously mentioned) claimed to be a translation from the French drama of the 'La Femme à Deux Maris' by René-Charles Guilbert and 'formed into an interesting story', was actually based on the musical adaptation of James Cobb as performed at the Theatre-Royal, Drury-Lane. The bluebook, like the drama, relates the story of Eliza, whom marries Isidore Fritz against her father's wish. Fritz is a man of deceit, who whilst in prison, fakes his own death. Believing that she is a widow, the Count Belfior marries her. Years later, Fritz returns to claim his wife, as well as her property. Eliza, caught between duty to a husband whom she loves and one whom she despises, concedes that she should leave the Count, but his friend recognises Fritz as a deserter and has him immediately arrested. Spared the death penalty through Eliza's intercession, Fritz repays her kindness by attempting to murder the Count, but is himself slain.

Wilkinson has reworked her adaptation of Eliza's tale into Clementina's. There are many similarities between the bluebook and the inset tale: both Eliza and Clementina marry against the wish of their father; both mistakenly believe their first husbands to be dead; and both are confronted by the horror of their contrasting duties. As I have already argued, for Wilkinson, the traditional importance of duty within a marriage is fundamental. By placing Eliza and Clementina in a situation which brings them into direct conflict with this duty, Wilkinson underlines a woman's imprisonment in an institution that binds one party by certain rules and restrictions which are flouted by the other. However, despite these broad similarities, there are important differences in presentation and emphasis between Eliza's and Clementina's tales, and these can be understood as a response to changes from bluebook to a tale within a novel.

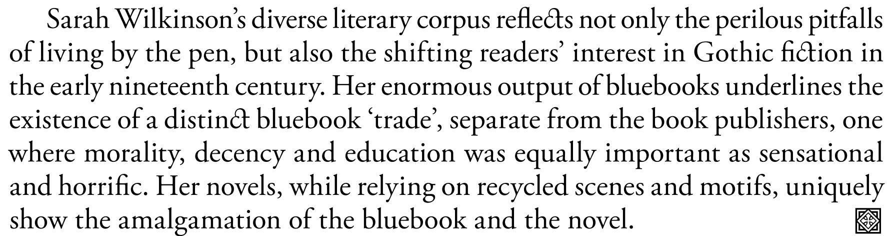
While Wilkinson took the basic plot structure from her dramatic adaptation, she simultaneously drew from other popular themes found in Gothic novels, most notably from Eliza Parsons's *The Mysterious Warning*. The inset

tale, which was later extracted verbatim and published anonymously as *The Horrible Revenge; or, the Assassin of the Solitary Castle* by Fairburn in 1828, contained the memoirs of Baron S—— which records, with exacting detail, the imprisonment of his wife and 'husband'. Baron S—— saves Count Zimchaw and his daughter Eugenia from banditti. In gratitude Zimchaw offers the Baron Eugenia's hand in marriage, and though she appears hostile to the union, the father's will prevails and they are united. That night, Eugenia disappears from her room; all searches prove futile. This humiliation drives the Baron to distraction: '[f]or my part, neither time nor disappointment had abated my passion; I still loved to a degree of fury, for rage, and a desire of revenge on her and her paramour, went hand in hand with my inclination for her person'.[16] Eventually, the Baron discovers Eugenia and her lover, Count M——. Baron S—— accuses his wife: 'you, who at the altar gave me your hand and faith, and now live as an adultress with the man you swore never to be join with without your father's consent; know you are still my wife, and I will prove my right by my power of punishing you' (p. 18). This threat is similar to the threats of Count Ottagio: 'I regard not your marriage, unsanctioned by parental consent, as any bar to my wishes;' said Ottagio, fiercely, 'but look on you in the light of a base adulterer, striving to dishonour my name' (*Fugitive Countess*, II, 151). But as with Clementina, Eugenia had secretly married Count M—— before meeting the Baron. The Baron moved the family, consisting of the Count, Eugenia and young daughter, to a dungeon. In an act of unadulterated evil, Baron S—— dashes the family's water to the floor, just as their young daughter is dying from thirst. The cruel Baron eventually dies and the Count M—— and Eugenia are freed from their prison.

Again, the similarities between Parsons's and Wilkinson's inset tales are consistent: second marriages, cruel revenge, and conflicting duty (though more focused on the tension between filial and matrimonial). Wilkinson's attraction to this inset tale though is directly associated with its male perspective. There are broad similarities between Count Ottagio and Baron S—— which link the two texts. While *The Wife of Two Husbands* focuses on the dreadful circumstance from the viewpoint of the wife, Parsons's inset tale (extracted as *The Horrrible Revenge*) illustrates the viewpoint of the Baron. In similar terms, Wilkinson's inset tale focuses on Clementina's perspective of discovering that Leonardo still lives, while Ottagio's cruel revenge, seen from his perspective, is defending his honour. The amalgamation of the two perspectives allows Wilkinson to contrast their individual roles within marriage. For the Count it is honour, for Clementina (and Magdalena) it is merely duty.

The bluebook incidents such as these are utilised by Wilkinson to moderate the pace of the narrative, often allowing characters the time and ability to reflect on circumstances in the past. For example, in the case of Magdalena, Clementina's distressful confinement in a dungeon confirms all of her growing suspicions about the Count. Throughout *The Fugitive Countess*, Wilkinson is continually experimenting with assimilating bluebooks, as inset tales, into her novels as a method of both moralising and revealing the past. Recycling her

'trade' into novels is not unexpected, but they indicate a fluidity and connection to the larger Gothic market that is politely ignored by critics who view the Gothic merely as an art form.



Sarah Wilkinson's diverse literary corpus reflects not only the perilous pitfalls of living by the pen, but also the shifting readers' interest in Gothic fiction in the early nineteenth century. Her enormous output of bluebooks underlines the existence of a distinct bluebook 'trade', separate from the book publishers, one where morality, decency and education was equally important as sensational and horrific. Her novels, while relying on recycled scenes and motifs, uniquely show the amalgamation of the bluebook and the novel.

Notes

1. 'The Life of an Authoress, Written by Herself', Tale 57 in *Tell-Tale Magazine* (London: Ann Lemoine, 1803), p. 28. Further references to this tale are given in the text.
2. The tale is attached to *The Eastern Turret; or, Orphan of Navona. A Romance*, which, though not attributed, has the distinct characteristics and language found in Wilkinson's other *Tale-Tell* stories. Particularly, Wilkinson's discussion of female wit is found verbatim in later novels of hers, such as *The Convent of Grey Penitents* (1810).
3. Letter to the Royal Literary Fund, 10 Feb 1824: Loan No. 96 (Case 375), British Library. Hereafter referred to as RLF and accompanied by the date of the letter.
4. These textbooks comprised: *A Visit to London: Containing a Description of the Principal Curiosities in the British Metropolis* (1810), *A Visit to a Farm-House* (1805) both published at the Juvenile and School Library by M'Millan, and *The Instructive Remembrancer: Being an Abstract of the Various Rites and Ceremonies of the Four Quarters of the Globe. For the Use of Schools* (1805) published by M'Kenzie,
5. Robert Mayo identifies eleven works by Wilkinson, though, my research indicates at least sixteen. See Mayo's *The English Novel in the Magazines, 1740–1815* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1962), p. 368, which lists the following tales, all of which appeared in the *Tell-Tale*: *The Adopted Child, or the Castle of St Villereagh*, *The History of George Barnwell*, *Lissette of Savoy, or the Fair Maid of the Mountains*, *Lord Gowen, or the Forester's Daughter*, *The Maid of Lochlin, or Mysteries of the North*, *The Marriage Promise*, *Monastic Ruins, or the Invisible Monitor*, *The Mountain Cottager, or the Deserted Bride*, *Orlando, or the Knight of the Moon*, *The Sorcerer's Palace, or the Princess of Sinadone*, *The Wife of Two Husbands*.
6. For example, the name Sarah Wilkinson appears on the title page of *The Spectres; or, Lord Oswald and Lady Rosa* published by Langley in 1814 and Sara Scudgell Wilkinson appears on the title page of *The White Pilgrim; or, Castle of Olival*, published by Dean & Munday in 1820.
7. Valentine Readers were collections of poems written, generally, for the working class, often for specific occupations and events such as proposals of marriage.
8. 'Mackintosh, Sir James (1765–1832), British writer and public servant, b. Scotland. His *Vindiciae Gallicae* (1791), a spirited reply to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution*, was the leading Whig statement in favour of the French Revolution, but from 1796 he grew hostile to French radicalism. His writings

include several historical works.'—*Dictionary of National Biography: Index and Epitome* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1906), p. 819.

'Holland, Sir Henry (1788–1873), physician, son of Peter Holland, medical practitioner, and the medical attendant on the Princess of Wales (afterwards Queen Caroline). He became one of the best known men in London society, the friend and adviser of almost every man of note. In 1837 he was appointed physician extraordinary to Queen Victoria, in 1840 physician in ordinary to the prince consort, and he declined a baronetcy offered by Lord Melbourne in 1841. He was made physician in ordinary to the queen in 1852, and accepted a baronetcy in 1853.'—ibid., p. 631.

9. The novel almost certainly remained unpublished at her death.
10. The bluebook *Mysterious Novice; or, Convent of the Grey Penitents* should be distinguished from her two-volume romance, *Convent of Grey Penitents; or, the Apostate Nun* (London: J. F. Hughes, 1810).
11. Frederick Frank, *The First Gothics: A Critical Guide to the English Gothic Novel*, (London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1987), p. 412.
12. 'The Spectre; or, the Ruins of Belfont Priory', in *The Lifted Veil*, ed. A. Susan Williams (London: Xanadu, 1992), p. 16.
13. Sarah Wilkinson, *The Eve of St Mark; or, the Mysterious Spectre* (London: J. Bailey, 1820), p. 5. Further references to this tale are given after quotations in the text.
14. Sarah Wilkinson, *The Fugitive Countess; or, the Convent of St Ursula. A Romance* (London: J. F. Hughes, 1807), I, 1–2. Further references to this novel are given in the text.
15. Sarah Wilkinson, *The Subterraneous Passage; or, Gothic Cell. A Romance* (London: Anne Lemoine and J. Roe, 1803), p. 15.
16. *The Horrible Revenge; or, the Assassin of the Solitary Castle* (London: Fairburn, 1828), p. 11.

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