Modifications of Genre: A Feminist Critique of "Christabel" and "Die Braut von Korinth"

LORE METZGER

Criticism indeed consists of analyzing and reflecting upon limits.
—Michel Foucault

The study of genre has been a driving force in literary theory and criticism from Plato and Aristotle to Todorov and Genette. Locating itself at the intersection of description and prescription, theory and empirical observation, genre criticism has functioned to conserve literary kinds along with the value system of canonical models. The concept of genre, as Claudio Guillén has pointed out, "looks forward and backward at the same time. Backward, toward the literary works that already exist. Forward, in the direction of the apprentice, the future writer, the informed critic."¹ The system of genres thus functions as a code of transmission, a law of inheritance that discriminates between legitimate and illegitimate heirs.

It is no accident that in the revolutionary decades of the later eighteenth century, Edmund Burke grounded his antirevolutionary position in the concept of inheritance: "We wish to derive all we possess as *an inheritance from our forefathers*." Thus, according to Burke, even rights, freedom, reform, and power are to be regarded as kinds of property; the idea of "entailed inheritance" "furnishes a sure principle of conservation, and a sure principle of transmission; without at all excluding

Versions of this essay were presented at the convention of the Midwest American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, October 1990, and at the International Comparative Literature Association Congress in Tokyo, August 1991; one also appears as "Modifications of Genre: A Feminist Critique of 'Christabel' and 'Die Braut von Korinth'" in Patricia B. Craddock and Carla Hay, eds., *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, vol. 22 (East Lansing: Colleagues' Press for the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, 1992), reprinted by permission.

¹Claudio Guillén, *Literature as System* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 109.

a principle of improvement. It leaves acquisition free; but it secures what it acquires."²

Such a principle of well-regulated transmission of social, cultural, and political patrimony includes the codes that govern genre and gender. Just as *property* and *propriety* derive from the same root, so do *genre* and *gender*. It is remarkable that this connection has been ignored by most critics writing on genre, from René Wellek and Northrop Frye to Paul Hernadi and Gérard Genette—with the notable exception of Jacques Derrida—when it seemed perfectly obvious early in this century to the German humorist Roda-Roda, who summed up genre distinctions as follows: "A man alone: a lyric poem; two men: a ballad; one man and one woman: a novella; one man and two women: a novel; one woman and two men: a tragedy; two women and two men: a comedy."³ Even this playful bit of categorization reveals that genre articulates gender roles. Attention to the way gender roles are represented by literary genres in different cultures raises questions about the part literature plays in generating, disseminating, enforcing, or subverting the rules of social relationships by which individuals acquire gendered identities. Genre thus forms a crucial point of articulation between feminist and comparatist interdisciplinary criticism.

If leading comparatists have notably disregarded the intersection of genre and gender, feminist critics have rarely addressed issues of genre when theorizing gender while also slighting the resources of a comparatist perspective. The masculinist discourse of genre theory, from Aristotle to the present, has been grounded in and has served to legitimate the Western canon while occluding the politics of its theoretical foundation. Even when genre theory includes the dialectics of genre and of countergenre, as Claudio Guillén's does, it ignores the role of gender in focusing on generic continuities and discontinuities from a structural-historical perspective. And even when Alastair Fowler's influential *Kinds of Literature* proposes the concept of family resemblances as the key to generic relations, it disregards gender just as it dismisses contemporary theory, as Mary Jacobus astutely observes, "in the interests of conserving an ultimately dynastic view of literary history." Moreover, women's texts on genre theory participate in this masculinist discourse, as Adena Rosmarin's pragmatic theory, grounded in the interaction of difference and similitude, remarkably demonstrates. For her

²Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* [published with Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man*] (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981), 43, 45.

³Cited in Rosalie L. Colie, *Resources of Kind: Genre-Theory in the Renaissance*, ed. Barbara K. Lewalski (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 30.

the power of genre empowers (masculinist) criticism to constitute and valorize the (canonical) literary works of art.⁴

Although feminist criticism has challenged the foundations of genderless critical judgments, its intense interest in genres converges on those previously considered marginal or feminized (e.g., domestic novel, romance, gothic) rather than on genres valorized as universal and exemplary (e.g., epic, tragedy, dramatic monologue).⁵ Furthermore, when feminist criticism does focus on canonical genres, it rarely contests their underlying regulatory power but instead creates female subgenres—the female bildungsroman, autobiography, utopia, or fantasy—which reinforce the gender boundaries of genres.⁶ (Interestingly, a comprehensive 1991 collection of essays on feminist theory and practice subsumes both gender and genre under other categories such as body, discourse, desire, autobiography, and so on.)⁷ Yet important theoretical work on gender like Judith Butler's could be productively extended to analyze how in literary as in other social texts gender interacts performatively with genre, how genre/gender identity "is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results."⁸ This emphasis on the performative possibilities of genre/gender formations and transformations would begin to address the task Celeste Schenck posed for feminist theory: "to question the hypostasizing and . . . limiting of genre to a designation of *form* or *norm*."⁹ Surely the time has come to interrogate the

⁴Mary Jacobus, *Romanticism, Writing, and Sexual Difference* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 188. Adena Rosmarin, *The Power of Genre* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 49–50. Along with Rosmarin's example of women's participation in genderless genre theory, I should here include Rosalie Colie's otherwise splendid *Resources of Kind* and my own speculations on genre in *One Foot in Eden: Modes of Pastoral in Romantic Poetry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986).

⁵From the vast array of important recent studies, let me cite a few key examples dealing with fiction or nonfictional prose: Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Laurie Langbauer, *Women and Romance: The Consolations of Gender in the English Novel* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); Felicity A. Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); and Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck, eds., *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).

⁶See, for example, Anne Cranny-Francis, *Feminist Fiction: Feminist Uses of Generic Fiction* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990); Patricia Waugh, *Feminist Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern* (London: Routledge, 1989); Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland, eds., *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1983); Marleen Barr, ed., *Future Females: A Critical Anthology* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Press, 1981).

⁷See Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl, eds., *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991).

⁸Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1990), 25.

⁹Celeste Schenck, "All of a Piece," in Brodzki and Schenck, *Life/Lines*, 286.

complex regulatory transactions as well as the aesthetics of genres as ideologically informed.

It should always be borne in mind not only that genre and gender are etymologically linked but also that they engender a semantic repertory, as Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jacques Derrida have reminded us, which is much larger and more expansive in French than in English, genre always including gender within its scope. Similarly, in German, *Gattung* (genre) connects with *Gatte/Gattin* (husband/wife) and establishes generic connections as an act of begetting or coupling (*gatten*).¹⁰ Thus gender is genre's double and diffuses, refocuses, and problematizes the codes, laws, norms, and boundaries of genre.

Significantly, this semantic field links genre and gender with propriety through the criterion of propriety that governs normative judgments and establishes the legitimate members of proper families. The rules regulating the decorum of literary works and the proper behavior of women recall the fact that classical rhetoric from Aristotle on was dominated, as Patricia Parker has so convincingly argued, "by the notion of 'place'—of territory already staked out, of the topological as inseparable from the topological—and thus also of 'property,' or of place where a word properly belongs." In the eighteenth century, Hugh Blair, like Edmund Burke, was concerned with establishing rules for language according to the dictates of propriety that would arrest the instability engendered by improper tropes.¹¹ Rhetorical "property," words in their proper place, is a form of "entailed inheritance," confirming the Burkean principle of the stable, patrilineal transmission of landed property which "leaves acquisition free" but "secures what it acquires";¹² and rhetorical "property" also entails the dictates of propriety governing genre and gender.

Even violations and transgressions of the dominant codes of genre and gender, like transgressions of other laws, do not negate but rather validate the laws' legitimacy. Tzvetan Todorov has argued that transgression indeed requires a law to be transgressed, and that, furthermore, "the norm becomes visible—lives—only by its transgressions." And he supports his argument by citing Maurice Blanchot's claim that James Joyce's exceptional works "establish a law and at the same time

¹⁰Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, trans. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Chester (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 91, 144 n.26; Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre," trans. Avital Ronell, *Critical Inquiry* 7 (Autumn 1980): 74.

¹¹Patricia Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies: Rhetoric, Gender, Property* (London: Methuen, 1987), 36, 156.

¹²Burke, *Reflections*, 45.

suppress it. . . . Each time, in these exceptional works where a limit is reached, it is the exception alone that reveals to us this 'law' whose uncommon and necessary deviation it also constitutes."¹³ It follows that acts of transgression, transformation, displacement, or inversion of proper generic codes make visible and recognizable the codes that they abrogate.

I choose Goethe's "Braut von Korinth" (1796) and Coleridge's "Christabel" (written 1797; published 1816) as my exemplary texts to problematize the normative and regulative function of genre. At the end of the eighteenth century, Goethe's and Coleridge's claiming the ballad form for serious poetry involved them in transgressing boundaries that separated high from low art as well as proper from improper gender roles. These transgressions reveal the frequently occluded dominant codes that kept literary as well as social hierarchies in their proper places.

I take my clue from Derrida's "Law of Genre," which, exploiting the enigma of the "two genres of genre," reminds us that "the genre has always in all genres been able to play order's principle." Derrida elaborates this principle into the hyperbolic command that "as soon as genre announces itself, one must respect a norm, one must not cross a line of demarcation, one must not risk impurity, anomaly, or monstrosity." This monstrous rule serves as the lever for Derrida's counterlaw "lodged within the heart of the law itself": "It is precisely a principle of contamination, a law of impurity, a parasitical economy."¹⁴ I cannot do justice here to Derrida's brilliant argument that proceeds through an ingenious reading of Blanchot's *Folie du jour* and reveals that in fact the law of genre is madness. This ironic conclusion of course disrupts both the classic law and the Derridean antilaw of genre; the madness encompasses the mixing of sexual as well as literary genres and subverts all possibility of order, boundary, or authority.

Less subversive but nevertheless exemplifying the Derridean counterlaw of genre, the principle of contamination and impurity, the lowly subgenre of ballads, from Bishop Percy's influential collection of "ancient reliques" in 1765 to Goethe's and Schiller's, Wordsworth's and Coleridge's famous productions of the 1790s, defies yet also defines the boundaries between popular art and canonical poetry. Gothic ballads especially heighten the contamination of romance with realism, culture with barbarism, the human with the inhuman, the natural with the

¹³Tzvetan Todorov, "The Origin of Genres," *New Literary History* 8 (Autumn 1976): 160.

¹⁴Derrida, "Law of Genre," 56–57, 59.

supernatural, the carnal with the spiritual. The poets were involved in a process one modern critic describes as "the translation of the ballad from an active life on the popular level to a 'museum life' on a higher level."¹⁵ Broadside and minstrel ballads began to appreciate in value with academic collections such as Percy's, a favorite hunting ground not only for English but also for German poets, assembling as folk poetry anything that deviated from the Latin-French tradition and was regarded as exotic, including specimens of "Moorish" romances, translations from Chinese, and a paraphrase of the Song of Songs, along with other "reliques of ancient poetry"—all of which Percy freely emended.¹⁶

The most influential ballads in Percy's collection were those like "The Childe of Elle" and "Sir Cauline," for which he fabricated missing sections of narrative by borrowing from romances.¹⁷ It is worth noting that Wordsworth praised Percy's "reliques" as exhibiting "true simplicity and genuine pathos," while he also sought to distance his own *Lyrical Ballads* as serious poetry from popular works written for mass appeal.¹⁸ His praise for Gottfried August Bürger's enormously popular "Lenore," which was based on a Percy ballad, stressed precisely the difference between popular folk poetry and art for the masses: "Bürger is always the poet; he is never the mobbist, one of those dim drivellers with which our island has teemed for so many years."¹⁹

This simultaneous admiration and distrust for popular works was in fact part of an ongoing eighteenth-century paradox in which Percy, like Samuel Johnson, played a significant role. In his preface and editorial comments in the *Reliques*, Percy sought to adjudicate for his public living "in a polished age" between the rudeness and artlessness of "old rhapsodists" and contemporary poetry "of a higher class." He deliberately intermingled some "little elegant pieces of the lyric kind" to gain acceptance for the traditional ballads. He set up a contest between "those who had all the advantages of learning," writing for "fame and posterity," on the one hand, and, on the other, "the old strolling min-

¹⁵Albert B. Friedman, *The Ballad Revival* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 79.

¹⁶Thomas Percy, ed., *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765), 6th ed., 4 vols. (London: Samuel Richards, 1823).

¹⁷Friedman, *Ballad Revival*, 297–98.

¹⁸William Wordsworth, "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface (1815)," in *Literary Criticism of William Wordsworth*, ed. Paul M. Zall (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 176.

¹⁹These are Wordsworth's words as quoted by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in a letter to William Taylor, translator of Bürger's "Lenore," drawing on an exchange of letters about Bürger while Wordsworth and Coleridge were in Germany. See *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956–71), 1:566.

strels," who "looked no farther than for present applause, and present subsistence." Yet frequently, Percy observed, the palm is awarded to the minstrels.²⁰

Such cautious praise for popular poetry turned into revolutionary enthusiasm by the German *Sturm-und-Drang* writers, among whom the young Goethe was a leading figure. In his autobiography he recalled how Herder's influential tutelage led him to discover a new perspective on poetry: "Hebrew poetry, which, following the example of Lowth, [Herder] treated perceptively, popular poetry [*die Volkspoesie*] . . . and the oldest poetic records [*Urkunden*]²¹—all bore witness that the art of poetry was indeed a universal and popular-national gift [*eine Welt- und Völkergabe*] and not a private legacy of a few refined, cultivated [*gebildeten*] men."²¹ Thus, at the end of the eighteenth century, leading poets in England and Germany found in popular poetry ammunition against neoclassical elitism while at the same time they sought to authenticate their experiments and smuggle them into the canons of high art.

When Coleridge borrowed some motifs for his vampiric narrative "Christabel" from Percy's *Reliques*, he turned to the lower class of minstrel ballads, whose simplicity Wordsworth declared to have "absolutely redeemed" English poetry.²² Goethe, who had found inspiration for his popular "Erlkönig" in Herder's influential collection of folk-songs, *Volkslieder* (1777–78), turned, by contrast, to a classical source, Phlegon of Tralles, for his thoroughly unclassical production "Die Braut von Korinth."²³ It is most likely that Coleridge knew Goethe's daring ballad, first published in Schiller's *Musen-Almanach* for 1798 (the volume actually appeared in the fall of 1797). It was the first literary depiction of a female vampire who was not monstrous but beautiful and irresistible.²⁴

Both Goethe's and Coleridge's ballad-romances feature as their central event an erotic encounter with an attractive vampire, an act of moral transgression that is also a transgression of genre. In both poems the vampire represents the ambiguous status of a woman who is neither

²⁰Percy, *Reliques*, 10–11.

²¹Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Gedenkausgabe der Werke, Briefe und Gespräche*, ed. Ernst Beutler, 27 vols. (Zurich: Artemis, 1948–71), 10:448; hereafter cited as *GA*. All translations are my own.

²²Wordsworth, *Literary Criticism*, 180.

²³Emil Staiger, *Goethe*, 3 vols. (Zurich: Atlantis, 1952–59), 2:308. Goethe himself denied that Phlegon of Tralles was his source, according to his friend Friedrich von Müller, but gave no specifics about any other except that the bride's name was Philinnion (*GA*, 23: 348).

²⁴Peter D. Grudin, *The Demon-Lover: The Theme of Demoniality in English and Continental Fiction of the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (New York: Garland, 1987), 64.

quite human nor inhuman, neither mistress of her life nor slave of her master, who is both victim and victimizer. Both poems clearly violated contemporary moral and aesthetic norms and were received as scandalous, licentious, and obscene. In Goethe's case, public opinion was severely divided about his "Braut von Korinth": whereas some readers were affronted by its "most disgusting of all bordello scenes" and its "desecration of Christianity," others considered it "the most perfect of all of Goethe's shorter works."²⁵ In Coleridge's case, though sixteen years elapsed between the intended publication of "Christabel" in *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) and its actual publication in 1816, critics similarly found a good deal to praise and to blame. They granted it originality but frequently found it unintelligible, senseless, or absurd. An anonymous pamphlet, "Hypocrisy Unveiled, and Calumny Detected," referred to Byron's "Parisina" and Coleridge's "Christabel" as "poems which sin as heinously against purity and decency as it is well possible to imagine."²⁶

Goethe's "Braut von Korinth" was particularly scandalous for its foregrounding of a "bride" whose virginal appearance masks a lascivious vampire. Dramatizing this "low" subject matter in a ballad whose literary artistry and authorship by a world-renowned poet gave it a claim to generic legitimacy was bound to intensify the contemporary readers' shocked recognition that it transgressed all bounds of moral and literary propriety. Since Goethe wrote "Die Braut von Korinth" during a time of intensive occupation with classical models, with the problem of selecting and matching themes and forms proper for different poetic kinds, the work appears as a deliberate affront. It exploits the demonic sphere of the vampire to mask a bourgeois psychodrama, the conflict between the impulse toward unrestrained sexual desire and the restraints of social codes and conventions.

The poem's opening signals a traditional popular ballad, offering no hint of its being, as Goethe dubbed it in his journal, "the vampiric poem" (GA, *Tagebücher*, supplemental vol. 2:209). It begins in medias res; the setting consists of place names (Athens and Corinth) without any descriptive details; time is not mentioned at all; and characters are introduced generically, without proper names. The narrator speaks soberly of a young man (*Jüngling*) from Athens, a pagan who comes to Corinth as stranger and guest (*Gast*); the recurring term "guest" ety-

²⁵For these opinions, see the letter from the gossiping Weimar philologist and archaeologist Karl August Böttiger to the poet Friedrich von Matthison, October 18, 1797, in *Goethe in vertraulichen Briefen seiner Zeitgenossen*, ed. Wilhelm Bode, 3 vols. (Munich: Beck, 1982), 2:116.

²⁶Coleridge, *Collected Letters*, 4:917n.

mologically links and blurs the relations of guest, host, and stranger. The youth is defined by his future kinship to his Christian host's younger daughter. Their fathers, related through mutual hospitality—Goethe's economically coined word is *gastverwandt*—had early betrothed them:

Beide Väter waren gastverwandt,
Hatten frühe schon
Töchterchen und Sohn
Braut und Bräutigam voraus genannt.²⁷

These relational roles, whether marital or hospitable, replace proper names in defining family and social status. The poem exploits the ballad convention of minimizing individual identity as it focuses on a culture that contains the individual's aspirations within generic codes. The text early establishes the principal characters' belonging to discordant cultural, religious, and political spheres (Athens and Corinth, pagan and Christian), which are tenuously bridged by their fathers' (the law's) oath to perpetuate their own kinship through their offspring.

These marks of lawful relations, like the codes of ballad conventions, simultaneously enforce lines of authority and mask the tensions of change. They mark the "bridegroom" as an outsider in Corinth who nonetheless feels entitled to an honored place in his host's house, ignoring their political and religious disparity. The public sphere of Athens and Corinth quickly recedes as we follow the "bridegroom" into his lavish private chamber (*Prunkgemach*). Subtly the cool, distanced narrative tone modulates into increasingly lyrical intimacy as the pagan guest is visited in turn by "a strange guest" (*ein seltnen Gast*), a seemingly proper (*sittsam*) young woman in a white veil, who is so estranged in her own house that she is unaware of the guest's presence: "Bin ich, rief sie aus, so fremd im Hause, / Daß ich von dem Gaste nichts vernahm?" In words that mysteriously veil her ontological status, she warns the youth, who seeks to interest her in the gifts of Ceres, Bacchus, and Amor, that she does not belong to the realm of joy, that she has already taken "the last step": "Schon der letzte Schritt ist, ach! geschehen." It is striking that whereas the potential bridegroom is indeed culturally an outsider, he has received an honored place in the household in which the bride, the host's daughter, who should be an insider, is a displaced person, alienated, marginalized, without the right to her

²⁷"The fathers were related through mutual hospitality and early preordained daughter and son as bride and bridegroom."

proper place. As she has already hinted, she is nowhere at home, having uncannily returned from the grave. She is an unrecognized revenant. Her vampiric presence is indeed *unheimlich*, though neither the narrator nor the bridegroom nor the mother shudders at or even notes her grave hints.

The text follows ballad convention in limiting the narrator's role to formulaic reporting of the features of the young woman's appearance that strike the guest—white veil, a black and orange fillet—and then shifting to her own words without any intrusive moral judgments. Observing this ballad tradition, however, underscores the text's and invites the reader's complicit acceptance of the woman's dispossessed status, (she is relegated to her "cell"), which contrasts dramatically with the bridegroom's secure and privileged place in the same household. But we are no sooner led to expect adherence to ballad convention, with its formulaic sparsity of details reported in impersonal language, when the poem disdains this constraint and establishes an emotionally involved tone in dramatizing the turbulent love scene between the two "guests."

Here Goethe decisively parts company with ballad tradition, not only as it is known from inherited models but also as it was established in his own previous contributions, such as the immensely popular "Heidenröslein." Schiller's close friend Christian Gottfried Körner, who shared their *Balladenstudien* of 1797—what Goethe inimitably called their playing around with the nature and perversion of balladry ("im Balladenwesen und Unwesen herumtreiben" [GA, 19:286])—advised that a small dose of love would enliven ballads as long as it was kept in the background and sensed only through its effect, as in Schiller's ballad "Der Taucher" and Goethe's "Es war ein König von Thule."²⁸ Goethe himself stated in July 1797 that Schiller's and his efforts were directed toward maintaining the traditional tone and mood of ballads while choosing more elevated (*würdiger*) and manifold subject matter (GA, 19:287).

Transgressing the boundaries set by these precepts, "Die Braut von Korinth" distills the most passionate excitement into brief exclamations of verbal magic, like *Liebesüberfluß*. Seamlessly intermingling narrative, dialogue, and lyric, the text violates generic norms as readily as social proprieties, preferring aesthetic impurities and moral ambiguities. Thus, at the witching hour (*Geisterstunde*) the seeming virgin turns first into a voracious maenad ("Gierig schlürfte sie mit blassem Munde /

²⁸Christian Gottfried Körner, *Briefwechsel zwischen Schiller und Körner*, ed. Klaus L. Berghahn (Munich: Winkler, 1973), 268.

Nun den dunkel blutgefärbten Wein'') and then into a femme fatale who lusts for her lover's fiery mouth ("Gierig saugt sie seines Mundes Flammen'') and finally into the gothic vampire who longs to suck her lover's blood ("zu saugen seines Herzens Blut''). The incremental repetition, with its variations within a structural formula, recalls the ballad convention even as it violates its restraint through its powerful language of sexual passion, producing an unprecedented lyric-narrative-dialogical form to represent the shared excess of the moment of love: *Liebesüberfluß*. This surplus overflows all boundaries demarcating one speaker from the other, indirect from direct discourse, joyful desire from passionate fury (*Liebeswut*), youthful love from demonic possession:

Heftig faßt er sie mit starken Armen,
 Von der Liebe Jugendkraft durchmannt:
 Hoffe doch, bei mir noch zu erwarmen,
 Wärst du selbst mir aus dem Grab gesandt!
 Wechselhauch und Kuß!
 Liebesüberfluß!
 Brennst du nicht und fühlst mich entbrannt?²⁹

Dionysian rapture joins vampiric desire in an unprecedented erotic lexicon. Goethe forges a style that achieves its striking vividness and concentrated intensity by calling attention to its verbal medium, its lyric magic, rather than by approaching visual precision. Indeed, only a few months after completing the ballad Goethe complained to Schiller of the public's childish and barbaric lack of taste that caused it to prefer the illustrations of key scenes over employing the imagination. He saw this corrupt tendency as leading to the intermingling of art forms, without mentioning the fact that he himself had contributed to compromising the purity of genre, that in an unclassical impulse he had fearlessly violated the "impenetrable magic circles" within which he had insisted each work of art should be properly bound by its own properties (*Eigenheiten*) (GA, 20:473).

The ballad's lyric intensity is broken by the return of the narrator's cool voice reporting the mother's stealthy voyeuristic eavesdropping at the door, where she overhears "des Liebestammelns Raserei" (love's stammering frenzy). Once more the text breaks with ballad convention

²⁹"Impetuously he seizes her with powerful arms, shot through with youthful strength of love: Still hope to warm you at my side, even if you were sent to me from the grave itself! Exchange of breath and kiss! Love's overflowing! Aren't you in flames, and don't you feel me set afire?"

as, in response to the mother's moralistic intervention, the bride usurps the narrator's role in the entire final section—six stanzas, constituting nearly one fourth of the whole ballad—and addresses a passionate monologue to the intruder, delivering an indictment of Christian morality and its mortification of the flesh. The mother emerges in the daughter's discourse as representing an excess of religious zeal that has transformed her betrothal under Venus' aegis into a marriage to Christ. The mother's oath was taken in a moment of delirium, which is also a moment of madness; it was thus both an act of gratitude for her recovery from sickness and an act of sick fanaticism. In a reversal of the oedipal triangle, the mother envies the daughter's active sexuality. As Franco Moretti points out in a different context, "The repressed returns, then, but disguised as a monster."³⁰ The daughter represents herself as a human sacrifice, denied by her ascetic and repressive mother even the enjoyment of a single night's passion. She suggests not only that her mother is responsible for her death and her return as a vampire but also that her religion is a kind of vampirism demanding human sacrifice. Should we, however, see the mother too as a victim of Pauline Christianity, since the poem is set at the time of Corinth's conversion? And if so, what does this pagan-Christian historical moment signify to the reader of Schiller's *Musen-Almanach* in 1797? Merely a moment in Goethe's psychobiography, his nostalgia for the freer moral climate of Rome after his return to the narrower bourgeois-artistocratic dukedom of Weimar?³¹

The only psychic life this poem explores is that of the vampiric revenant, whose freedom of choice is minimal. She has escaped repression only through death. She clearly represents herself as one more sinned against than sinning, more victimized than victimizing. Just as her father had the power to settle her marriage and her mother the power to betroth her to the church against her will, an unnamed mysterious power controls her even as vampire, driving her to fulfill her undesired destiny in a way that seals her lover's fate and the fate of those who must succeed him. Powerless to put an end to the cycle of victimization, she implores her mother to immolate her with her lover in a pagan rite. Her desire to escape from her death-in-life into a love-death destabilizes

³⁰Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders* (London: Verso, 1983), 103.

³¹Goethe was frequently accused of pagan immorality both in Germany and abroad, especially in England. On one occasion he defended himself by ironically citing all the heroines, among whom he might have included the "bride" in this ballad, who pay for their transgressions with death. What could possibly be more Christian? ("Ich heidnisch? Nun habe ich doch Gretchen hinrichten und Ottilie verhungern lassen; ist denn das den Leuten nicht christlich genug? Was wollen sie noch Christlicheres?" [GA, 22:579]).

the authority of father and mother, church and fate. The poem leaves it an open question whether the mother grants her daughter's death wish, whether Eros and Thanatos vanquish Christ. The final words are the daughter's passionate plea for the transgression of Christian doctrine through a return to the ancient gods:

Höre, Mutter, nun die letzte Bitte:
Einen Scheiterhaufen schichte du;
Öffne meine bange kleine Hütte,
Bring in Flammen Liebende zu Ruh!
Wenn der Funke sprüht,
Wenn die Asche glüht,
Eilen wir den alten Göttern zu.³²

There is no reply.

The ending of "Die Braut von Korinth" is unsettling because it refuses to provide a comforting closure with the return to the world from which the demonic has been expelled and banished, the kind of reassuring closure that became a dominant convention in all later vampiric literature, especially in the Dracula versions.³³ Goethe's ending refuses equally to validate the stable, existing order and to authorize the vampire's subversive challenge to social institutions. As Silvia Volckmann has persuasively argued, such ambiguous vampiric symbolization banishes woman—and not only woman as vampire—to the site of death and of the Other. The Romantic poets' recourse to the concept of the feminine as subversive of oppressive authority becomes an "ideological trap."³⁴ Trust in the eternal feminine may not necessarily lead upward.

In "Christabel" the role of woman as vampire and vampire as woman is ideologically complicated by the doubling of female protagonists. The poem's polymorphous complexity exceeds ballad convention, as is clear by a cursory glance at its prototype in Bishop Percy's collection, "Sir Cauline." Christabel, whose proper name is one of Percy's emendations, the daughter of a nameless king, chaste object of

³²"Hear, Mother, my final request: raise a funeral pyre, release me from my fearful, narrow dwelling, grant the lovers their rest in flames; the scattering sparks, the glowing ashes will speed us toward the ancient gods."

³³For an incisive discussion of the thematic structure and psychosexual implications of the Dracula versions, see Christopher Craft, "'Kiss Me with Those Red Lips': Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*," in *Speaking of Gender*, ed. Elaine Showalter (New York: Routledge, 1989), 216–24.

³⁴Silvia Volckmann, "'Gierig saugt sie seines Mundes Flammen.' Anmerkungen zum Funktionswandel des weiblichen Vampirs in der Literatur des 19. Jahrhunderts," in *Weiblichkeit und Tod in der Literatur*, ed. Renate Berger and Inge Stephan (Cologne: Böhlau, 1987), 166.

many suitors, is loved by Sir Cauline, who, not being her peer, is rejected and banished by the king. Christabel secretly loves the banished knight but is of course powerless. She can do nothing but wring her lily-white hands, moan, shriek, swoon, and expire "with a deepe-fette sighe," when her devoted knight is killed in a joust with a giant.

Coleridge borrows from Percy only the material for an opening tableau: Christabel in the castle woods late at night praying for her distant lover's well-being. Coleridge then immediately enlivens the received formulaic narrative through a counterplot focused on the more complicated, disruptive, demonic female character, the vampiric Geraldine, who probably owes her beautiful looks and seductive demeanor to Goethe's "bride." In the incomplete "Christabel" generic codes are difficult to decipher since the narrative never clearly establishes a dominant mode, changing focus as it does from characters' psychological complexities to dramatic dialogue, to lyric evocation, to incremental repetition, to sentimental romance, to erotic initiation, to chivalric rules, and to gothic bathos.³⁵ These divergent strands contaminate ballad simplicity while blurring the implicit boundaries between high and low art, between social propriety and poetic license. The vampire-as-woman is the parasitic agent that appropriates the proprieties and undermines the stability of the social as well as the aesthetic text.

Let me focus here on only one episode, the scandalous homoerotic encounter between the saintly Christabel and the mysterious "weary woman scarce alive" whom she rescues. Invoking her father's chivalric service, the proper daughter offers the hospitality of her chamber to the homeless and uncanny (*unheimliche*) Geraldine, whose ambiguous virtue is revealed in the momentary glittering of her eyes. As the narrative unfolds, it well exemplifies Franco Moretti's observation that "vampirism is an excellent example of the identity of desire and fear."³⁶

Insofar as Coleridge's narrator presents himself as a rather artless minstrel reciting a received narrative, he casts the reader in the role of fascinated listener and prurient onlooker. Like the narrator, the implied reader is male.³⁷ The narrator's presence in the bedroom functions to turn both women into objects exhibited for the pleasure of the male viewer-listener. Borrowing Jerome Christensen's term, we might call

³⁵Karen Swann discusses the generic complexities and disturbances in "'Christabel': The Wandering Mother and the Enigma of Form," *Studies in Romanticism* 23 (Winter 1984): 533-53.

³⁶Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders*, 100.

³⁷The "masculinization" of the spectator position is fully discussed in relation to film in Laura Mulvey's influential *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 14-38.

this moment a "Scene of Fascination," as distinguished from Harold Bloom's "Scene of Instruction": whereas the scene of Instruction takes Raphael's discourse in book 5 of *Paradise Lost* as its prototype, the "pattern of the scene of fascination is that where, transfixed, Satan gazes at the nakedly veiled Eve, tempted to become the tempter."³⁸ Although the narrator in "Christabel" is no satanic tempter, his interest in the virgin's disrobing and lying down "in her loveliness" is both voyeuristic and moralistic. He gives no details about Christabel's body beyond stating that she undressed her "gentle limbs," but he presents the naked Christabel as raising herself on her elbow to look at Geraldine. He then appropriates her gaze to display Geraldine in the process of undressing. Coleridge expunged the line describing half her bosom as "lean and old and foul of hue," but he gave the narrator enough license to evoke gothic sexual fantasies that entice the reader into imaginative collaboration:

Then drawing in her breath aloud,
Like one that shuddered, she unbound
The cincture from beneath her breast:
Her silken robe, and inner vest,
Dropt to her feet, and full in view,
Behold! her bosom and half her side—
A sight to dream of, not to tell!

(1.247-53)

It is the sight of woman as a gothic object on display. Ironically, in his preface to the poem the author apologizes for the irregularities in his meter, which he assures his reader were "not introduced wantonly,"³⁹ but he does not apologize for the erotic irregularities.

If in this scene the narrator controls the text, at other times Geraldine's disruptive presence seems to escape his mastery. He resorts to stereotypical roles from gothic romance to contain her: beautiful damsel in distress; noble lady abducted by violent barbarians; seductress of both the innocent heroine and her father; usurper of power over the dead mother. Her duplicity engenders a total disruption of law and order, striking at the family, the core of bourgeois stability. She generates her own narrative explaining her entrance into the baron's house-

³⁸Jerome Christensen, "Setting Byron Straight: Class, Sexuality, and the Poet," in *Literature and the Body*, ed. Elaine Scarry (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 126.

³⁹Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1912), 1:215.

hold, which she enforces as the operative truth. Skillful purveyor of carefully manipulated facts that she is, she effectively spellbinds Christabel into reproducing her version:

... in the dim forest
 Thou heard'st a low moaning,
 And found'st a bright lady, surpassingly fair;
 And didst bring her home with thee in love and in charity.
(1. 274-77)

Moreover, even without prompting, Sir Leoline later produces her narrative for her when the bard displaces the minstrel narrator and relates his dream of the struggle of a gentle dove whose wings and neck are caught in a snake's coils. Ignoring the bard's identification of dove and Christabel, Sir Leoline rationalizes his attraction to Geraldine by identifying her as "Lord Roland's beauteous dove" (2.569). Masking sexual desire with chivalric duty, he dismisses the poet's ineffectual, feminized words and promises more manly action on Geraldine's behalf: "With arms more strong than harp or song, / Thy sire and I will crush the snake" (2.570-71). Geraldine's unlawful intrusion thus crushes all potential counternarratives, ensnares patriarchal authority, and leaves the legitimate daughter marginalized and without a voice.

Geraldine, who can be seen as "an evil substitute mother,"⁴⁰ disrupts the father-daughter relationship but is instrumental in restoring the boyhood friendship between the two patriarchs, Sir Leoline and Sir Roland. The narrator's paean to male friendship was the only section of this capacious narrative of which reviewers approved. Hazlitt, whom Coleridge suspected of maliciously spreading the story that Geraldine was a man in drag,⁴¹ admired the passage as the only "genuine burst of humanity" in the poem, the only place where "no dream oppresses" the author, "no spell binds him."⁴² "Constancy," Coleridge's narrator asserts, "lives in realms above" (2.410); the youths' idyllic friendship ends as each insults "his heart's best brother" (2.417), but though they part, neither ever again finds another "to free the hollow heart from paining" (2.420).

Geraldine's capacity to enthrall, to captivate and spellbind her chosen

⁴⁰Margery Durham, "The Mother Tongue: *Christabel* and the Language of Love," in *The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation*, ed. Shirley Nelson Garner, Claire Kahane, and Madelon Sprengnether (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 181.

⁴¹Coleridge, *Collected Letters*, 4:917.

⁴²Quoted in Swann, "Christabel," 544.

subject, suggests that she is an artist figure. The mesmerizing power of her large blue eyes that "glitter bright" (1.221). links her to Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, who was created at roughly the same time, in the fall of 1797. The vampire's art and art's vampirism engage in a morally ambiguous transaction with an empathic Other, who is powerfully transported into an imaginary realm, which, as Plato so sternly warned, can through its mimetic effect make the recipient participate as readily in evil as in good.

In their theoretical writings the Romantic poets unambiguously extolled the virtues of the imagination, as in Shelley's paradigmatic formulation:

The great secret of morals is love; or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own. . . . The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effects by acting upon the cause. Poetry enlarges the circumference of the imagination by replenishing it with thoughts of ever new delight, which have the power of attracting and assimilating to their own nature all other thoughts, and which form new intervals and interstices whose void for ever craves fresh food.⁴³

While thus expunging the Platonic doubt about the imagination's potentially immoral identification with evil, Romantic authors in their poetry, most notably Goethe in *Faust*, nevertheless displayed the vampiric capacity for "attracting and assimilating . . . all other thoughts," leaving the vampiric reader forever craving "fresh food." The post-Romantic locus classicus of this amoral complicity between the artist and his reader, Charles Baudelaire's *Fleurs du mal*, exquisitely articulates the vampiric imagination as both an external power and part of the poet's and reader's psyche, as both the enslaver and the enslaved. Neither the poet nor the reader, his double ("mon semblable"), can escape the demonic entrapment, driven as they are to forge the irresistible Faustian pact.

We might ask why Coleridge chose to name his vampire-artist Geraldine rather than Gerald.⁴⁴ Does the female visage of the vampire, like the female features of the snake tempting Eve in Renaissance paintings, deflect the seductive power of evil away from patriarchy and suggest

⁴³Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Critical Prose*, ed. Bruce R. McElderry, Jr. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), 12–13.

⁴⁴Moretti offers the ingenious claim that works featuring women as vampires represent elite culture whereas those featuring men are part of mass culture (*Signs Taken for Wonders*, 103–4).

that women's narcissism is at the root of all evil? That when women command the poet's strange power of speech, they draw others into their own ambiguous sphere, controlling both subconscious and conscious mind? Having experienced the spell of art, the victim returns to her own familiar world, able to recall only traces of her vampiric experience, like the aura of a forgotten dream. Although both the Mariner and Geraldine are types of the *poète maudit*, the male figure's curse empowers him and enlightens his spellbound male listener, whereas the female's demonism paralyzes her captivated female subject, who mimes her gestures (rolling eyes, hissing tongue) without gaining access to either wisdom or power.

Thus, in key moments Christabel unwittingly functions as Geraldine's double, a doubling that allows us "to see 'feminine' genre and gender alike as cultural fantasy."⁴⁵ The fantasy takes on multiple benevolent and malevolent perspectives of meek maiden and cunning vampire, chivalric poet and imperious baron, which can be articulated only through generic mixtures, impurities, contaminations; they subvert the sense communicated by the formulaic repertory of the ballad that hierarchical social relations are universal and unchanging. Yet even as the text destabilizes the rules of genre and gender it makes visible the limits it transgresses. Christabel, that paragon of maidenly innocence and meek obedience, cannot finally confirm the triumph of feminine virtue, combining smiles with tears in her first experience of sin. And Geraldine, the humanly inhuman vampire, cannot unambiguously confirm the subversion of patriarchal law, but neither can she be bound by the domestic sphere. Needlework is not her favorite occupation. Instead of being trapped in a single social role or single narrative genre, Geraldine lures her listeners through desire and fear into her sphere of influence. The woman as vampire thus signals a way of escaping (not transforming) cultural codes but without generating a utopian counter-narrative.

Neither "Christabel" nor "Die Braut von Korinth" provides the closure that in the gothic fiction of their time contained or expelled the violent forces it so thrillingly entertained. Driven by figures risen from the grave to prey on the living, their narratives suggest the virulent danger of unresolved conflicts from the past threatening to undermine the stability of the present.⁴⁶ This threat is more clearly social as well

⁴⁵Swann, "Christabel," 541.

⁴⁶See David Punter's perceptive comment that the gothic "occupied a borderguard position, forever on the lookout for threats from without, whether from the un-dead aristocracy or simply from the past, or even from within the bourgeois order itself, from

as psychological in the completed "Braut von Korinth" than in the fragmentary "Christabel," since Goethe explicitly situates his narrative in a historical moment of change from pagan to Christian morality, a "progress" that he depicts as harshly repressive. The reader of 1797 would easily recall the revolutionary work of *la guillotine*, which could hardly be said to have replaced the ancien régime with a gentler and kinder new order. Yet we cannot simply equate Goethe's and Coleridge's vampires with revolutionary bloodletting. They are far more ambiguous: they are both attractive and disruptive, both desirable and terrifying, leading the reader both to empathize with their subversive energy and to fear their demonic entrapment.

In the microstructure of Goethe's and Coleridge's vampiric ballads, in which the threats from past social systems are encoded as undead female demons, we can view and review far more clearly than in macrostructures like Romanticism the interplay between genre and gender, between authors' unpredictable creativity and predictable codes and conventions, between individual neologisms and inherited cultural systems. Such reviews are needed in order to arrive at theoretically more precise articulations of genre and gender in literary and cultural history.

those aspects of reality, psychological and social, which threatened to break through the thin web of ideological conformism and disrupt conservative synthesis." David Punter, "Social Relations of Gothic Fiction," in *Romanticism and Ideology*, ed. David Aers, Jonathan Cook, and David Punter (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 117.