



# *Women and Gothic*

Women and the use of the Gothic from 1798 to the present in  
England, the United States and the Netherlands

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## Introduction

Charming as were all Mrs. Radcliffe's works, and charming even as were the works of all her imitators, it was not in them perhaps that human nature, at least in the midland counties of England, was to be looked for. Of the Alps and Pyrenees, with their pine forests and their vices, they might give faithful delineation; and Italy, Switzerland, and the South of France, might be as fruitful in horrors as they were there represented. Catherine dared not doubt beyond her own country, and even of that, if hard pressed, would have yielded the northern and western extremities. But in the central part of England there was surely some security for the existence even of a wife not beloved, in the laws of the land, and the manners of the age. Murder was not tolerated, servants were not slaves, and neither poison nor sleeping potions to be procured, like rhubarb, from every druggist. Among the Alps and Pyrenees, perhaps, there were no mixed characters. There, such as were not as spotless as an angel, might have the dispositions of a fiend. But in England it was not so; among the English, she believed, in their hearts and habits, there was a general though unequal mixture of good and bad. (*Northanger Abbey*, p205-206)

### Gothic

What is Gothic? In a nutshell I would describe Gothic as a style of books or films in which the absurdities of normality are so blown out of proportion that normality itself is made into an absurdity and is something critically thought about by readers and viewers. But Gothic can actually not be caught into one or even a few sentences; the genre knows many faces and forms. It is therefore important to explain what Gothic is and where it came from. Virginia Woolf described Gothic in 1921 like this: 'It is a parasite, an artificial commodity, produced half in joke in reaction against the current style, or in relief from it.'<sup>1</sup> Gothic literature was the kind of literature that no serious person would ever read, and Woolf says that we should perhaps congratulate ourselves because we have advanced from this level of literature. But she also says that perhaps this was just the kind of literature people needed between the books of Pope and Richardson. Just like today, because now more people read pulp, for example books from the Bouquet-novels in the Netherlands, than high literature like Shakespeare.

Fred Botting and Dale Townshend describe Gothic literature as 'a shift from classicism to modernity, embodying a new sense of literature'<sup>2</sup>. They claim that Gothic language is used mainly for the effect. It is used 'to push language to the limit'<sup>3</sup> and to scare and thrill people. Critics and reviewers opposed the way language and the way historical facts were used in Gothic novels. It was neither contemporary, nor was it historical. It was at least not historically correct. Rosemarie Buikema and Lies Wesseling argue that Gothic is a genre that critically reviews modernism. In the eighteenth century the term Gothic was used to oppose classicism or classics. The chivalry of the medieval period was seen as a virtue from a long lost time that should be brought back to the present. When Horace Walpole called his novel *Castle of Otranto* a 'gothic tale' in 1764, a time of the rise of the bourgeoisie, Walpole wanted to create a new alliance between reality and the

supernatural. According to Buikema en Wesseling, he also wanted to create a new alliance between the bourgeoisie and nobility, between progress and melancholia, and between rationality and uncontrollable emotions.<sup>4</sup> Gothic stories often take place in exotic countries and almost always in big houses that are cut off from the modern world. This distance from contemporary England, the Netherlands or America is important to blow contemporary values and standards out of proportion and in this way criticize them. Buikema en Wesseling argue that in this setting the female heroine looks even more virtuous and capable to carry out the new, just future.<sup>5</sup> At the same time these women also stand for the uncontrollable emotion Walpole wanted to set against rationality. The women in first wave Gothic stories are often hysterical, over-emotional, too curious for their own good, naïve and a bit witless. Jane Austen has put her finger on exactly this, by letting her heroine in *Northanger Abbey* be overly emotional and letting her see danger and murderers everywhere because she had read Gothic novels.

Furthermore, the Gothic offers a platform to the emancipation of women. The women in the novels and films struggle, mostly against men, but also against other women. But the woman, either the author or the heroine of the novel, in the end breaks free from her struggle and shows other women that they should live their life the way they want.

On the other hand, the past always haunts the present and future of people in Gothic stories. Most of the time, the past is represented by ghosts but sometimes also by mere memories of the past. Gothic stories, in other words, show the tension between the bright future and the brutal past that went before it and never completely stays in the past.

According to Gary Kelly Gothic novels are ‘criticisms of the fashion system, pride of rank, the gentry of culture of conspicuous consumption, patronage and dependence, the “mistress system” of courtly gallantry, and emulation of these “merely” social and economic institutions by other classes.’<sup>6</sup>

### **The suppressed and unconscious**

Another important feature of Gothic novels is the way in which it shows the unconscious and suppressed of the society the novel was written in. Gothic has since the beginning been the genre that was analysed as bringing the unconscious to the surface. Sigmund Freud was the first to use the term unconscious within psychoanalysis. In ‘The Unconscious’ in 1915 Freud argued that the unconscious is very important because it gives us ‘intellectual conclusions [that we arrive] at we do not know how’ and puts ‘ideas into our head we do not know from where’.<sup>7</sup> It cannot be located in a particular part of our brain, but it is very important for who we are, what we do and why we do it. Robert Miles put it beautifully when he said: ‘After 1794 the Gothic (...) became a

way of speaking the unspeakable.<sup>8</sup> Unconsciously all the people in Great Britain knew what was wrong in their society, but the Gothic novels gave words to it.

### **Why use novels?**

But why use novels to give an image of the time the novels were written in? How can novels teach us about history, since novels contain fiction which is made up by the authors of these novels? In my thesis the word 'novel' and 'film' are one and the same thing.

Literary theorist Jane Tompkins developed the term 'cultural work' in the nineteen-eighties. Tompkins argues that literature is used to cope with and process tensions in the society. Novels not only mirror society but also created a place to undermine, support and create social values and standards.<sup>9</sup> Roland Barthes argued in 1967, in his article 'The Discourse of History' that history uses techniques from fiction, like the technique he calls the 'referential illusion', which means that the historian had absented himself from the narrative to make it seem that history tells itself.<sup>10</sup> Historian Hayden White argues that historians should not only acknowledge that they use literary techniques, they should also acknowledge that admitting this does not give history less of a status as something that tells the truth since novels 'have much to tell us about reality, our world and our relation with other.'<sup>11</sup> White states that historians are just like the writers of novels. Their stories are not waiting to be written, they have to be created by a novelist or historian. Writing history is therefore, according to White, a poetic or literary enterprise. He even argues that literary techniques are more important than the analysis of evidence or sources. And White also says the ambition of historians should be to produce a literary classic which could never be exceeded by new research. So not only should the historian look at novels but they should write a novel themselves in the process. Philosopher Paul Ricoeur also sees history as a narrative and as similar to literature. But he also makes a distinction, namely in the fact that the events described by historians actually happened and are not created by the author of it, in other words, historical truth is different than poetic or novelist truth.<sup>12</sup> Ricoeur acknowledges the importance of stories. People have told each other stories since the oral tradition in ancient times and not only because stories are easier to remember than mere fact, but also, as Ricoeur argues, because it is by telling the story of once life, a person will understand his purpose in life and his identity.<sup>13</sup> If we take this view into a broader perspective, novels can help by understanding the identity and purpose of a society or nation.

In novels we can see what was important in the time, we can read about how people coped with whatever problems society or the author had, we can read about what was normal and we can read about the way people spoke. By looking at the sales numbers, the way in which

the book was published and the reviews of the book, we can see if the genre was popular or not and why.

### **'Female Gothic'**

My thesis is about the lives of women. I make three distinctions in kinds of women: female authors, female readers/viewers and female heroines in the novels and films. These three kinds of women often merge as is showed for example in the way the living and the dead are portrait in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* by Ann Radcliffe. Terry Castle argues that that the living are constantly being haunted in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. The person haunting them can be a ghost but it can also be a living person. According to Terry Castle '[t]o love in the novel is to become ghostly oneself.'<sup>14</sup> And being haunted by the ghost of a living person is even worse than be haunted by a dead person, because a living person is immune to exorcism. In the film *Rebecca* the heroine is haunted by the living memory of the first wife of her husband, Rebecca. Although Rebecca is never seen or heard in the film, she plays a vital part in it. Another type of dead woman or ghost is the married woman. E. J. Clery argues that being married for the English law was a 'civil death'. Madame Montoni is the metaphorical example of this, since her marriage led to her death. Also, the woman who is supposed to haunt Chateau-de-Bland, Countess de Villefort, was poisoned by her husband.<sup>15</sup>

The kind of Gothic I am using in this thesis has been called 'Female Gothic'. Ellen Moers introduced this term in the 1970s. She defined Female Gothic as: 'the work that women writers have done in the literary mode that, since the eighteenth century, we have called Gothic.'<sup>16</sup> She broadened the term by also including the Gothic that was according to her especially female, namely the Gothic stories that include a female heroine that has to break free from an evil patriarch. The school example of this heroine is the young woman that is a bit too curious for her own good and is exposed to all kinds of evil in old and deserted mansions.<sup>17</sup> The term Female Gothic has been much critiqued since its introduction. Robert Miles stated in 1994 for example that the term had reached an impasse and should from then on be compared with the so called 'Male Gothic' and the emphasis should be put on the social-historical context.

I will be using the term 'Female Gothic' with a new meaning. Female Gothic in this thesis is a broad genre and includes Gothic written by women, Gothic read/watched by women and Gothic with a female heroine. The female heroine is not necessarily a young woman tormented by an patriarch but could just as well be found naïve by her husband or lover. The common theme in all novels and films is a struggling female heroine and/or female writer.

## Outline of this thesis

In chapter one I will be analysing *Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman* by Mary Wollstonecraft (1798), a novel that was published by her husband after her death, and the novel of her daughter Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein: or, the Modern Prometheus* (1818) with the emphasis on Wollstonecraft's novel. Furthermore I will analyse *Northanger Abbey* (1818) by Jane Austen, a novel that is Gothic and at the same time mocks the Gothic. In chapter two I will analyse the Gothic films *Rebecca* by Alfred Hitchcock (1940), *What Lies Beneath* by Robert Zemeckis (2000), *The Others* by Alejandro Amenábar (2001) and *The Lovely Bones* by Peter Jackson (2009). In chapter three I will turn to literature in my own country and analyse two Dutch novels, which, I will argue, are Dutch Gothic novels. The novels I will be using to do this are *De Tienduizend Dingen* by Maria Dermoût (1955) and *Buitenstaanders* by Renate Dorrestein (1983).

Clearly, it would be impossible to analyse all Gothic novels but I have chosen these books and films as representative, because I think that they give a fine example of the kind of Gothic literature and films from the time. I have chosen these time-periods because first of all the first-wave Gothic literature is vital for understanding later Gothic and the 1790s until the 1820 were absolutely vibrant and interesting times. For the films I have chosen for three films from the beginning of this century and one film from the 1940s because it would be interesting to see how Gothic from the 1940s differs from the Hollywood Gothic of today. Furthermore are all these films very well-known films. And finally the 1950s and 1980s are the most interesting times from the twentieth-century in the Netherlands because, for women, they were both periods of a struggle for freedom and autonomy over your own life.

I will be writing this thesis as a Dutch student of Cultural History, from a Dutch perspective and context. I will, by including not only Gothic films from Hollywood, but also Dutch Gothic novels, come to a better insight of how the Gothic have influenced, and still influences women in Great Britain, the United States and the Netherlands.

## English First Wave Gothic

In this first chapter I will introduce the Gothic by analysing the Gothic novels of three women who lived around 1800: Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley and Jane Austen. These women are not only interesting because of their Gothic novels, but also because of their lives, the way they led it, the troubles they faced as a woman writer and the way this changed throughout the years. Women started publishing novels somewhere around 1750. In 1775 the *Monthly Review* wrote that 'that branch of the literary trade' was 'almost entirely engrossed by the ladies.'<sup>18</sup> But this does not mean that it was easy for women to be a writer or have a novel published. Men, particularly, objected and thought that writing and reading women were dangerous. In the artbook *Reading Women* American writer Karen Joy Fowler writes in the foreword how happy women today should be about their opportunity to read:

We women who read should take a moment, put down the book, this or any other, look around us. We are experiencing a rare period of triumph. A collection such as this one encourages the long view, reminding us that this triumph has been a long time coming – hard-fought, hard-won. We should note it, enjoy it fast before books disappear entirely, as we've been told (but do not believe) they soon will in favour of digital technologies – shoot-'em-up web games, Internet quests, chat rooms, weblogs, and other entertainment that haven't yet been invented. The woman who reads had a complicated history. (...) One might wonder why artists so often choose a woman reading as the subject of a painting or photograph. Given the limited access to literacy women have historically had, women readers would seem to be overrepresented in the visual arts. But the image is an interestingly complicated one. We, the viewers, are invited to enter visually, mentally, a place we do not occupy – a garden, perhaps, or a sunlit room – in order to watch a woman who is visually, mentally, in yet another place. She might be time travelling – back to ancient Rome, forward to colonized Mars. She might, while the book lasts, be a completely different person from the one we are seeing. (*Reading Women*, p13-14)

Part of the complicated history of the woman who reads Fowler talks about, will be discussed in this chapter. How did the English society look upon reading and writing women around 1800? And how did these women respond? And what can we learn from Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley and Jane Austen?

### First wave Gothic

The first ever novel to be called Gothic in England was *The Castle of Otranto* (1765) by Horace Walpole. Walpole himself had named the novel 'A Gothic Story' because it is located in the Middle Ages and filled with Gothic themes like castles, chivalry and the supernatural. The first famous female writer of Gothic literature was Ann Radcliffe with *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797), to name two of her most famous novels. The first wave approximately took place until 1820, with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) as highlight. Since then, there has



been much discussion about what Gothic actually is. *Frankenstein*, for example, would not have been called Gothic by its contemporaries because it is not located in the past. Moreover, in 1818 Gothic romance was no longer fashionable. In response to Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice* for example, Miss Milbanke, the future Lady Byron, writes to her mother in 1813: 'It depends not on any of the common resources of novel writers, no drownings, no conflagrations, nor runaway horses, nor lap-dogs and parrots, nor chambermaids and milliners, nor rencontres and disguises. I really think it is the *most probable* fiction I have ever read.'<sup>19</sup> But when Jane Austen wrote *Northanger Abbey* in the 1790s, the Gothic romance was still flourishing as this quote from *Northanger Abbey* shows:

"But, my dearest Catherine, what have you been doing with yourself all this morning? – Have you gone on with Udolpho?" "Yes, I have been reading it ever since I woke; and I am got to the black veil." "Are you, indeed? How delightful! Oh! I would not tell you what is behind the black veil for the world! Are you not wild to know?" "Oh! yes, quite; what can it be? – But do not tell me – I would not be told upon any account. I know it must be a skeleton, I am sure it is Laurentina's skeleton. Oh! I am delighted with the book! I should like to spend my whole life in reading it. I assure you, if it had not been to meet you, I would not have come away from it for all the world." "Dear creature! how much I am obliged to you; and when you have finished Udolpho, we will read the Italian together; and I have made out a list of ten or twelve more of the same kind for you." "Have you, indeed! How glad I am! – What are they all?" "I will read you their names directly; here they are, in my pocket-book. Castle of Wolfenbach, Clermont, Mysterious Warnings, Necromancer of the Black Forest, Midnight Bell, Orphan of the Rhine, and Horrid Mysteries. Those will last us some time." "Yes, pretty well; but are they all horrid, are you sure they are all horrid?" (*Northanger Abbey*, p32)

This was a time of modernisation in England. But also a time of chaos, violence and revolution. And exactly this chaos was mentioned nowhere in literature, except in Gothic literature. This shows two important aspects of Gothic fiction. First, it shows that Gothic literature mentions the unmentioned. This is the case when contemporary violence is concerned but also the modernisation of England. *Frankenstein* for example, shows what could happen when modern science loses its grip over its inventions. The monster of *Frankenstein* can be seen as a horrid past that keeps haunting the present. This is the Gothic way of warning the people of England: no matter how modern and advanced you think you are, your horrid past will not be forgotten easily. Secondly, and more lightly, does the Gothic show that things are in the present a lot better than they have ever been. Nonetheless, in confronting readers with the past, or the marginal, or the oppressed, Gothic literature wants to show its readers that horrors occur everywhere and at all times, but can be solved if people were to acknowledge the horrors of society and work together to solve them.

## Reading and writing women during the first Gothic wave

When in the latter half of the eighteenth-century Gothic literature became popular and the number of published novels grew, the number of commentaries on women's reading grew just as fast. According to Karen Flint '[the commentary] can be found within the general studies of literature, especially those examining the rapid growth of novel production; within the number of advice manuals aimed specifically at young girls and their mothers, and within fiction itself.'<sup>20</sup> The main critique on reading women was, at first, that reading was a waste of time better spent elsewhere and that women could be influenced by what they read, so they could become preoccupied by romance and merely seek excitement and romance as they find them in novels. This critique can be found as early as the sixteenth century according to Karen Flint. In the eighteenth century, for example, a writer who called himself the Sylph wrote: 'My sight is everywhere offended by these foolish, yet dangerous, books. (...) I have actually seen mothers, in miserable garrets, *crying for the imaginary distress of an heroine*, while their children were *crying for bread*'<sup>21</sup>. Nearing the end of the eighteenth-century, a new fear of reading was uttered: reading could teach women a political attitude that would challenge the role of the woman in the family and in relation to authority.<sup>22</sup>

Reading women were not the only victims of criticism. Although women were the most productive writers of the period, men like Francis William Blagdon wrote in 1806 that 'with the exception of a certain *Monkish* author, the most *indecent* playwright, and the *grossest* and *most immoral* novelists of the present day, are *women!*'<sup>23</sup> Stuart Curran<sup>24</sup> argues that most woman writers were women looking for an identity and sometimes even independence through writing. It was a logical step in that time for (mainly wealthy) women to be involved in and have discussions with the intellectual and literary world, as their husbands already were. More and more bourgeois women could, just like aristocratic women, afford to quit their jobs and stay at home and read and write. Reading and writing became widely tolerated as mind-stimulating pastimes for women. At the end of the eighteenth century more than half the novels were written by women; it became a woman's genre. By the 1820s poetry could also be called a woman's genre. What Curran wonders about, is that men did not feel threatened at all by these women writers. According to Curran this was mainly because women writers were not taken seriously by men. Furthermore, most women argued that they were only writing to support themselves and their children after being abandoned by their husbands. They also wrote to inform young girls of what was just and virtuous and how they should behave.<sup>25</sup> According to Scott MacKenzie Ann Radcliffe does criticize these tracts and her heroines do give her readers an important opinion about the dilemma of reading and being read.<sup>26</sup> Radcliffe criticizes the reading-phobia for

example, MacKenzie says, when Countess de Villefort in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* listens to her companion reading her a Sentimental novel. And the entire novel exemplifies what reading is like for women, according to men. It is impossible to read a book without being completely lost in the book and you will not get out without help of your husband.<sup>27</sup> Fathers and husbands were supposed to be vigilant of what women read. The Spanish humanist Juan Luis Vives, already argued in the sixteenth-century 'that wise fathers will suffer their daughters, or husbands their wives, or that the manner and customs of people will dissemble and overlook, that women shall use to read wantonness'<sup>28</sup>. According to Vives men possessed the superior knowledge and wisdom to tell women what they are allowed to read, for women should not trust their own judgement on the matter. This also shows that reading is and was never merely a solo-activity. Women do read alone, and get lost in their novels alone. But they are advised by their friends about new books they should read, like Catherine in *Northanger Abbey*. And they have been taught to read novels by someone in the first place; mostly by their mothers. Clara Reeve argues that '[i]t is certainly the duty of every Mother, to consider seriously, the consequences of suffering children to read all the books that fall in their way indiscriminately.'<sup>29</sup> Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries the mother became the central figure in the lives of children, mostly in the bourgeoisie. More and more people (like Rousseau) wrote books on how to raise your children. Mothers were encouraged to give more exclusive attention to their children, for example by breastfeeding them themselves. Most bourgeois women did not agree, since they wanted to lead their own lives and developed themselves intellectually, but they were put back into the house by men how caused them to feel guilty about being a bad mother. Women had to be perfect wives and mothers.<sup>30</sup> But that meant that they would not be able to receive any education. Women were submitted to the private sphere, and no longer welcome in the public sphere. Women writers did not allow themselves to be put in this strait-jacket, however. They made public concerns personal, and by publishing their letters, they made their personal affairs public.<sup>31</sup> Mary Shelley for example picked up the debate about women, where her mother had left off. She was also one of few women writers to publish visions of women actively engaged in the public sphere and thereby rejecting the standard gender roles in society at the time.<sup>32</sup>

### **Mary Wollstonecraft**

Mary Wollstonecraft agreed with all the critical points against reading in some way or another. Wollstonecraft thought that women should not waste their time reading romantic novels. They should read schoolbooks or other books that could teach them about the world they lived in. Romance was not something to be read about, it was something you learned about in the real

world. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) Wollstonecraft wrote about women who read novels: "These are the women who are amused by the reveries of the stupid novelists, who, knowing little of human nature, work up stale tales, and describe meretricious scenes, all retailed in a sentimental jargon, which equally tend to corrupt the taste, and draw the heart aside from its daily duties."<sup>33</sup> She also argues that the best way 'to correct a fondness for novels is to ridicule them'<sup>34</sup>. Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1818) is an example of just this. Austen did not want to 'correct a fondness for novels', but she did want to show how ridiculous the fantasies of the women in Gothic novels were. The heroine of Austen's novel, Catherine, who, after being invited to Northanger Abbey, gets herself in to trouble because she invents murder stories where there are none. But just as Austen is not merely ridiculing Gothic novels, Wollstonecraft is not just against the reading of novels because 'any kind of reading I think [is] better than leaving a blank still a blank'<sup>35</sup> and '[w]hen, therefore, I advise my sex not to read such flimsy works, it is to induce them to read something superior'<sup>36</sup>. This is because Wollstonecraft did also agree with the third criticism; that reading could bring women political awareness. In *Maria: or, The Wrongs of Women* (1798) the hardships women face are blown out of proportion and made very clear to the reader. But Wollstonecraft mostly thought, of course, that reading more serious literature would make women more critical and also more serious partners for men. Men thought that women were too backwards and vain to be worth teaching anything. Wollstonecraft opposed this and said that women were like this *because* they did not have access to any education. Wollstonecraft argued that women should be educated to learn how to be free and independent and love would teach them about life.<sup>37</sup>

Mary Wollstonecraft was born 27 April 1759 in London to Edward John Wollstonecraft, the son of a weaver, and the Irish Elizabeth Dickson Wollstonecraft. Mary was their second child in a family of seven children in total.<sup>38</sup> The family moved a lot because Mary's father made debts everywhere. Her father was also violent towards her mother and Mary was often found on the landing in front of her mother's bedroom door to protect her from her husband. Mary was very unhappy and looked for affection outside of her family. She befriended a neighbouring clergyman and his family became her second family who educated her. When Mary Wollstonecraft turned eighteen she moved out of her parents' house and later she set up a school with her sister Eliza and her best friend Fanny Blood. Fanny died in childbirth and Mary was forced to close the school because of financial problems. She met the publisher Joseph Johnson who introduced her to some liberal writers. Johnson published Mary's book *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* in 1787 which earned her 10 guineas. The French Revolution was a very important event to Mary. It caused her to write *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, published in 1790 in response to *Reflections on*

*the Revolution in France* by Edmund Burke. Burke was against the Revolution while Mary was inspired by it and the idea of equality between people. But even the revolutionists in France did not want equal rights between men and women. This caused Mary to write her most famous book: *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792).

### ***Maria: or, The Wrongs of Women***

*Maria: or, The Wrongs of Women* was never a finished novel. It contains several pieces that her husband William Goldwin turned into a novel after Wollstonecraft's death. He added sentences to make it more complete with, as Goldwin writes in the Preface 'it being the editor's most earnest desire, to intrude nothing of himself into the work, but to give to the public the words, as well as ideas, of the real author.'<sup>39</sup> The ending of the novel is even left open and contains several different possible endings. Most scholars have, however, used the ending in which Maria finds her thought to be dead daughter again with the help of her nurse Jemima. This ending is the most extended ending and also the only ending that is happy without the presence of a husband or other man. According to Godwin, Wollstonecraft had worked intensely on the manuscript for twelve months before her death. The only other novel Wollstonecraft had written was *Mary, A Fiction* (1788). Her writings include works on education, political commentary, travel literature, autobiography, moral philosophy and fiction.<sup>40</sup>

Mary Wollstonecraft's life reads like a Gothic novel. Gothic novels are not necessarily scary and filled with ghosts. In Mary Wollstonecraft's novel *Mary: or, The Wrongs of Woman*, exactly that which Maggie Kilmour has described as Gothic, happens. "Normal' human relationships are defamiliarised and critiqued in the Gothic', she argues, 'by being pushed to destructive extremes.' *Maria* is about the young woman Maria who ends up in an asylum after being hunted down by her husband for the wish of divorcing him. She writes the story of her life in a letter to her daughter, who was kept from her by her husband, and she has all the bad luck a person can possibly have. Just like Mary Wollstonecraft, her father was a tyrannical patriarch and her mother was not an useful comrade-in-arms. Like Wollstonecraft, Maria fled the household as soon as she could, but in Maria's case she did so by marrying a man who, at first, seemed like a suitable husband. Next to the life of Maria, the story of many other women are also told in the novel. The novel starts as a typical Gothic novel:

Abodes of horror have frequently been described, and castles, filled with spectres and chimeras, conjured up by the magic spell of genius to harrow the soul, and absorb the wondering mind. But, formed of such stuff as dreams are made of, what were they to the mansion of despair, in one corner of which Maria sat, endeavouring to recal her scattered thoughts! (*Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman*, p75)

What Wollstonecraft is really saying here, and throughout the novel, is that real life is a lot more scary and horrid than any Gothic novel. This is especially clear when Wollstonecraft lets Maria write to her daughter: 'I heave sigh after sigh; yet my heart is still oppressed. For what am I reserved? Why was I not born a man, or why was I born at all?'<sup>41</sup> *Maria* is an interesting Gothic novel for several reasons. Because of the defamiliarization I have mentioned before, but also because the novel uses the Gothic narrative of suspense and horror, to get a point across, this point being, that most men are of no use to women, marriage should never be a woman's goal in life, women should be vigilant towards love and women should take care of each other. Wollstonecraft makes her point by showing all the mistakes women can possibly make.

When locked up in the asylum, Maria falls in love with a man who is also locked up, through his writings. They exchange books and letters. Nurse Jemima, who at first does not seem very friendly, tells her dreadful life-story filled with poverty and prostitution and is very touched by Maria's friendship towards her; something she had never experienced before. Maria herself was already very soon keen on leaving the house of her tyrannical father and mother who only loves her oldest son. But she makes the aberration of mistaking a man whose only goal is receiving her uncle's money, for her saviour.

(...) I heard with pleasure of my uncle's proposal; but thought more of obtaining my freedom, than of my lover. But, when George, seemingly anxious for my happiness, pressed me to quit my present painful situation, my heart swelled with gratitude – I know not that my uncle had promised him five thousand pounds. Had this truly generous man mentioned his intention to me, I should have insisted on a thousand pounds being settled on each of my sister; George would have contested; I should have seen his selfish soul; and – gracious God! have been spared the misery of discovering, when too late, that I was united to a heartless, unprincipled wretch. (*Maria: or, The Wrongs of Women*, p138)

Her husband George turns out to be an unwashed cheat, who has no respect for Maria. When he offers Maria a boyfriend, Maria decides to divorce her husband. He responds by locking her up in a room in their house. She escapes with the help of a servant and tries to find help with several women. But all women she turns to for help, although they offer her a room for some time, are too afraid of either their own husband or for George, to help her for a longer period. One landlady told Maria that "[w]omen must be submissive, (...) Indeed what could most women do? Who had they to maintain them, but their husbands? Every woman, and especially a lady, could not go through rough and smooth, as she had done, to earn a little bread."<sup>42</sup> This landlady shows that *Maria* crosses the class-boundaries. Jemima is a poor girl who had to prostitute herself to have something to eat and Maria on the other hand was so wealthy when she lived with her parents that she had two mattresses and wanted to give one of them away to poor neighbors. The landlady is sure that Maria could never fully understand the sorrows of

poor people: 'He [her husband] ran in debt to buy her [his mistress] fine clothes, such clothes as I never thought of wearing myself, and – would you believe it? – he signed an execution on my very goods, bought with the money I worked so hard to get; and they came and took my bed from under me, before I heard a word of the matter. Aye, madam, these are misfortunes that you gentlefolks know nothing of; - but sorrow is sorrow, let it come which way it will.'<sup>43</sup> But showing all these different kinds of sorrow is Wollstonecraft's way of bringing women of all classes and income together. Women should stick up for each other, no matter what their status in life. Jemima is the only person to help out Maria in her time of need, the man she had fallen in love with does nothing for her, but Jemima brings back her child and Maria decides to devote the rest of her life to her daughter.

### **Mary Shelley and *Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus***

On 30 August 1797 Mary Wollstonecraft gave birth to her own daughter, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin. Eleven days later Mary Wollstonecraft died of the complications of childbirth. The young Mary grew up without a real mother, but she was surrounded by her mother's books. She and her later husband Percy Shelley read everything Mary's parents had written. Mary Shelley published one of the most famous Gothic novels *Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus* in 1818. She wrote the novel when she was only eighteen because of a game she was participating in with Percy Shelley and Lord Byron. It was a competition to see who could write the best horror story. The story of *Frankenstein* came to Mary Shelley in a dream. Just like her mother's life, Mary Shelley's life is that of a Gothic story. Her birth caused the death of her mother. In 1815 Mary Shelley herself gave birth to a daughter who died two weeks later. She gave birth to her son William in 1816 who died in 1819. In 1816 her half-sister Fanny Imlay (the other daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft) committed suicide. In 1817 she gave birth to her daughter Clara who died a year later.

This very short biography of Mary Shelley's life already gives us lots of information about her and her reasons for writing *Frankenstein*. The birth and death of her first daughter occurred only eighteen months before the writing of the horror story. Shelley wrote in her journal of a recurring dream: 'Dream that my little baby came to life again – that it had only been cold & that we rubbed it by the fire & it lived – I awake & find no baby.'<sup>44</sup> Her son William was born on January 24, 1816, only six months before she wrote the novel. And she knew she was going to be pregnant again soon. From these facts, Anne Mellor abstracts a vital part of *Frankenstein*: Shelley's fear of giving birth to an abnormal, deformed and hideous child whom she would not be able to love.<sup>45</sup> Mellor argues that the dream of Mary Shelley's gives us the central theme of *Frankenstein*:

Victor Frankenstein's complete failure as a parent. He is not able to love his creature; he fears and loathes it. But giving birth can also be seen as a metaphor in this case. Firstly, Mary Shelley gave birth to her first novel. Secondly the book shows Shelley's anxiety of giving birth to her self-as-author.<sup>46</sup> And, Mellor argues, this is not because of something Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar called a female 'anxiety of authorship', but her personal anxiety that she would become a writer like her mother. Feminist critic Ellen Moers goes even further with this theme. She argues that *Frankenstein* is a 'birth myth' that reveals the 'revulsion against newborn life, and the drama of guilt, dread and flight surrounding birth and its consequences.'<sup>47</sup> Mary Shelley knew that her mother had died in childbirth, because the placenta (or after-birth) would not come out. Moers therefore reads *Frankenstein* as an afterbirth, containing Shelley's guilt, both for killing her mother and for not producing a son and heir for Percy Shelley.<sup>48</sup>

Mary Shelley's father William Goldwin agreed with Mary Wollstonecraft that girls should receive education, so Mary Shelley was homeschooled and read everything that was available to her. She was brought up by her father but also a little bit by her mother. Ulrich Knoepfmacher states that : '*Frankenstein* resurrects and rearranges an adolescent's conflicting emotions about her relation both to the dead mother she idealized and mourned and to the living, 'sententious and authoritative' father-philosopher she admired and deeply resented for his imperfect attempts at 'moulding' Mary Wollstonecraft's two daughters.'<sup>49</sup> Mary Shelley created her own mother, a surrogate mother, through her books. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar named this fact 'bibliogenesis': the fact that Mary Shelley brought herself to birth not through a human mother but through the reading and consumption of books.<sup>50</sup>

This is also to be found in *Frankenstein*. Feminists have first of all seen the novel as a description of what happens when men try to procreate without women.<sup>51</sup> It is not natural. And in the eyes of Mary Shelley perhaps, it is also not natural for a daughter to grow up without a mother. Perhaps she saw something of herself in the monster of *Frankenstein*. Perhaps she saw herself as a monster, not naturally born, because she caused her mother's death. We know for sure that Mary Shelley idealized her mother and took her ideas to be her own. Mary Shelley also wrote on women's education and thought it her duty to engage in the public debate. And also just like Mary Wollstonecraft, she believed that she, as a mother, had to bring up intelligent children who could think and talk for themselves.

*Frankenstein* can also be seen as a novel about Mary Wollstonecraft. The monster of Frankenstein also seeks love outside of the family and finds it for a little while with a blind man who is not able to see his ugliness. Mary Shelley knew the life of her mother well since her father William Goldwin, had published the complete story of her life in complete frankness in *Memoires*



of the Author of *Vindications of the Rights of Woman*.<sup>52</sup> The most striking quote from *Frankenstein* is about fitting in and being accepted by your surroundings, something that both Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley struggled with is:

I lay on my straw, but I could not sleep. I thought of the occurrences of the day. What chiefly struck me was the gentle manners of these people; and I longed to join them, but dared not. I remembered too well the treatment I had suffered the night before from the barbarous villagers, and resolved, whatever course of conduct I might hereafter think it right to pursue, that for the present I would remain quietly in my hovel, watching, and endeavouring to discover the motives which influenced their actions. (*Frankenstein*, p96)

In 1827 Mary Shelley wrote in a letter: '[My mother's] greatness of soul & my father's high talents have perpetually reminded me that I ought to degenerate as little as I could from those from whom I derived my being ... my chief merit must always be derived, first from the glory these wonderful beings have shed [*around*] me, & then for the enthusiasm I have for excellence & the ardent admiration I feel for those who sacrifice themselves for the public good.'<sup>53</sup> So she recognized her parents' talents but she was very aware of the fact that she did want to become like her parents. In a way *Frankenstein* can also be seen as novel that started Mary Shelley's life apart from her mother. Mary Shelley has from the start been a more famous novel writer than her mother. And today, every person on the planet knows *Frankenstein* but only so many people know the works of Mary Wollstonecraft. This particular Gothic novel has caused Mary Shelley to be her own autonomous self.

### **Jane Austen and *Northanger Abbey***

Jane Austen's story is a different one from the two Marys. Austen did not need to write to make money, or to prove something to her parents. What is more, Austen had to be careful of her reputation. She was an gentlewoman, born in Steventon, Hampshire as the daughter of a Anglican clergyman. Her brother Henry wanted to be sure that her reputation was that she was a 'ladylike, unmercenary, unprofessional, private, delicate, and domestic author'<sup>54</sup>, so he wrote in her biographies that she would never write a story for fame or profit. In reality Austen loved that she got money for her hard work and that people loved reading her stories. She lived for her writing and always read them to her family. She could not understand why other women sometimes ridicule novels in their own novels, as she writes in *Northanger Abbey*:

Yes novels; - for I will not adopt that ungenerous and impolitic custom so common with novel writers, of degrading by their contemptuous censure the very performances, to the number of which they are themselves adding - joining with their greatest enemies in bestowing the harshest epithets on such works, and scarcely ever permitting them to be read by their own heroine, who, if she accidentally takes up a novel, is sure to turn over its insipid pages with disgust. Alas!

if the heroine of one novel be not patronized by the heroine of another, from whom can she expect protection and regard? I cannot approve of it. Let us leave it to the Reviewers to abuse such effusions of fancy at their leisure, and over every new novel to talk in threadbare strains of the trash with which the press now groans. Let us not desert one another; we are an injured body. Although our productions have afforded more extensive and unaffected pleasure than those of any other literary corporation in the world, no species of composition has so much decried. From pride, ignorance, or fashion, our foes are almost as many as our readers. (*Northanger Abbey*, p30-31)

*Northanger Abbey* was published in 1818, a year after Jane Austen's death, together with her other novel *Persuasion*. Austen had starting writing the novel in the 1790s under the title *Susan* and finished it in 1799 and revised and sold in the 1803.<sup>55</sup> Rebecca West argued in the preface of the 1932 edition of *Northanger Abbey* that the buyer would probably have thought it a lovely story in simple English at first, but when he really read the novel closely found out that the novel was filled with mockery and that Austen seemed to laugh at her characters and even at her potential readers.<sup>56</sup> After six years of waiting Jane Austen send a letter to the buyer that if they would not publish her manuscript she would send a second copy to another publisher. The buyer responded that they could not remember agreeing to publish the novel, that if Austen would publish somewhere else they would come with legal action and if she wanted her manuscript back she could pay them the £10 she had paid them years before. Austen could probably not pay this amount of money, so the manuscript stayed with Benjamin Crosby & Co.<sup>57</sup> In 1816 Jane Austen's brother did buy the novel, but because another novel called *Susan* was published in 1809, the name of the heroine and the novel changed into *Catherine*. Jane Austen herself, apart from writing an 'advertisement' explaining that the novel should have been published in 1803 and apologizing for parts which were now 'comparatively obsolete'<sup>58</sup>, did not make any serious attempts to have her novel published. After her death, however, her brother and sister found a publisher very easy and in 1818 *Northanger Abbey* (as they had renamed it) was published. But the novel was never as popular as her other novels. Firstly because of the new name; between 1784 and 1818 thirty-two novels appeared with the word 'abbey' in them and since *Northanger Abbey* was already finished in 1799, readers thought that this could not have been a very 'new' novel. Nonetheless, all reviewers of *Northanger Abbey* were positive, albeit less positive than about Austen's other novels.

In *Northanger Abbey* Austen ridicules the Gothic novel and the novel of manners; all novels filled with overly sentimental women who exaggerate and have an imagination that gets the better of them. For example when Isabella has to wait five minutes before Catherine arrives, she says that she has waited 'at least this age'<sup>59</sup>. And when the heroine Catherine is invited to *Northanger Abbey*, she sees ghosts and murderers lurking in every corner when, in reality, there is absolutely nothing horrid or even exiting happening in the Abbey. Jane Austen's way of

writing is a Gothic one. She ridicules, criticizes and blows out of proportion. Gary Kelly argues that '[r]eading, for Austen as for some hermeneutic philosophers and some post-structuralist critics, is a dialectic between the self and the text, between the individual 'temper' (both innate and acquired inward character) and a world or a book (as a world) with its own independent, 'objective' reality but always, of necessity, subject to interpretation and thus in the root sense a fiction – something fashioned or formed.'<sup>60</sup> In other words, or actually in the words of Jane Tompkins, novels not only mirror society but also created a place to undermine, support and create social values and standards. And novels create a place to form your own self. For a reader this means, according to Kelly, that because Austen is 'engaging in [a] continual play with both social and fictional conventions in her novels'<sup>61</sup>, Austen's novels caused critical reviewing of the reader's own life, while comparing it to that of the novel's heroine.

As in *Maria: or, The Wrongs of Women*, women in *Northanger Abbey* do not often help each other or are even nice to each other. Catherine's best friend during her visit in Bath, Isabella, gets engaged to Catherine's brother but breaks his heart at the moment she finds out that he does not have sufficient funds and his parents are not willing to pay enough for her wedding and new life. Isabella promises Catherine that they are best friends forever, but the moment Catherine leaves Bath, the friendship is over. And Isabella did not help her out when Catherine was not keen on the advances of Isabella's brother. Real life, as it turns out, is even in *Northanger Abbey* more frightening than the Gothic novels Catherine is reading. Catherine lives partly in her own world, she is a naïve girl who knows nothing of the world because she did not have any education. Her knowledge comes from Gothic novels and this turns out to be insufficient in real life. This is made very clear when Catherine talks to her friend Miss Tilney about a new Gothic novel which is about to appear in London:

The general pause which succeeded his short disquisitions on the state of the nation, was put an end to by Catherine, who, in rather a solemn tone of voice, uttered these words, "I have heard that something very shocking indeed, will soon come out of London." Miss Tilney, to whom this was chiefly addresses, was startled, and hastily replied, "Indeed! – and of what nature?" "That I do not know, nor who is the author. I have only heard that it is to be more horrible than any thing we have met with yet." "Good heaven! – Where could you hear such a thing?" "A particular friend of mine had an account of it in a letter from London yesterday. It is to be uncommonly dreadful. I shall expect murder and every thing of the kind." "You speak with astonishing composure! But I hope your friend's accounts have been exaggerated; - and if such a design is know by forehand, proper measures will undoubtedly be taken by government to prevent its coming to effect." (*Northanger Abbey*, p113)

But Catherine grows from a naïve girl, into a more sensible person at the end. She still misinterprets a lot that is going on around her, causing her for example to misread Henry

Tilney's intentions of marrying her, but she does get wiser as the quote from *Northanger Abbey* in my introduction has shown.

In conclusion, all three women, Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley and Jane Austen, wrote their own kind of Gothic novel. They all wanted to teach women how important they are in this world and how vital it is that they are educated. From all three books we can conclude that the only way to make sure that men do not make a mess of this world, women have to become more educated and smarter, and work together to make things better.

## Chapter 2

### **American Gothic films**

In this chapter I will analyse the four American Gothic films *Rebecca* (1940), *What Lies Beneath* (2000), *The Others* (2001) and *The Lovely Bones* (2009). The heroines of the films, Mrs. De Winter, Claire, Grace and Susie, are very normal women, leading what seem to be very normal lives. They are, for the most part, rational women who do not get carried away by their imagination easily. Their stories are told in such a way, that a viewer can really relate to them. But because these films are Gothic films, normality is blown out of proportion and made absurd so that viewers are forced to critically review the reality they live in. Is it for example normal for a woman to give up her job, her music, her life just because she marries a man? Is it normal to sit around the house all day, take care of the children and make sure the house is clean while waiting for a husband to come home? Or is it normal that young girls can easily become the victim of strange men who are still able to pick them up on the street? Perhaps not. But this still happens everyday. Gothic films turn around what is normal and what is absurd; they make us realise that normality might perhaps not be as normal as we think. Gothic films are not just scary, like horror movies. The Gothic films I am analysing in this chapter are filled with themes like love, marriages, children, pregnancy, a first kiss, an empty nest syndrome etcetera. This is also why I link these films with women; Gothic films are very female films, containing female themes. And although all four films have Gothic themes and non-Gothic themes in common, for example the past haunting the present, domestic violence and strong women, I have decided to analyse each film separately because the films have different historical and technical backgrounds and it is also important to notice those differences.

#### **The United States in the nineteen thirties**

In the 1920s the American woman obtained the right to vote, she started to go on strike and stand up for herself because she had starting working during WWI and was not prepared to step down again. The divorce rate doubled from one in fifteen marriages to one in seven because women no longer saw their husband as the one person to rely on in bad times, but actually as the cause of their trouble. Marriage changed from an economic unit, to a place where a woman wanted to develop herself and find self-fulfilment.<sup>62</sup> But on the other hand, things were not so simple for the working mother. She was accused of being selfish, taking jobs from men and undermining the stability at home.<sup>63</sup> And the criticism became even worse when the Great Depression hit in the 1930s. People wanted to go back to the traditional mother, and because jobs were scarce, most women were forced to become a housewife again. And even though

increasing numbers of men could not provide for their families and often left their family all together, married working women were still the main cause for the unemployment of men in the eyes of many. The New Deal of president Roosevelt brought only some relief. Women looking for help at their government or employer mostly hit a brick wall. Soon people started working together. The networks of women that were built up in neighborhoods over the years, were now used to help people who faced eviction from their houses. After outnumbered city officials had thrown a family into the street, women would put the family's belongings back into their house. In the workplace, women went on strike again with huge numbers, for example against sexual harassment at work..<sup>64</sup>

In their private lives women had mostly extravagant women as their role models. Nancy Cott mentions polls from the 1920s that showed that 'movie stars had replaced political, business, and artistic leaders as role models for young people.'<sup>65</sup> In the 1920s most films starring leading women, were about the boring life of working girls. But the work was not glamorised, it was the way in which poor girls could work their way up to a rich life by, in the end, marrying their boss.<sup>66</sup> In the 1930s women in films had, on the one hand, become even more independent; they were intelligent and 'needed men to tame and soften them.'<sup>67</sup> On the other hand women in films became more dependent on men, they were 'deliciously ditsy, incompetent women [who] were rescued by sensible capable men'.<sup>68</sup> It was complicated to completely understand those role models. On the one hand, the woman of the 1930s saw in the movies she went to in her spare time that she had to be an independent working woman, but on the other hand, she needed to be a stay-at-home mother depending on her husband.

The Great Depression also hit Hollywood. New companies were not easily formed and experimental movies had to wait for more prosperous times. The 'Big Five' (Paramount, Loew's/MGM, 20<sup>th</sup> Century-Fox, Warner Bros. and RKO) monopolized Hollywood, together with three little, less rich companies namely Universal, Columbia and United Artist. In 1927 synchronized sound was introduced with the film *The Jazz Singer*, a movie from Warner Bros.<sup>69</sup> This caused many experimenting with new ways of making movies, for example the musical, which had been impossible until then. On the other hand, it cost many old actors their jobs because they could not adapt to the 'talkies'. The British producer Alfred Hitchcock had no problem with the new sound movies and even experimented with musicals. In 1939 he was contracted by David O. Selznick, who distributed movies at the United Artists. Hitchcock had become famous in Great Britain for his thrillers. But he wanted to make movies with more budget and better technology and Hollywood was still the place where this could happen. But Hollywood had to cope with censorship due to the public opinion. Many people thought that the

way women behaved in the 1930s had caused the Great Depression, so virtue and good moral was needed in Hollywood. If filmmakers did not comply to this new self-censorship, their film was subject to great controversy and sometimes even banishment by for example the New York State Censorship Board.<sup>70</sup> For the film *Rebecca* this meant that the film had to be different from the novel. For example, Rebecca was shot by her husband Maxim de Winter in the novel, but in the film Rebecca accidentally fell and hit her head while Maxim was thinking of killing her. Hitchcock did manage to make the housekeeper Mrs. Danvers as ghostlike and scary as possible. She almost slides through the house and she hardly ever blinks. *Rebecca* was Hitchcock's only film that was awarded Best Picture.

*Rebecca* was received by the critics with different opinions. Frank S. Nugent of *The New York Times* is filled with nothing but praise for *Rebecca*. *Variety* on the other hand, although finding the film 'an artistic success' is sure that the film will never be popular with a big audience. According to *Variety* 'Dave Selznick's picture is too tragic and deeply psychological to hit the fancy of wide audience appeal. It will receive attention from critics and class patronage as an example of the power in narrative drama of vivid screen portraiture, but general audiences will tab it as a long-drawn out drama that could have been told better in less footage.'<sup>71</sup>

### ***Rebecca* (1940)**

Hitchcock's first Hollywood-film *Rebecca* tells the story of an unnamed woman who is the 'paid companion' of an older lady, on holiday in Monte Carlo, the south of France. She meets Mr. De Winter, the owner of the estate Manderley in Cornwall, England. They soon marry and move to Manderley, where the I-figure (from here on known as Mrs. De Winter, this is also the only name she is given in the film) finds out that the house and the lives of the people living in it are haunted by the former Mrs. De Winter, Rebecca, who supposedly drowned a year before.

The film begins with the sound of Mrs. De Winter's voice narrating how she still dreams of going back to Manderley. Spooky images are shown at the same time, of dark trees, the dark iron gate of the estate and she 'passed like a spirit through the barriers' because 'like all dreamers' she 'was possessed all of a sudden, with supernatural powers'. The use of language in this narration is very Gothic. She speaks of ghosts, supernatural powers, but also that '[n]ature had come into her own again, and little by little had encroached upon the drive, with long, tenacious fingers.' Manderley, a house very much like a haunted house, completely in the dark with a gloomy, dark sky above it, is 'secretive and silent.' When she comes closer to the house she says: 'Moonlight can play tricks upon the fancy, and suddenly it seemed to me that light came from the windows. And then a cloud came upon the moon, and hovered an instant, like a dark hand

before a face. The illusion went with it. I looked upon a desolate shell, with no whisper of the past about its staring walls. We can never go back to Manderley again, that much is certain.' This scene sets the tone for an eerie film.

The narration of Mrs. De Winter is also of great importance. Moonlight made it seem that the lights were on in Manderley again, this to me shows that the dead are never really dead. The dead are always still among the living. Mrs. De Winter at one point even turns into Rebecca. Mrs. Danvers tricked her into wearing a dress to a costumed ball, Rebecca wore the year before. The sister of Maxim calls her Rebecca at that point. And when Maxim tells Mrs. De Winter about the night Rebecca died, the camera becomes Rebecca's eyes. We see what she must have seen that night through the movement of the camera. The narration could also have been told by Rebecca, who can never go back to Manderley, because the memory of her is finally beaten. When Manderley was filled with her memory, she could still live there. But now, since Manderley is burned and everybody has moved on without her, there is 'no whisper of the past about its staring walls.' There is no one in the house wanted to live in the past. The estate manager Frank Crawley tells Mrs. De Winter that '[i]t's up to you, you know, to lead us away from it.' The great task of making everybody forget the past, lies upon the shoulders of Mrs. De Winter. Maxim told her he loved spending time with her from the very beginning because '[y]ou've blotted out the past for me more than all the bright lights of Monte Carlo.' But in the end it is really Mrs. Danvers who drives out the memory of Rebecca. Mrs. Danvers dies in Rebecca's old room, the room in the West Wing that has not been altered one bit since Rebecca vanished. It is the room that preserves the past. And when Mrs. Danvers sets fire to Manderley and the room, the past is finally beaten. The ghost of Rebecca is finally beaten.

### **The strong women of *Rebecca***

The second scene in the film is the first encounter of Maxim de Winter and Mrs. De Winter. Maxim is standing at a cliff, which he will later explain is the place where Rebecca told him all about herself when they were married for four days, and he started to hate her. Rebecca is to me the woman who will not obey her husband, who goes her own way, lives her own life, is not 'afraid of anything' and is loved and adored by everyone except by her husband. Mrs. De Winter on the other hand, is rather dull and virtuous, but she is the perfect wife. What a perfect wife should be like, is discussed several times in the film. Rebecca looked like the perfect wife from the outside because of her three qualities: 'breeding, brains and beauty'. But that did not please Maxim, once he was married to her, because '[s]he was incapable of love, or tenderness or decency.' Mrs. De Winter is sure that the three qualities of a perfect wife are 'beauty, wit and



intelligence'. But the estate manager Frank Crawley, although he also finds these qualities very important in a woman, thinks that for a wife Mrs. De Winter's qualities '[k]indliness', 'sincerity' and 'modesty' are much more important. The distinction is thus made between a woman and a wife. From the outside, beauty and intelligence are very important for a wife. But they turn out to be unsuitable for a wife when she is actually married. A woman like Rebecca can only, as she put it herself 'play the perfect wife' and mother. But she will never truly become one. For Maxim, the most important quality of Mrs. De Winter, is that she loves him. Being a working woman is also a conversational piece in the film. When Mrs. De Winter tells Maxim that she is a paid companion of Mrs. Van Hopper, he is surprised that he has a job. He asks her if she has not got any family to take care of her. Her mother and father both passed away, so she had to take care of herself. Needless to say, that her working days are over once she is married to Maxim.

At first, a viewer would feel sorry for Mrs. De Winter and hate Rebecca just as much as she and Maxim do. Frank Nugent wrote in his review of *Rebecca* that: 'Through Mr. Hitchcock's method, the film is first-personal [...], so that its frail young heroine's diffident blunders, her fears, her tears are silly only at first, and then are silly no longer, but torture us too.' But when we take a closer look at Rebecca, she becomes much like 'the madwoman in the attic'<sup>72</sup>, the part of society people do not talk about. She is a free woman who lives her own life, despite what anybody might think. And, as the housekeeper Mrs. Danvers puts it: 'No one ever got the better of her, never, never. She was beaten in the end, but it wasn't a man, it wasn't a woman. It was the sea! But even in death she was not beaten. She is the past that haunts the present. Earlier on Mrs. Danvers spoke to Mrs. De Winter about Rebecca as if she was still in the house: 'Sometimes when I walk along the corridor, I fancy I hear her just behind me. That quick, light step. I couldn't mistake it anywhere. It's not only in this room. It's in all the rooms in the house. I can almost hear it now. Do you think the dead come back and watch the living? (...) Sometimes I wonder if she doesn't come back here to Manderley and watch you and Mr. De Winter together.'

Also in the second scene, when Maxim stands upon a cliff, Mrs. De Winter calls 'No! Stop!' to him. She thinks he wants to jump of the cliff. This exemplifies the beginning of Mrs. De Winters urges to save Maxim. This automatically turns Mrs. De Winter into a less dependent woman. She becomes one of those women in films who need to get their husband straight. This is especially so when the body of Rebecca is found on the floor of the boat in which she sank to the bottom of the sea and Mrs. De Winter comes up with a plan to clear her husband's name. And when Maxim needs to go to the inquest of Rebecca's death, Mrs. De Winter urges Maxim not to become mad or violent and in this way incriminate himself. She is shown as the sane woman, who knows best, and Maxim as the primitive man who needs help from his wife. But he

does not allow her to save him. In the scene at the cliff he angrily tells her to mind her own business. And in court he becomes angry nonetheless. But the example shows that some efforts are made to show Mrs. De Winter as independent woman with a job who wants to save a man from making mistakes. Perhaps this is done to appeal to the 'new woman' who appeared in the 1920s, but at the same time also to the more conservative people in the United States, since she does give up her job after her marriage and she stops helping whenever Maxim asks her to. This shows the ambivalence about the part a woman and a wife and mother plays or should play in society in the 1930s. Several historians and film analysts have argued that a film is like a distorted mirror that shows the society it is made in, not the way it looks but the way it wants to look.<sup>73</sup> In this light *Rebecca* is a way of showing that society should only tolerate wives who quit their jobs once they get married and who listen to their husbands. They have to possess Mrs. De Winter's qualities and certainly not Rebecca's.

### **The United States in the 1990s**

A lot changed in the United States between the 1940s and 1990s. Although a government campaign urged women to go back to their families after the war, in 1950 23 percent of married women had a job. The mass media taught women, that they should be stay-at-home-mums, but most women started working once their children went to school. When, in 1963, the Equal Pay Act was signed, women were finally paid the same amount of money as men for the same jobs. But not all women were faced by the same problems; not even all women thought they *had* a problem. So the difficulty was to unite these women. But during the 1960s women came to the conclusion that whatever difficulties they experienced in their lives had to do with their relationship to men. Men caused them to feel less worthy, to not find a job, or to not be able to even look for a job. Under the influence of feminists like Betty Friedan, women started to feel like they had 'no personality'<sup>74</sup> and were locked up in their small, domestic world. And while young women experienced their sexuality during Woodstock and the like, women started protesting again, as they had done in the 1920s. The fight for day care, abortion and autonomy had started. But it was of course not this simple. Still great numbers of women did not feel like they had some injustice to fight for. Their lives, they thought, were the way they were supposed to be. Especially religious women feared that the feminists would break down the American society. Richard Nixon won the presidential elections in 1968 because he said he would 'restore law and order, resist permissiveness, and strike out against the excesses of antiwar demonstrations and other protestors' because the 'silent majority' wanted him to.<sup>75</sup> Nevertheless, in the 1990s 75 percent of all women had a job, including 60 percent of women whose children

did not go to school yet.<sup>76</sup> In 1960 women earned 59 percent of a men's wages, in 1998 this was 73 percent.<sup>77</sup> Having a divorce became more easy for women, which led to less unhappy marriages and more independent women. Having an abortion also became more easy, although especially religious groups would still protest against it.

Before, in 1948, the 'Big Five' and the 'little three' (the biggest film companies in Hollywood) were now openly accused of monopolistic practices. Not only did they have the biggest budgets to make movies, they owned the most theatres and distribution companies, which made it virtually impossible for independent film companies to make and show their movies. Theatre chains were sold and stars and directors started their own companies. Less, but more expensive films were made, and admission fees for the cinema had to go up. But the way people spent their leisure time also changed. Had the working woman of the 1920s spent her lunch breaks at cheap cinemas, now people went out of the city and into the suburbs. People would rather sit at home watching television, than drive all the way to the city. Hollywood responded by using new techniques to make the theatre more appealing and more of an experience. And drive-in theatres were built. This way people could go to the movies in their neighborhood in the privacy of their own car. This way of watching films appealed mostly to young people, so the films that were shown were more and more made for teenagers. Hollywood flourished for a while but in the 1960s the film industry faced a recession. The amount of people going to the movies kept dropping and not until the old directors retired and new, young filmmakers took their place, was there a way of solving this problem. Young directors such as Steven Spielberg, George Lucas and Robert Zemeckis changed Hollywood with their 'boyish' films like *Jaws*, *Star Wars* and *Back to the Future*. The government had helped Hollywood this time. In 1971 the film industry was saved by a law that allowed film companies to claim all the investments in films in the 1960s and 1970s and recover tax credits.<sup>78</sup> The blockbuster, the one big film companies released in certainty that it would make much profit, and had been normal in the 1920s, returned in the 1970s. With films like *Star Wars*, merchandise also became an important source of income. The film as a somewhat more expensive but very much a 'night out' had returned.

### **The reception of *What Lies Beneath* (2000)**

*What Lies Beneath* is produced by Robert Zemeckis. Zemeckis had told his producer Jack Rapke that he had always wanted to make a suspense film 'perhaps the kind of film Hitchcock would have done in his day'.<sup>79</sup> Reviewer Roger Ebert, however, disagrees with Zemeckis that Hitchcock would ever had made a film quite like this one: 'Hitchcock would have insisted on rewrites to

remove the supernatural and explain the action in terms of human psychology, however abnormal.<sup>80</sup> It did struck Ebert that Zemeckis uses themes from Hitchcock. Reviewer Paul Clinton of CNN even goes as far as saying that the first half of the film is 'lifted right out of Alfred Hitchcock's classic thriller "Rear Window" (1954) with Pfeiffer playing Jimmy Stewart's role.' But for Clinton this is not necessarily positive for he ads: '(...) it would be fresh if it hadn't been done 46 years ago.'<sup>81</sup> Peter Rainer of New York Magazine agrees that nothing much lies beneath this film if you know your film history.<sup>82</sup> The reviewers on a whole, are not very positive about Zemeckis' attempt to make a film in Hitchcock-style. The horror genre at the turn of century was dominated by low-budget, pulp films like *I know what you did last summer* and *Scream*. With the statement to make a film that Hitchcock would have wanted to make, Zemeckis positioned himself above these pulp films and claimed to make a more intellectual horror movie, according to the reviewers. And they all agree that he has failed to do so. Emanuel Levy of *Variety* magazine adds to this negativity that women might find the film offensive: 'Claire, a talented cellist, gave up her career entirely just three months after meeting Norman, and neighbor Mary is so consumed with love that when her hubby leaves for work she goes into unbearable flights of hysterics.'<sup>83</sup> Their conclusion is that it is certainly an enjoyable film with a lot of shock-effects in it, but not much 'lies beneath'. Nevertheless, Michelle Pfeiffer and Harrison Ford won awards for Best Actress and Best Actor for this film and the film was nominated for the Saturn Award Best Horror Movie from the Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror Films USA.<sup>84</sup>

### ***What Lies Beneath***

Claire Spencer, her husband Norman and daughter Caitlin live in the old house of Norman's father in Vermont. The house is, very Gothic-like, a big house by a lake with only one house next to it. There is never anybody around to hear Claire scream. The first scene of the film shows an underwater scene. A face appears in the water, just for a few seconds. Than a face that appears to be dead is shown again, and the eyes suddenly open. The face turns into the face of Claire who is lying under water in her bathtub. It all happens very fast, and a viewer could easily miss it. But this first scene tells the viewer a lot about the rest of the film. For one thing, that the underwater world is very important. This is where 'what lies beneath' lies. The woman's face tells us that a dead woman must be hidden in the water. And when the dead woman's eyes open, we know for sure that she is going to haunt the house. That the dead woman's face turns into Claire's face, is not made entirely clear, it all happens very fast. But just that, makes you wonder what the dead woman has to do with Claire. Will she become this dead woman? Or did she kill someone herself? The bathtub and bathroom are also immediately made important. This will become the

most interesting room of the film, the 'Bluebeard' room of this house. It is in this room that Claire sees the dead woman. The woman communicates with Claire through the mirror, she sees her in the bathtub and Claire is almost murdered by Norman in the bathroom. But the viewer will, at first, not suspect Norman in any way. It is clear that the dead woman is the one that needs to be feared.

The part of the film which is like *Rear Window*, puts the suspicion on the man living next door. Claire finds his wife, Mrs. Feur crying in her garden, and talking as if she is very scared. When Claire asks her what she is afraid of, she answers that she is afraid that one day she will disappear. When Mrs. Feur does disappear, Claire is sure that Mr. Feur has murdered his wife. This is also when strange things start to happen in Claire's house. The door keeps opening, a framed picture keeps falling on the floor and the dog starts barking and growling for no apparent reason. The first appearance of a woman's face is seen in the lake behind the house when Claire tries to take the dog's ball out of the lake because he would not move an inch. Later, she sees the face in the bathtub. And after she had a séance with a friend, and the bathtub is mysteriously filled with water she screams at the ghost: 'What do you want from me?!' The words 'You Know' appear in the mirror. She runs down and stops at her computer where the initials MEF are appear. But when she confronts Mr. Feur, he calls for his wife, who appeared to be standing right behind him. The dead woman is not Mrs. Feur. But Claire has no idea who it could be. The words 'You Know' are important. They show that Claire already knows what has happened in the past but she has no access to that memory. The memory starts to come back slightly when she is at a party and a woman who saw her at a similar party a year ago asks her how she is doing, she reminds her that at the party a year ago she: 'went completely pale. [She] couldn't get [her] breath. It was as if [she] had seen a ghost.' After the party, when the picture falls on the floor for the third time, Claire sees the newspaper article that is put in the back of the frame. At the same time that her husband got the prize that last year's party was for, a girl disappeared. Claire starts to research this girl and soon finds out that Norman had an affair with her. Her name is Madison Elisabeth Frank, MEF. It is when Madison takes possession of Claire's body that she remembers what had happened the night of the accident. She had found Norman and Madison having sex in the house. She drove away in her car and had an accident. Maybe that car accident caused her amnesia. When this memory comes back, she suddenly suspects Norman of having something to do with Madison's disappearance. While being possessed by Madison's spirit, she seduces Norman, to recreated what had happened a year before. When she looks in the mirror she sees herself entering the door and looking at them, just like she had done that night a year before. The possessed Claire starts to smile when she sees this. Madison now knows that Claire has gotten

her memory back, something she was trying to accomplish throughout the film. When Claire says: 'I think she is starting to suspect something. Your wife.' her eyes turn green and when she gets closer to Norman, her face turns into Madison's face. Norman responds by throwing her on the floor. The next time Madison takes over Claire's body, is when Norman is trying to drown her in the bathtub, using a sedative that makes her immobile. Claire was wearing Madison's necklace this time. Madison scares Norman, just at the moment he wants to give Claire more sedative and this causes him to fall with his head on the sink.

### **Women and the perfect family in *What Lies Beneath***

Even though women had come a long way since the 1940s, the perfect family was still important in the 1990s. Once Claire remembers the affair Norman was having with Madison, she starts screaming at him that she gave up everything for him: 'I gave up my life and my music.' Norman says that he never asked her to do that, but Claire says: 'Oh, there was never any other choice. You had to topple perfect daddy and that meant perfect wife, perfect family.' Norman makes it seem that it is all Claire's own fault. If only she had loved him more, he would not have had an affair. And if she had loved him more, he would not have to kill her by paralyzing her with drugs and letting her drown in the bathtub. Norman actually says: 'You have no idea what it was like, to hold her under water, watch her life slip away. But she gave me no choice. Neither have you.' Claire reminds me of Rebecca for this. Rebecca was an independent woman, like Claire, who was not willing to give up her life, the way Claire did. According to Maxim she was incapable of love. Norman has the same opinion about Claire. Claire certainly is not a woman incapable of love asking for her husband to murder her. In some ways, *What Lies Beneath* shows us that women have not come a long way, despite what we might think. Women are still being oppressed by their husbands who force them to give up their lives. And when women do not try hard enough to be the 'perfect wife' and the 'perfect mother' they need to be taken care of. But how does this correspond with the idea that films show what society would like to be like? Because Norman is beaten in the end. Claire tries really hard to beat him but she does not succeed. Madison is the one who drowns Norman in the lake where her body lies. Maybe the lesson here is that women have to stick together? In the original transcript of the film, the woman at the party said exactly this. It is perhaps that Claire, just like Ann Radcliffe's heroines, is too curious for her own good. It is clear that if Claire made the choice to forget all about the affair Norman had and the girl he murdered, that she would have lived. But Madison forces her to choose her, to make the choice of solving her murder. And she repays Claire for this by saving her life when she murders

Norman. The dead are not the ones to be feared in most Gothic films, it is the living we should fear, and the dead that help the living.

### **The reception of *The Others* (2001)**

In August 2001 *The Others* was released in American cinema's. The film is based partly upon the Gothic novel *The Turn of the Screw* by Henry James from 1898. The film is made by the Spanish-Chilean director Alejandro Amenábar and is a production of the Spanish Sogecine, with co-producers French Canal+ and American Dimension Films. In the 1990s and 2000s Hollywood became more and more global, releasing films all over the world and joining production companies in all corners of the world. *The Others* was the first and only film without a word of Spanish spoken in it to win a Spanish Goya-award. It won, among other Goya-awards, the award for Best Film and Best Director. In the United States the film received the Saturn Award for Best Horror Film and leading lady Nicole Kidman won the Saturn Award for Best Actress.<sup>85</sup>

Again, just as we have seen with *What Lies Beneath*, the reviewers are not very positive about the film. I think the problem is, that the reviewers I have found are men who suspect a thrilling horror-movie and are let down when the film is actually a little more complicated and domestic than that. *The Others* has a very surprising plot, just as *What Lies Beneath*. It works its way there very subtly and brilliantly but, as Roger Ebert has well put it: '[t]he director, Alejandro Amenabar, has the patience to create a languorous, dreamy atmosphere, and Nicole Kidman succeeds in convincing us that she is a normal person in a disturbing situation and not just a standard-issue horror movie hysteric. But in drawing out his effects, Amenabar is a little too confident that style can substitute for substance. As our suspense was supposed to be building, our impatience was outstripping it. As Houdini said, or should have if he didn't, you can only listen to so much spectral knocking before you want to look under the table.'<sup>86</sup>

### ***The Others***

Grace Stewart lives in Jersey, England, in a big isolated house, right next to the Channel, with her children Nicholas and Anne. The year is 1945 and WWII has just ended. Her husband Charles disappeared in the war and the servants had also disappeared some time before. Three new servants come up to the house at the beginning of the film: Bertha Mills, the housekeeper and nanny, Edmund Tuttle the gardener and a young mute girl called Lydia. Nicholas and Anne are so allergic to light that it could kill them, so the curtains in the house are always closed. There is no telephone, radio or electricity in the house. The children spent their days doing homework or

playing by candlelight. Grace explains to the servants that ‘no door must be opened without the previous one being closed first.’

*The Others* is explicitly about what I believe all the Gothic films of this chapter are about and perhaps most Gothic stories are about: what happens to us after we die. Since the beginning of the modern age, the age in which people think everything is possible and everything can be solved by science, this one thing has always stayed unclear, up till today. Science cannot answer our questions about heaven and hell, ghosts or the death of our soul. But the Gothic does. *Rebecca* reassured us that we will not be forgotten after we die. *What Lies Beneath* shows us that the dead can help the living and the living can help the dead. In *The Others* Grace tells her children that where people go after they are killed in a war, depends on ‘whether they fought for the goodies or the baddies.’ *The Others* furthermore makes clear that the dead and the living can life together in harmony. The housekeeper Bertha at one point tells Grace that: ‘We must all learn to live together. The living and the dead.’ Grace keeps holding on to religion, as some people nowadays also still do. When Bertha tells her: ‘I think that, sometimes the world of the dead gets mixed up with the world of the living.’ Grace answers: ‘But it's impossible! The Lord would never allow such an aberration! The living and the dead will only meet at the end of Eternity. It says so in the Bible.’ Bertha’s answer is striking: ‘Ma'am, there isn't always an answer for everything.’ Grace has taught her children that if they are bad they go to the children’s hell, Limbo. But when she finds out that they are in fact dead themselves the children ask: ‘If we’re dead, where’s Limbo?’ Grace answers: ‘I don’t know if there even is a Limbo. I’m not wiser than you are. But I do know that I love you.’ And in this way the Gothic gives us an answer to our greatest unknown answers. Or maybe they just reassure us that it is no bad thing that there is no answer for everything. That leaving some part of your life, and death, to the imagination is a good thing. For the greater part of the film it looks as though Grace, her children and the servants live with ghosts. But Anne gives us hints, from the beginning, that the boy Victor and the old woman she is seeing are not ghosts. She has seen ghosts at night and they ‘go about in white sheets and carry chains.’ It is clear that Victor and his family are in the house, Victor is even visible to the viewer. It is when Grace finds a book filled with photos of dead people and sees the servants, that she finds out that she, her husband and her children and servants are in fact dead and that Victor and his family are alive.

Grace sits around the house all day waiting for her husband to return from the war. In my introduction I have stated that E. J. Clery argued that being married was for the English law a ‘civil death’. So being married was the same thing as being dead in some ways. Bertha tells Grace that she does not have to burden herself and take care of the house all by herself. The servants



are there for her. But Grace will not hear of it: 'who do you think you are?' she says, 'You have no idea what has to be done.' When Grace's husband Charles returns to the house only to leave again, Grace says: 'Your place was here, with us. With your family. I loved you. And that was enough for me. Living here in this darkness, in this prison. But it wasn't enough for you. That's why you left. It wasn't just the war. You want to leave me, don't you?' In the end it is revealed that Grace had gone mad, smothered her children with a pillow and then shot herself. Perhaps she had gone mad because her husband had left her? Or because she had heard that he had died in the war? Or maybe Bertha is right and Grace could not handle the house and the children all by herself and felt like there was no other way out. Bertha tells Anne: 'There are things your mother does not want to hear. She only believes in what she was told. Don't worry. Sooner or later, she'll see them. Then everything will be different.' After Grace had shot herself she could hear her children laughing and playing as if nothing had happened. She could choose to believe that nothing had happened. But when the servants arrived, they forced her to remember. It turns out, that Grace and the children are being haunted by the living. In all the films of this chapter, the present is haunted by the past. But in *What Lies Beneath* and *The Others* the past is a memory that the heroine does not have access to until very late in the film.

### **The United States after 9-11-2001**

For most Americans, the twenty-first millennium started when two airplanes hit the Twin Tower in New York on September 11, 2001. Not only did Americans lose their feeling of being untouchable and safe, Americans realised that their freedom was not carved in stone. The 2000s, were a turbulent decade for the United States. Starting with the terrorist attack, continuing with the war on terror, natural disasters like hurricane Katrina, the positive sound of the first African American president promising change but soon walking against a wall of bureaucracy, unable to really make a change.

The real breakthrough of the internet, social media, video-on-demand, downloading of films, YouTube and the like, caused Hollywood the same problems as when television entered the American household. Ticket prices went up and the number of moviegoers dropped. In the 2000s, next to the new rise of the 3D-film, film companies benefitted from new technological inventions which made films cheaper to make and more appealing to the public. Much money was invested in advertisement of the cinema as an experience, much better than watching a downloaded film on your computer in poor quality. Some films were released on DVD just a few days after its release in the cinema, to keep people from downloading. According to Timothy Corrigan<sup>87</sup> people asked themselves what it truly meant to be human. Blockbusters like *Avatar*

and *The Matrix* showed the people what humans were like from the outside looking in. And many films about history did the same. Films for example about the time of the VOC but also the wild west, or for example in *The Lovely Bones*, the 1970s. The main character Susie Salmon narrates to the viewer that '[t]his was before missing kids started appearing on milk cartons, or were feature stories on the daily news. It was back when people believed things like that didn't happen.' People wanted to go back to more simple times. But a film like *The Lovely Bones* make it very clear that those simpler times have never existed. Perhaps this is exactly why films like *The Pirates of the Caribbean* and *Gangs of New York* show how violent the past really was; so people today realise that the present is not that horrible after all. And when viewers did believe that the present is a horrible time to live in, they could always look at fantasy films such as *Lord of the Rings*, and the *Harry Potter*-series; a mix of computer-animated people and real people in a fantasy world where all hardship is always conquered and every story has an happy ending.

### **The reception of *The Lovely Bones* (2009)**

Producer Peter Jackson, born in New Zealand in 1961, has become famous worldwide with the *Lord of the Rings*-trilogy. *The Lovely Bones* is based on the novel of the same name from 2002, written by American author Alice Sebold and is based partly upon her own youth. Just as Susie Salmon, she was raped. The novel is, however, more brutal than the film. The rape is not even mentioned in the films, even though it is written out by Alice Sebold in detail in the novel, and her murder takes place somewhere outside the screen. According to *Entertainment Weekly* critic Lisa Schwarzbaum: 'Readers [who have read the book by Alice Sebold] will be frustrated; newcomers to the story may wonder why what is now essentially a serial-killer thriller includes so many scenes of a heaven that looks like a gumdrop-colored hobbit shire, a magical place of fanciful special effects. In Jackson's simplified, sweetened, and CGI-besotted telling, "The Lovely Bones" is a sad-but-hopeful, dramatic-but-gentle fairy tale intentionally made less upsetting for teens.'<sup>88</sup> Roger Ebert agrees with Schwarzbaum and argues that: "The Lovely Bones" is a deplorable film with this message: If you're a 14-year-old girl who has been brutally raped and murdered by a serial killer, you have a lot to look forward to. You can get together in heaven with the other teenage victims of the same killer, and gaze down in benevolence upon your family members as they mourn you and realize what a wonderful person you were. Sure, you miss your friends, but your fellow fatalities come dancing to greet you in a meadow of wildflowers, and how cool is that?<sup>89</sup> All critics are disappointed about the way Susie's heaven is shown in the film. On the official website of *The Lovely Bones*<sup>90</sup> is to be read that Peter Jackson 'wanted Susie's experience of the afterlife to be completely personal and specific to Susie's understanding of the world. They

wanted it to transcend religious tradition and celestial imagery and for it to reflect instead Susie's inner-consciousness and emotional life.' According to Roger Ebert however: 'This movie sells the philosophy that even evil things are God's will, and their victims are happier now. Isn't it nice to think so. I think it's best if they don't happen at all. But if they do, why pretend they don't hurt? Those girls are dead.'<sup>91</sup> Perhaps this discussion explains why the film as a whole received no awards. Saoirse Ronan however, who plays Susie Salmon, received several awards and Stanley Tucci was nominated for an Oscar for his role as the murderer George Harvey.

### ***The Lovely Bones***

Susie Salmon is a fourteen-year-old girl who tells her story after she dies. She talks about how she was murdered and how her family coped with her death. She tells the story from her personal heaven, the 'in-between'. When she is just murdered, Susie stays on earth and sees her mother and father looking for her and talking to the police. When she enters a bathroom, she sees a man lying in the bathtub with a cloth on his face. The bathroom and bathtub are covered in dirt and blood. Susie's bracelet is hanging on the tap by the sink. When the man takes the cloth off his face and Susie realizes the man is George Harvey, she realised that she did not escape from the underground room, as viewers are made to believe because we actually see her escape, but that she was in fact murdered by Harvey and is now a wandering spirit. At that moment she disappears to the 'in-between'.

Although Susie lives in a suburb and was murdered by the man living across the street, the abandoned house plays a vital role in this film. Her murderer, George Harvey, is making a dollhouse at the beginning of the film, possibly to attract young girls to his house. For the murder of Susie he had created a sort of house under the ground; a hide-out he had allegedly made for the children in the neighborhood and lured Susie into. When he has murdered her, he saves her bracelet as a trophy but when he realizes that the bracelet could give him away, he throws it away but saves the little house hanging on the bracelet. In Susie's heaven there is a dark house of which she is sure that when she enters it, there is no way back. In this house all the murder victims of Harvey are revealed to Susie and the viewer. In Susie's parents' house, Susie's room became the 'Bluebeard room'. At one point, Susie's grandmother speaks to Susie's mother about the room saying that: 'You have a tomb in the middle of your house!'

Just like Claire in *What Lies Beneath*, Susie is threatened by someone from her safe environment, which does not appear to be so safe after all. Susie tells the viewers that, if only she would not have been so distracted by a boy she had a crush on, she would have noticed that Harvey was watching her. In the scene she tells the viewer, in the mall, Harvey is actually in the

picture several times. But always together with the boys she loved, Ray, so the viewer's attention is, just as Susie's, drawn to Ray. She blames herself for being murdered. But since the viewer will also pay attention to Ray alone and not notice Harvey at first, it is made clear to the viewer that you must always be vigilant, and not be distracted. Susie's sister Lindsey is determined to catch Susie's murderer. She is a strong young woman who is not afraid of Harvey. And, although she is Harvey's alleged new victim, he does not get to her. She breaks into his house to find proof that he murdered Susie. When Harvey suddenly returns home and hears Lindsey, she runs away. At the moment she is behind the fence and outside of his property he tries to grab her, but stops. He runs back into the house to pack his belongings and flees. When he tries to give a girl who stands at a parking place a ride, all she has to do is refuse. She yells at him to leave her alone and walks away. It is clear that if Susie had not made the choice of going into Harvey's underground room, she would not have been killed. Harvey never attacked any woman in plain sight. He had killed six other women and girls, all of them in houses or after he had lured them into some sort of hiding. The moment a woman stood up to him, he did not stand a chance. In some way *The Lovely Bones* warns girls not to go anywhere with strange men, but also to stand up for yourself.

Like the housewives who felt like they had no personality because they were nothing except a mother and a wife, Susie is also degraded to nothing by the hand of George Harvey. She asks Holly, another victim of Harvey: 'Look at me! Look at what he did to me! What am I now? The dead girl? The lost girl? The missing girl? I'm nothing I'm nothing! I was stupid. I was so stupid!' It is made clear to the viewer that a woman should not blame herself. Susie blames herself for being murdered, but she should not. And when Susie tries to blame Harvey Holly responds: 'You don't control this, Susie. He does not own you. You can be free of him. But not this way.' When Susie chooses to let go of the past and chooses herself she is finally freed of him. And by some supernatural way, an icicle falls on Harvey's shoulder and falls into an abyss and dies. All women are free of him forever now.

Before Susie finds peace, she takes possession of Ruth, '[t]hat strange, other-worldly girl who so easily accepted the presence of the dead among the living.' As Bertha tells Anne in *The Others*, people only see what they want to see. Gothic films have the message that sometimes you have to be more open-minded. Ruth is a good example of an open-minded person. Dead does not necessarily mean gone, as Ray thinks. Ruth tells him: 'I never knew what dead meant. I used to think it meant lost. Frozen.' When Ray tells her it means gone, '[s]he's gone', Ruth answers: 'What if she isn't? What if she's still here?' Susie also makes contact with her younger brother Buckley and with her father. And at the end of the films Susie comes to life for a short time through Ruth's body and she has her first kiss with Ray. Ray is not at all scared or shocked to see

her, but tells her that she looks beautiful. The message here is, that to be dead does not mean to be gone. Like Rebecca, Susie stays around to watch the living: '[a]lways, I would watch Ray. I was in the air around him. I was in the cold winter mornings he spent with Ruth Conners. (...) And sometimes, Ray would think of me.' People can still exist in your memory and they can sometimes help you. But the message is also, not to dwell on the past and move on. Holly tells Susie: 'You're not supposed to look back. You're supposed to keep going.' And this goes for the living as well. But you must keep an open mind. You must not only believe what you want to believe. Death is the only certainty we have as Holly makes clear: 'You will see, Susie. In the end, you will understand. Everyone dies.'

## Chapter 3

### Dutch Gothic

In the previous chapters we have seen how the Gothic emerged in England, how English women, readers and writers alike, used the Gothic in their daily lives and how Gothic was adopted in the cinema of Hollywood. In this chapter I will argue that, although the Netherlands does not have a tradition of Gothic literature, Dutch women have also had their fair share of Gothic novels. I will argue that Maria Dermoût wrote Gothic about defamiliarisation, Eastern ways of thinking and coming to terms with murder in her novel *De Tienduizend Dingen* (1955) and that Renate Dorrestein has written Gothic to process her sister's suicide and to protest against the 'normal' family in *Buitenstaanders* (1983).

#### Dutch Gothic literature

As Buikema and Wesseling and Andeweg have rightly noted, there is no Dutch word for the Gothic novel. They themselves use the word *gotiek*. Dennis Schouten uses the term 'griezelligheid'<sup>92</sup> and Agnes Andeweg mentions the word 'schrikroman'<sup>93</sup>. In German the equivalent of the Gothic novel is the 'Schauerroman' and in French it is either the 'roman frénétique'<sup>94</sup> or the 'roman noir'<sup>95</sup>. This tells us that the Gothic novel in the Netherlands has never been a genre, or something to create a word for.

But when you look for it, you will find the Gothic in Dutch literature. Dennis Schouten argues that, even though the 'griezelligheid' has never become a full-grown genre in the Netherlands, some Dutch Gothic does exist. For example for the first half of the nineteenth-century he qualifies Michiel Adriaan Sobels, A. D. van Buren Schele and J. Krabbendam as Gothic writers.<sup>96</sup> Hendrik van Gorp states that the Dutch Gothic novel is more a historical novel after 1820, citing works by Jacob van Lennep, Adriaan van der Hoop Jr and Hendrik Arnold Meijer.<sup>97</sup> Just after 1900 supernatural novels were to be found in Dutch literature. The most famous author Schouten labels as Gothic is Belcampo (1902-1990) who wrote fantastic stories. In the nineteen fifties magical realism was a favourite genre in the Netherlands. Then, in the nineteen seventies and eighties, the only Dutch writer whose entire oeuvre fits in the box 'griezelligheid' was Catherine Duval. Schouten merely mentions Renate Dorrestein as one of several writers whose work contain Gothic elements.<sup>98</sup> Reasons for this lack of Dutch Gothic novels is for example the fact that the Dutch bourgeoisie wanted to educate and civilize, instead of exclude, the lower classes. This led to literary societies whose goal was to stop the decay of the literature. This meant that novels, and especially Gothic novels, were very hard to publish. The societies did not directly influence the production of novels, but they had a very great

indirect influence because they set the standard for every Dutch author that wanted to be published.<sup>99</sup>

But next to a few Dutch Gothic novels, translated Gothic novels were available in the Netherlands from the beginning of the genre. Most of the novels were from Germany and France and some from England. Most of the English novels were the ones Ann Radcliffe had written. And people read and discussed these novels. We know this, for example, because the society 'Tot Nut van het Algemeen' asked people to write a critical essay about 'het ongegronde, het onzedelyke en het schadelyke van deze en andere hier mede verbondene Vooroordelen' around 1800 because they establish that 'Duivelsbezwingen, toveryen en Spookeryen' in novels still did not belong to the past.<sup>100</sup> So the Gothic as cultural phenomenon was and is known to the Dutch reader.

### **The Netherlands in the 1950s**

When Maria Dermoût first published in 1951, Dermoût's novel was an unusual one in the Netherlands. In the post-war years the Dutch society was, as Ruiter and Smulders call it 'het hoogtepunt van verzuiling, betutteling en volgzaamheid.'<sup>101</sup> But there were signs of a more revolutionary movement. People did not want to go back to the way things were before the war. Not all women wanted to go back to being a housewife; they wanted to have jobs and create and develop their own lives. After the joy of the liberation of the Netherlands, its inhabitants craved a more open society, they wanted to get out of the situation of the pillars but they did not yet want to give up on their faith. The pilarization of the Netherlands had started in the nineteenth-century. The Dutch society was divided into four pillars: a Catholic pillar, a Protestant pillar, a socialist pillar and a more general one, also called the liberal pillar. Every Dutch inhabitant belonged to a pillar and went to the school, the store, the club and in the case of the religious pillars, to the church that belonged to his or her pillar. People from different pillars almost never met each other, because every aspect of society was separated. But during the war people from different pillars did work together to fight against the German oppressor. After the war the 'Nederlandse Volksbeweging' was founded and every progressive person from whichever pillar could join. But it would take until about the 1960s before all the pillars had for the most part disappeared.

The war had almost entirely put a halt to the literary life and 1945 brought new opportunities for new writers. But a new generation writers did not immediately step forward. There were new writers, but they still wrote merely for the elite and brought the pre-war characters back to life. The 'Utrechtse School' attempted to write new literature. All writers of the

‘Utrechtse School’ belonged to a different pillar but they were liberal and innovative within their own pillars. Their emphasis lay on the self-development, empowerment and responsibility.<sup>102</sup> Family and man-woman relations were very important for the Utrechtse School. But other writers did not agree with them and despised the family, man-woman relationships and the idealising of the ‘perfect woman’. Anna Blaman had for example written the *Eenzaam avontuur* (1948), a lesbian-erotic novel, about a heterosexual couple on holiday in a remote place next to four female friends. The female of the couple cheats on her boyfriend with one of the women nearby. This is a novel that could easily be called a Gothic novel, because of its criticism on society and its Gothic elements. A member of the Utrechtse School, psychologist Buytendijk on the other hand, wrote *De vrouw, haar natuur, verschijning en bestaan* (1951) in response to Simone de Beauvoir’s *Le Deuxième Sexe* (1949). And Anna Blaman’s novel was, although praised for its literary performance, ridiculed and even put on ‘trial’ in front of a ‘Boekentribunaal’. But for Maria Dermoût other writers from her time were not important. She did not read any of them and she never talked about them. Her novel was different from all the others.

### **Maria Dermoût in the Dutch East Indies**

*De Tienduizend Dingen* by Maria Dermoût is an example of a Dutch Gothic novel. Maria Dermoût was born 15 June 1888 near Pekalongan on Midden Java, the Dutch Indies. She lived almost her entire life in the Dutch Indies, but moved to the Netherlands permanently in 1944. She was a Dutch woman, raised by a Dutch father and Dutch step-mother, schooled in the Netherlands and married to a Dutch husband. In her early letters she would get irritated by Chinese superstition, the fact that there was no healthy food around, that the climate was horrible and that the native people stole everything they could get their hands on. She especially disliked the more Christian natives on Ambon, who were ‘horrible mensen’. But Maria Dermoût started to feel more at home in the Dutch East Indies. She would continue to feel estranged because she was not a native in the Dutch East Indies, but she was very open to the native culture and started to appreciate it more and more. And she was interested in all sorts of religion, also the religion she found in the Dutch East Indies. Most of all she searched for a meaning in life, and a way to cope with her life in Taoïsm. *De Tienduizend Dingen* is a term derived from Taoïsm, a Chinese religion, and means everything that exists.

Zij zat rustig in haar stoel, het waren ook geen honderd dingen, veel meer dan honderd dingen, en niet alleen van haar, honderd keer ‘honderd dingen’, naast elkaar, los van elkaar, elkaar rakende, hier en daar in elkaar vervloeiende – zonder ergens enige binding, en tegelijkertijd voor altijd met elkaar verbonden – Een verbondenheid die zij niet goed begreep: dat hoefde niet, het viel niet te begrijpen, haar voor een ogenblik gegeven om te aanschouwen boven het maanverlichte water. (*De Tienduizend Dingen*, p212)



Maria Dermoût links the thousand things to the pagan song from the Indies sung for a deceased person, that is called 'honderd dingen'. The song is about the hundred things that the diseased, loved one is remembered by. This could be the people in his life, his possessions and what he loved but also about the environment he will never see again. Just as the thousand things are about everything around, the hundred things are everything a diseased person could be remembered by. The eastern cyclical way of thinking, the awareness that without death there would be no life, is engraved deep into the soul of Maria Dermoût.

### **Postcolonial Gothic**

Maria Dermoût was always writing, mostly letters and stories. Writing did help her to make some sense of her life, because she never really felt at home. In de Dutch East Indies she was a Dutch woman, and in the Netherlands she was an 'Aziatische oude dame'.

*De Tienduizend Dingen* was published in 1955. Literary critics knew Maria Dermoût from her first novel *Nog Pas Gisteren* and her new novel attracted much attention straight away. Maria was asked to write about the intentions of the book in de *Haagse Post*. She wrote:

Dat Oosterlingen en Westerlingen zo niet te overbruggen veel van elkander zouden verschillen heb ik nooit geloofd. Maar er is ongetwijfeld een groot, een diepgaand verschil tussen de mens levende in het Westen en diezelfde mens levende in het Oosten; vooral wanneer een bepaalde omgeving, een bepaald tijdvak, nog sterkere accenten van verschil legt. Waar ander[s] dan in de diepe stilte en groenheid, de veraf-heid, de volstrekte eenzaamheid ook van zo'n perk in het Oosten, op een eiland in de Molukken, kan een mens de woorden van de Chinese, de Oosterse wijsgeer werkelijk beleven. Wanneer de "tienduizend dingen" gezien zijn in hun eenheid, keren wij terug tot het begin en blijven waar wij altijd zijn geweest. De mens dus niet als middelpunt van de schepping, maar slechts als een deel van de overweldigende – goede en wrede – schone en niet schone – eeuwig bewegende, eeuwig in rust zijnde veelheid die wij de Schepping noemen. Hij is niet meer, ook niet minder dan de boom, of de bloem aan zijn zijde, een vogel, of een kwalletje (mooi als juweel); ja zelfs niet minder of meer dan wat wij als niet levend, niet bezield hebben leren beschouwen; een leeg schelpje zonder zijn bewoner, een kristal, een steentje. (*Geheim Indie*, p243-244)

Although she is modest, and in her diary even insecure and doubtful, she does have a strong message about the equality of Western and Eastern people and the beauty of a country the Dutch consider primitive. Only in the Dutch Indies, you can come to deep insights, feel the beauty of the world and become the humble person you are meant to be. Maria never said it in so many words, but her novels were her way of bringing people together. She wanted to make people see that there are no racial differences between people. The people from the East are not primitive and people from the West are not just colonial exploiters. This was also important for Maria to realise in her own life. Her Eastern background was often seen as primitive by Dutch people and when she lived in the Dutch Indies she was often seen as a colonial ruler.

In 1949 a difficult time started for the relation between the Dutch Indies and the Netherlands. The Dutch Indies fought very hard to become independent from the Netherlands. December 27 Queen Juliana signed the document for the transfer of the sovereign power to the leaders of what is since then Indonesia. The hostility towards the Dutch people only grew since that moment. In 1957 all Dutch citizens were forced to leave Indonesia, trade with Dutch companies were prohibited, the Dutch language was forbidden in Indonesia and houses and cars of Dutch people were molested.

### **The reception of *De Tienduizend Dingen***

But Maria Dermoût kept going strong even though getting her books published was not always easy. The publishing of *De Tienduizend Dingen* was problematic because just before finishing it she got an infection in her gall bladder. But despite her condition she did finish the book two months later. It was her second novel, so finding a publisher and audience was no longer a problem for her. *De Tienduizend Dingen* has always been seen as her masterpiece. But Maria Dermoût's novels and stories, and *De Tienduizend Dingen* was no exception, were always seen as 'heimweeliteratuur'. Rico Bulthuis wrote in his review in de *Haagse Post* about *De Tienduizend Dingen*: 'Het is een geschrift, dat nauwelijks een roman kan worden genoemd. Wel is de compositie van het verhaal goed volgehouden, maar het verhaal zelf is zo gebonden aan los van elkaar staande jeugdherinneringen, zodat men hier in de eerste plaats met een kroniek heeft te maken.' And that the Dutch Indies were 'een weemoedige herinnering waaraan ze met heimwee en tevens enige schrik terugdenkt.'<sup>103</sup> Other reviews also called her novel above all a fine memory. And even though Maria Dermoût detested and disputed this, the reviews were very positive. Her narrative style, the atmosphere of the novel and her deep insights were praised endlessly.

*De Tienduizend Dingen* was translated in thirteen languages and was a great success especially in the USA as *The Ten Thousand Things*. Daphne du Maurier, the writer of the novel *Rebecca*, the movie which I analysed in chapter two, called *The Ten Thousand Things*: 'An unusual, lovely book of great charm. A remarkable book in every way.'<sup>104</sup> *De Tienduizend Dingen* won many prizes in the Netherlands and was named book of the year 1958 in the United States. Strikingly enough was the novel only translated in Indonesian in 1975. It did not get much attention, and never became popular in Indonesia. The translator thought this was because the narrative style of Maria Dermoût for Indonesian people, felt too much opaque, it was not transparent enough.<sup>105</sup>

### ***De Tienduizend Dingen***

*De Tienduizend Dingen* is a Gothic novel for many reasons, but first of all because it brings to life the past in the present. Dermoût's novels and stories are always situated at least twenty years in the past; *De Tienduizend Dingen* is situated in the 1930s. Writer and friend of Maria Dermoût Tjalie Robinson said about Maria and her stories: 'Haar verhalen konden net zo goed een eeuw geleden of over een eeuw geschreven zijn. Veel van haar instellingen zijn ook niet zozeer Aziatisch als "oer".' And 'Haar belangstelling gold 'het dode en voorbije naast het levende en eeuwig actuele'.<sup>106</sup> Apart from in the past, *De Tienduizend Dingen* is also situated in an exotic country; the Dutch East Indies. Here we see a direct comparison with for example Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, which was situated in Italy in the Middle Ages. But an important difference with Ann Radcliffe is the fact that she had never visited the foreign countries she wrote about and Maria Dermoût was born and raised in the Dutch East Indies. This not only caused her to know the environment of which she wrote better, she also knew the culture and the inhabitants of the country extremely well. She used this knowledge to really bring to life the stories and the people in the stories. She used the Eastern religion to explain the life of heroine Felicia. In almost every chapter of the book, each chapter contains a different story, a person is murdered. In the final chapter 'Allerzielen' all the souls come together in Felicia's garden. And although the rest of the island think Felicia is crazy for locking herself up in her garden once a year and honouring the murdered souls of the island, she continues to do so because she wants to and she finds it the best way to commemorate the death and come to terms with the hardship she had in her life.

### **The four women of the posthouder**

Maria Dermoût's *De Tienduizend Dingen* is a book containing six different stories, with mevrouw van Kleyntjes as a returning character, in not all, but most of the stories. Other important women in *De Tienduizend Dingen* are, however, the four women of the story 'De Posthouder'. This is the most mysterious story of the book. The posthouder, a wealthy, pensioned man with a bad reputation with four women living with him, is found dead near his house. The women, of whom the youngest one turned out to be his wife, are interrogated but appears innocent and leave the island. The murder is never solved but the narrator is sure there was foul play from the three women.

Neen, neen geloof het toch niet! er is geen woord van waar – het is van a tot z gelogen!  
De Posthouder is wel degelijk vermoord, vermoord door zijn Geliefde en de drie oude  
heksen hebben meegeholpen. (*De Tienduizend Dingen*, p123)

However, the narrator is not entirely sure: ‘Laat hij [the posthouder] de vier vrouwen vergiffenis schenken als zij hem tenminste vermoord hebben – hij kan het weten.’<sup>107</sup> One thing is clear, the women are better off without the posthouder: ‘De vier vrouwen zagen er ook niet meer zo schuw en bedrukt uit als tevoren, zij waren opgewonden over de reis die zij gingen maken en keken naar alles en stootten elkaar aan en lachten er tezamen stilletjes om, achter hun handen.’<sup>108</sup> These women are, although murderers, also strong women that take their lives in their own hands. Maria Dermoût implies that the women were afraid of the posthouder. And also that he was a very unpleasant man. Maybe Dermoût thought it a good thing that he was murdered? In the final chapter Dermoût lets Felicia say that the posthouder was definitely not a friendly man. She talked to his spirit and he would not tell her if he was murdered or not. In this case it is maybe better that we do not know for sure that he was murdered; that way we cannot blame the four women.

### **Constance and Pauline**

Chapter four tells the story of Constance and a sailor. Constance was the cook of a wealthy family living in a house owned by mevrouw van Kleyntjes in the village. Constance had a lot of lovers and one day she sleeps with a jealous sailor. When he finds out that Constance sleeps around he threatens to murder her with a knife. The reader never does find out if the sailor murdered Constance, but she is murdered with a knife. A young woman called Pauline, who adored Constance, is beyond herself. The sailor is found dead and Pauline leaves the island, never to return.

This story is also about strong women. Constance did not only have a lot of male lovers, she was never too enthusiastic about that. Her real love was dancing to drums called ‘tifa’s’, a dance called ‘rotantrekken’. She did not need a man in her life. Pauline also did not need any men, she adored Constance. It could be that she was in love with her, but that is never made explicit. It does say a lot that Pauline murders the man she thinks murdered Constance.

Nobody looks at Constance differently for having affairs or dancing to the rhythm of the tifa’s. People start to talk when she has an affair with a sailor: ‘Hij was ook niet ‘een van hier’: zelfs niet van een van de eilanden – een Makassar liefst! en o gruwel, zou hij wel een Christenmens zijn?’ Being Christian has been mentioned before by Maria Dermoût, in relation to the song of the ‘honderd dingen’. Even though the island is filled with pagan, Eastern customs, Christianity is also very important for the inhabitants. The way people think of people who are ‘niet van hier’ could perhaps be seen as Maria Dermoût’s interpretation of the situation in the Dutch Indies at the time of writing. Dutch people were no longer welcome and were ordered to leave the country.

## **Felicia or mevrouw van Kleyntjes**

The main character of the novel is mevrouw van Kleyntjes or Felicia. The garden Kleyntjes, where mevrouw van Kleyntjes lives and is named after, is one of the biggest gardens on the island and it was once one of the most beautiful gardens there. Mevrouw van Kleyntjes is introduced like this:

Er werd overal op het eiland over haar gesproken, geluisterd soms – zoals tevoren over haar grootmoeder en daarvóór over die haar grootmoeder, (over de mannen van de familie viel weinig te praten of te fluisteren). Zij zeiden niet veel kwaad van haar; waarom zouden zij? Zij kon het erg goed doen! Nu tenminste, vroeger niet, en zij was een door en door bazige vrouw, die eerst alles precies wilde weten, maar die dan ook bereid was te helpen, als er geholpen moest worden; en met een ander mens mee te voelen. (*De Tienduizend Dingen*, p19)

In the first story mevrouw van Kleyntjes thinks about the past in the present. She thinks of the way the garden and the house standing in it, used to look and about the stories of the island. It is a story of memories, of things that have once been and have been lost, of the evanescent state of the world. And it is also a story about death.

Zij zelf was zwaar genoeg beproefd in het leven: de grootmoeder dood, aan wie zij eigenlijk alles te danken had; haar beide ouders – die hadden zich nooit veel aan haar gelegen laten liggen; broers en zusters had zij niet; haar man – niemand wist het ware over die man: hij was nooit op het eiland geweest, hij moest al jaren en jaren geleden gestorven zijn; en nu niet zo lang geleden nog de zoon, haar enig kind. Zo had zij dus niemand meer. (*De Tienduizend Dingen*, p19)

It is obvious why her reviewers interpreted *De Tienduizend Dingen* as homesick-literature or nostalgia-literature. The first chapter oozes homesickness. Homesickness to the island and to the past. It feels like Maria Dermoût was constantly sighing to be back there, while writing.

In the second chapter the story of mevrouw van Kleyntjes is told. She was born in the garden Kleyntjes as Felicia. Mevrouw van Kleyntjes lived in the garden with her father, mother and grandmother. Her mother was a very wealthy woman who fancied material things and status more than family. Her mother-in-law (the grandmother of Felicia) did not approve of her daughter-in-law's way of life and they often argued. Felicia's mother represents the Western materialistic people and her grandmother the Eastern people who value good manners, health, love etcetera much more than material stuff.

Felicia had a fairly happy but most of all interesting childhood on the island. When her mother wanted to rebuilt one of the most beautiful buildings that had once stood in the garden her grandmother became furious. That house should never be rebuilt because it would bring bad luck over the garden. Felicia's mother would not stay a minute longer in the garden, so the family moved to 'Europa' (meaning the Netherlands). Felicia's mother here is a bit like what Maria

Dermoût was like in her younger days. She was also rebellious against the superstition of the natives. But Dermoût shows here how much she has become like the people of Ambon. In the nineteen fifties, she could no longer imagine choosing material things over people.

Felicia meets a man in the Netherlands and after conceiving a child with her, would disappear with her most valuable possessions. Felicia and her son Willem (who would be called Himpies on the island because the natives cannot pronounce the W) went back to her grandmother in the garden Kleyntjes. They made the garden and house flourish, by growing vegetables and fruit and handcrafting all sorts of goods and selling this in the nearby village. The grandmother at first protests against making their own money. It was not normal behaviour for a woman. But she has to acknowledge that there is no other way of making any money. Felicia shows here how woman can have the best of both worlds: she is a strong, European woman who will take care of herself and at the same time she values all the people on the island by growing and selling what is already on the island.

Nearing the end of the second story, Himpies grows up in the garden and decides to join the army and gets killed by a barbarian at the end. This is a very important event for the novel. Because Himpies is dead, Felicia changes and becomes the woman of the first chapter, living alone in a abandoned garden. It is also important for the final chapter:

Maar er was iets, daarin overdreef zij toch. Een dag, een nacht van het jaar, op de sterfdag van die zoon wilde zij alleen zijn – dat was tot daar aan toe, maar dat ging zó ver dat zij zelfs alle bedienden met hun hele familie van de tuin wegzond naar de stad aan de buitenbaai. Zij zou die dag ook geen bezoek ontvangen; wanneer er toch mensen kwamen – volstrekt niet uit nieuwsgierigheid! maar om haar op te beuren! vroeg zij hen het bezoek liever tot een andere keer uit te stellen, en liet ze, wie het ook waren, rustig het hele eind in de prauw weer teruggaan. Eén dag, één nacht in het jaar aan de doden gewijd? is dat al te veel? Maar zo was het niet! Zij wijdde die dag en nacht niet aan de doden; enkel en alleen aan die vermoord waren, in dat jaar op het eiland vermoord waren. (*De Tienduizend Dingen*, p19)

The final chapter 'Allerzielen' brings mevrouw van Kleyntjes and all the murdered people in the former stories, and three little girls that were killed in the house that brought bad luck in the garden Kleyntjes, together in the garden. Mevrouw van Kleyntjes talks to her son, but really just talks to herself. The chapter is about coming to terms with her own life and with the deaths of all the murdered people on the island. By talking to her son, but really to herself, mevrouw van Kleyntjes comes closer to the murderers and can really forgive them and start living herself.

Zij was niet een ziekelijke vrouw en zeker niet sentimenteel maar zij zou altijd dat diep en brandend medelijden blijven voelen met die vermoord waren, zij kwam er tegen in opstand, zij kon het niet aanvaarden, van haar zoon niet, en van niemand, en nu niet, en in der eeuwigheid niet. Sterven well! – iedereen moet sterven, jong of oud, door ziekte, ouderdom, door een ongeval, door 'Fenijn' desnoods, maar dan per ongeluk; daar heeft

iemand zich bij neer te leggen. Maar het is niet goed dat de ene mens door de andere vermoord wordt. (De Tienduizend Dingen, p201)

Of all the injustice in the world, Felicia finds the murdering of people the most unbearable.

Zij drukte de vingertoppen van haar ene hand tegen het voorhoofd vlak boven haar wenkbrauwen, - hoeveel moordenaars waren er! zij werd er duizelig van en tegelijkertijd verbaasde ze zich over iets: terwijl zij aan hen dacht voelde zij niet de woede, de afschuw van altijd, maar bijna medelijden, niet het groot en brandend gevoel van medelijden zoals met die vermoord waren, een klein gevoel van ongeduld, van verdrietigheid – waarom nu toch, ezels die jullie zijn! zonder wraakgevoelens, zonder haat meer. Alsof zij niet de moordenaars waren maar ook mee de vermoorden. (De Tienduizend Dingen, p210)

But still, while she is commemorating the dead, she stops feelings anger towards the murderers and feels some pity for them. Her thinking continues: ‘En toen waren er niet meer moordenaars en vermoorden. Het was zo wazig, het liep alles zo door elkaar in haar hoofd, dus toch het een én het ander, zoals haar zoon het wilde.’<sup>109</sup>

As the title of the final chapter shows, Felicia commemorates all the souls of those who have passed away. And while she has felt anger and hate towards murderers all her life, she starts to believe that the murdered and the murderers are not that different. They both had reasons for doing what they did. They four women of the posthouder for example, they could no longer life under the reign of the posthouder. And Pauline, she loved Constance that much that she was willing to kill for her. Maybe the conclusion of *De Tienduizend Dingen* is, that no matter what people do in their lives, no matter how many sins they have, there is good in everybody.

### **Renate Dorrestein**

Renate Dorrestein was born January 25th 1954 in Amsterdam. She worked for magazines like *Panorama*, *De Tijd*, *Viva* and the feminist magazine *Opzij*. She had her debut as a writer in 1983 with the novel *Buitenstaanders*. A very important in her life was the suicide of her little sister in 1979, who jumped of a flat at the age of twenty. We shall see that this moment is very important in the novel *Buitenstaanders*. Renate Dorrestein uses literature to, for example, process the suicide of her sister, the disease ME (Chronic Fatigue Syndrome) which she suffered from for eleven years and the illness and death of her mother. Dorrestein: ‘Ik snap overigens niet hoe gewone burgers het hoofd bieden aan dit soort levensrampen. Wij kunstenaars en schrijvers kunnen tenminste nog denken: dit verrijkt mijn repertoire. Verdriet en tegenslag leveren me ook nog wat op. (...) Een boek bijvoorbeeld. En het is ook weer een soort toevoeging aan het compassiepakket. Het helpt om je te kunnen identificeren met allerlei mensen met ultieme pech.’<sup>110</sup>

## The Gothic and Renate Dorrestein

The novels of Renate Dorrestein have been mentioned in relation to the Gothic several times. Renate Dorrestein herself mentioned the Gothic in her novel *Het perpetuum mobile van de liefde* (1988) as ‘een genre dat niet voor niets door vrouwen groot is geworden’.<sup>111</sup> Even on her own website<sup>112</sup> the relation with the novels Renate Dorrestein and the Gothic novel is acknowledged: ‘Dorrestein is de eerste Nederlandse auteur die in deze traditie te plaatsen is en die er een moderne draai aan heeft gegeven. Ook bij haar komen typisch gotische thema’s en kenmerken voor, zoals verdrongen herinneringen, familiegeheimen, geestverschijningen en bloedstollende gewelddadigheden (of de dreiging daarvan). Haar verhalen spelen zich vaak op geïsoleerde plaatsen af die veiligheid lijken te bieden, maar ook voor een verstikkende atmosfeer zorgen. Waan en werkelijkheid lopen soms naadloos in elkaar over.’<sup>113</sup>

Dutch writer Hella S. Haasse was the first to pick up on the Gothic in Dorrestein’s novels.<sup>114</sup> Haasse argues that Dorrestein does not use Gothic elements in her novels to fill some fashionable gap in the market or to have an original frame for her satire, but because it is a necessity that comes from within. She uses Gothic elements to, for example, get to grips with the suicide of her sister and her own feelings of guilt about it. According to Agnes Andeweg, Hella Haasse ground this on what Renate Dorrestein herself wrote in *Het perpetuum mobile van de liefde*: ‘Sprong mijn zusje van een flatgebouw haar dood tegemoet? Ha! Dan duw ik in mijn werk zoveel mogelijk personages van daken, balkons of rotsen – en zie: mijn pen geeft hen net op tijd vleugels. Echte, mythologische of overdrachtelijke wiken, geen moeite is mij teveel.’<sup>115</sup>

Haasse also claims that the core of all Dorrestein’s novels is a quest for identity. And that this identity is intertwined with the problematic attitude towards femininity. Also important in Dorrestein’s novels, Haasse states, is the sadomasochistic relationship between man and woman.

Agnes Andeweg and Buikema and Wesseling have also analysed novels of Renate Dorrestein. Both theses analyzed the Gothic elements in the novels. Agnes Andeweg analyses the two novels of Renate Dorrestein using the theories of Nancy Armstrong.<sup>116</sup> Armstrong argues that the history of the British novel provided the test case for the British modern subject. To produce an individual, authors of the novel wrote like the individual already existed; and the individual came into being in modern British society, not only as narrated subject, but also as reader. It is important here that there has to be a dissatisfied subject in order to create a new one.<sup>117</sup> Andeweg uses this theory for Renate Dorrestein’s novels to show how Dorrestein’s novels show the tension between the individual and the ‘normal’ or what society thinks as normal. Armstrong theorizes that feminists should, instead of the ‘madwoman in the attic’, use *Dracula* for ideas. The vampires in *Dracula* all have the same mind, and create another relationship between



the individual and the collective this way. Andeweg uses the ‘vampiristic sisterhood’ to clarify the relationship between women in *Het perpetuum mobile van de liefde*, as a community in itself, where families with children are obsolete.

Buikema and Wesseling do use the concept of the ‘madwoman in the attic’ and compare women in Dorrestein’s novels to Bertha Mason. Dorrestein’s women are not like Jane Eyre; they do not contain their feelings and emotions but live to them. When they want somebody to die, it will happen, if they want someone to disappear, he will disappear. But Buikema and Wesseling empathize the violent, aggressive women in the novels. To the passive, more Victorian woman in *Buitenstaanders* however, other rules apply. But to understand this novel, we first need to know about the Netherlands in the 1980s.

### **The Netherlands in the 1980s**

The baby boom generation had started the ‘anti-burgerlijkheid’ and anti-authorial movements in the nineteen sixties. They wanted to make literature more democratic and above all fun.<sup>118</sup> This was also the time of the Feminist Second Wave in the Netherlands, with its best known image of women demonstrating for use of the birth control pill with the slogan ‘Baas in eigen Buik’ written on their stomachs. A youth culture developed and the pre-war generation became more and more obsolete. In the culture and literature everything was possible. Ruiter and Smulders called it ‘een orgie in de cultuur, waar het verbodene voor enige tijd het normale verving’.<sup>119</sup> The dividing line between high and low culture faded. Everything was possible, and this was still going on in the nineteen eighties. Renate Dorrestein’s novel *Buitenstaanders* was published in a time that was filled with novels alike. *Buitenstaanders* criticizes society, the role of the woman in Dutch society and in the family.

### ***Buitenstaanders***

Even though Renate Dorrestein’s novel *Buitenstaanders* was received with nothing but praise and she is one of the Netherlands’ most famous and well-read authors today, getting her first novel published was problematic. She had almost given up, when after ten years of endless rejection letters she suddenly realised that she had taken her own writing way too seriously. She started over without the idea of writing difficult, important literature and wrote *Buitenstaanders*. In the Flemish newspaper *De Standaard* Dorrestein wrote: ‘Buitenstaanders vond gemakkelijk een uitgever, het verscheen en werd uitstekend besproken. ‘Een krankzinnig goed boek,’ aldus *Vrij Nederland*, en vanzelfsprekend was ik het daar geheel mee eens. De wereld (althans het deel ervan dat las) was met recht en reden verrukt over mij en mijn boek. Wij tweeën waren eigenzinnig,

origineel en onweerstaanbaar.<sup>120</sup> The moment Dorrestein gave up the idea of writing a very intelligent novel, she actually wrote an empowering Gothic novel.

*Buitenstaanders* is a novel about a family that find themselves in an abandoned house after having a car accident. In that house lives an old woman who craves fresh blood, her son who writes love letters to her, two identical sisters, a backward child and a retarded servant. But nothing is as it seems: during a strange ritual, everyone's true identity is revealed. The twins turn out to be two of a triplet, all inhabitants of the house turn out to be patients of the 'retarded servant' who turns out to be their psychiatrist without their knowing it.

The nineteen eighties were a time of rebelling against authority and the 'institutions'. The psychiatrist Wibbe represents the institutions. Dorrestein shows us in *Buitenstaanders* that the institutions only think of themselves and are not to be trusted. To illustrate this I have three examples from the novel.

Psychiatrist Wibbe supervises the house. It is his responsibility that nobody gets hurt. But Sterre committed suicide anyway. He feels guilty about it, but he also looks at the situation with the eyes of a psychiatrist: 'Het zou razend interessant zijn om te zien wat er met Lupo gebeurde als Agrippina overleed.'<sup>121</sup> Agrippina and Lupo are the mother and son of the house.

The second example shows what happens when you think you can trust the institutions. When Laurie is lost in the woods, she finds out that the house she is staying in actually a house filled with patients who are under supervision. She explains to the employees from the actual psychiatric asylum that things are out of control in the house. When the psychiatrist in charge calls Wibbe to ask about the situation, Wibbe answers that Laurie is herself crazy and not to be trusted and that nothing is going on in the house.

Example three will show that there was definitely something strange going on in the house. During the ritual that the inhabitants of the house have been preparing since the beginning of the novel, the two sisters Biba and Ebbe are supposedly planning to jump off the roof of the house, just like their sister Sterre did. When Wibbe wants to climb up to the roof to rescue them, Biba and Ebbe mock him, for they had never any intention of actually jumping. But because they think he is hysterical, they lock Wibbe in the attic. Wibbe goes completely insane and gets delusions about what kind of horrible rituals the sisters could be performing right now. This example shows that the institutions cannot handle disobedience. In the 1960s, to the 1980s the police were often not capable of stopping the people in peaceful demonstrations. Because the police was not used to people being disobedient, they used brute force. This of course, made the people even more angry towards authorities.

What all these examples also show, is what happens when a 'normal' family is mixed with outsiders. In the end the outsiders (Agrippina, Mar and Agrippina's dog) will not survive. And the institutions will exclusively think of how this situation will benefit them.

### **The past haunts the present**

Just like in *De Tienduizend Dingen* is the past constantly present. The modern family is thrown back in time, without a telephone and with strange people who eat herbs and vegetables from their garden. One of the most important characters is the sister of Biba and Ebbe (the triplet that turned into a twin), Sterre who committed suicide by jumping of a building. The memory of Sterre is always present in the house and in the minds of the inhabitants. The strange ritual is the celebration of the birthday of Sterre (or probably the day of her death, because otherwise it would also be the birthday of the other sisters, but that is never completely clear.). Sterre haunts the inhabitants of the house. Everybody is very preoccupied with the memory of Sterre and planning her birthday party.

In Renate Dorrestein's own life the past still haunts her. In the above mentioned interview in the newspaper *Trouw* she said that she still has the feeling that she and her sister write the novels together. At first she had the obsession that her sister's talent had gotten in to her mind. But later she could let go of the obsession and was happy about the fact that her sister was now a writer through her. Her younger sister suffered from an eating disorder and had a short but destructive life. In 1979, when Renate was twenty-seven and her sister only twenty years old, her sister jumped of a building and died. At first Renate felt nothing but guilt. She let people jump of buildings in all her novels and she saved them all with her pen, like she would have wanted to save her little sister. Sterre is an example of a character that jumped of a building. Dorrestein did not save her, Sterre is the only character in *Buitenstaanders* she allows to jump to her death. Sterre is also the first. Perhaps she had to let her sister die first, in a novel, before she could begin to save her. In 1988 Dorrestein wrote the autobiographical *Het Perpetuum Mobile van de liefde* about her sister death. For Renate, this was the only way to exorcise her sister, as she calls it, from her life and from her writings. Writing this book made Dorrestein's guilt disappear; she decided that she could no longer live in the shadow of her sister's death. Since then, she approaches the suicide of her sister from another perspective. In an interview Renate said about the way her sister killed herself: 'Daar is heldenmoed voor nodig. Het is zo verschrikkelijk jammer dat ze die moed niet voor het leven kon mobiliseren.'<sup>122</sup> Sterre also expresses the feelings Dorrestein must have felt after her sister's death. Or perhaps how her sister had felt throughout her life.

Ze zweeg in alle talen terwijl haar obsessie toenam. Ze baadde, trok schone kleren aan en ging doodstil op een stoel zitten wachten. Binnen het uur kon ze zichzelf alweer ruiken: als een dikke walm stroomde haar walgelijkheid uit haar tevoorschijn, het was om van te gruwen, om in te stikken. Er viel niet tegenop te schrobben. Waar kwam het toch vandaan? Van binnenuit, dacht Sterre huiverend, vanuit het wezenlijke van haar zijn, vanuit haar verdorven kern. In haar binnenste werd die onzindelijke lucht veroorzaakt die door haar huis naar buiten droop. Ze zou zich van binnen moeten zuiveren en schuren. (*Buitenstaanders*, p68)

In Sterre's case this feeling is caused by menstruation. Sterre does not want to be a woman, if she had been a boy she would not have been so disgusting.

In Sterre we also find Dorrestein's attitude against women. She herself does not want to be a disgusting woman and the adopted child Mar had to be brought up without a gender according to Sterre. Sterre had decided that Mar should be raised without a gender so that it could not be programmed, like every other person in this world: 'Weet je wat gek is?' had Biba gezegd, als een petemoei boven het kind hangend. 'Ik weet niet hoe ik tegen hem of haar moet dóén.' 'Precies. Dat is het hele punt,' had Sterre gezegd. (...) 'Niemand zal iets speciaals van dit kind verwachten. Het wordt de eerste niet-geprogrammeerde mens.'<sup>123</sup> This could be interpreted as the words of Simone de Beauvoir who argues that a woman is not born a woman but becomes a woman.

### **The perfect family**

The main character is Laurie, a wife and mother of two boys. Already in the first sentences it is clear that the relationship between Laurie and her husband Max is not a good one: 'Ze hadden ruzie. Op het moment dat de wielen van de weg loskwamen, dacht Max: nu krijg je me eindelijk waar je me hebben wilt – in een rolstoel.'<sup>124</sup> At first it seems that Laurie is a strong woman who takes action when action needs to be taken. But it soon becomes clear that Laurie is actually a very sad woman with a horrible husband and two horrible sons. Laurie is the typical 'damsel in distress from Radcliffean novels. This is for example what Laurie says to Agrippina when they have just found the house after their car had hit the water: 'Ik doe altijd zo mijn best om het goed te doen in zijn ogen,' snotterde Laurie. Ze kon het niet meer ophouden. 'Hij vindt me waardeloos en dom en lelijk en maakt me zo zenuwachtig met zijn eeuwige kritiek. Nooit is het goed.'<sup>125</sup> She is the character that contains Dorrestein's criticism against the 'normal' family and against mothers. She never wanted to be a mother and she never became one. Throughout her oeuvre she despises mothers and their offspring. In *Buitenstaanders*, Laurie's husband and two sons are very unpleasant characters. Her husband is cheating on her and her sons are constantly mean to the little girl Mar who has Down Syndrome. At the end of the novel Laurie has a very Gothic, very supernatural vision in which Mar becomes the victim of Laurie's sons.

Er waren drie dwergen. De kleinste was geheel ontkleed. Hij zat vast aan een lang touw. (...) In de hand van de grootste blonk een mes. 'Na het villen,' sprak hij, 'zal de aanblik van dit gedrochtje prettiger zijn. Wat u aan zijn verschijning vrees aanjaagt, is de verraderlijke gelijkenis met een mensachtige. Als we die vermomming verwijderen, zal blijken wat de ware aard van dit wezen is. We zullen beginnen met het gelaat.' Zijn assistent zette de kleinste op z'n spillebenen en trok het ronde kabouterhoofd achterover. Het mes glom. Het maakte een kriskrassend gerucht. Hard begon de blote kabouter te zingen. Nog net was zichtbaar hoe de wirwar van kerven opensprong. Toen rees het publiek als één man juichend toe. Laurie raakte beklemd tussen de knisperende, papierdunne lichamen die naar voren stormden om niets te missen. 'Pas op!' schreeuwde de dwergenleider. Ze zag zijn ogen fonkelen. Zijn gezicht kreeg er een dimensie bij. Zijn wangen werden rond. Het zonlicht bescheen zijn wipneus. 'Kijk nou uit, mama,' schreeuwde hij, 'je gooit alles om.' (*Buitenstaanders*, p195-196)

Renate Dorrestein lets Laurie choose to forget the skinning of Mar ever took place. But what if it never happened? Were her memories of her life with her husband Max and her two sons real? Did that ever happen? She had to choose, but if she decided that her nightmare never happened, her whole life would become a meaningless illusion. But she had to choose. And there was no good choice, the question was with which lie she would rather live. Renate Dorrestein creates the impression that the story she had just told never happened. And what did not happen cannot be of any significance. Claire in *What Lies Beneath*, for example, also chooses to find out everything there is to know about Madison and the past of her husband. He offers her a choice on several occasions in the film. When she would have decided to stop her enquiry, he would probably not have murdered her. It never would have happened. But she would have to live the rest of her life with a man who betrayed her and murdered the woman he betrayed her with.

*Buitenstaanders* is a novel about, as the title suggests, outsiders. People who do not completely fit in society. 'Gekke mensen,' zei Ebbe, 'zijn ont-zet-tend eng.' 'Je kunt,' zei Biba, 'beter uit hun buurt blijven.' 'Normale mensen,' zei Ebbe, 'moeten absoluut voor ze uitkijken.' 'Anders,' zei Biba, 'raken ze misschien besmet.'<sup>126</sup> But as Ebbe and Biba continue their conversation they hit the core of the novel, and of all Gothic novels and films: 'Eigenlijk,' zei Ebbe tegen Biba, 'zijn normale mensen ook knap eng.' 'Eigenlijk,' zei Biba tegen Ebbe, 'weet ik niet wie hier het meest geschift is.'<sup>127</sup>

## Conclusion

Female Gothic fiction has been an important part of women's lives since the 1790s, not only for the writers of Gothic fiction but also for the readers and viewers of it. During the first Gothic wave (approximately 1790-1820) Gothic novels were novels that were situated in the past, mostly in a foreign, exotic country and contained lots of horror. The first novel I have analysed, *Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman* would not have been seen as a Gothic novel in its time. This is also the case with the other two novels I have analysed: *Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus* and *Northanger Abbey*. Both novels are situated in the present (although *Northanger Abbey* was finished in 1799 and was supposed to be published in 1803) and *Northanger Abbey* also in England. All three novels, however, contain lots of Gothic elements. *Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman* for example shows how women are being suppressed by their husband and fathers and even criminalized by other women. The novel contains so much hardship that the normal and the abnormal are turned around and the normal world now seems like a strange place to live in. Wollstonecraft makes sure that the reader understands that real life, for most women, is a lot worse than the life of the heroine in any Gothic novel.

*Frankenstein* on the other hand, gives the reader a female insight on what the world would look like if men were to procreate without women, but with science. The lack of a female voice in this novel shows how much the world needs women, for example to keep men and their urge for progress under control. Mary Shelley herself used her novel to break free from her parents and particularly her mother. She was afraid, on the one hand, not to become such a good a writer as her mother, but on the other hand to become a writer just like her mother. In the process of writing *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley has distanced herself from her mother. She had written out what it is like to grow up without a birth mother and how it feels to have caused your mother's death; it is not natural just like the monster of Victor Frankenstein. On the other hand because *Frankenstein* has become more famous than all her mother's writings combined.

*Northanger Abbey* gives a reader, in part, the same message as Mary Wollstonecraft wanted to get across: that women should not be kept from education and read more than just novels. This causes them to miss a lot of what is going on around them, and makes them victim to their own imagination. *Northanger Abbey* is a very interesting novel because it mocks the Gothic novel, but it also advocates it and is written like one itself.

In the twentieth century Gothic also came to the big screen. In the United States of America for example, Gothic films have been brought to the cinemas since the beginning of the cinema. In 1940 *Rebecca* was the first film made by Alfred Hitchcock in Hollywood. It is a Gothic

film because the present is constantly haunted by the past, in this case by the ghost of Mr. De Winter's first wife Rebecca. Rebecca was murdered by Mr. De Winter in the novel the film is based on by Daphne du Maurier, but because of Hollywood's censorship she fell down and hit her head. It is very easy to hate Rebecca and feel pity for the new Mrs. De Winter. But in my analyses I have shown that Rebecca is actually the one that was silenced and suppressed because she would not act like the perfect wife.

Perfect wives are also an important theme of the films *What Lies Beneath* (2000). But the message that women should stick together and help each other out, like Mary Wollstonecraft for example also argues in *Maria*, is also very important in this film. The heroine Claire at first thinks that she is haunted by a ghost that wants to murder her and her husband. Viewers are also made to believe this for a very long time during the film. But it turns out that the ghost, who was murdered by Claire's husband, wants to warn and help Claire before her husband kills her too.

Another recurring Gothic theme is to be found in the film *The Others* from 2001: the supernatural and the explanation of death. In our modern time we try to understand everything that is going on in the world. This started when modernisation started, and can sometimes also be something to be afraid of (shown in *Frankenstein* for example). Death, and what happens to our soul when we die, is probably the last real gap in Western knowledge. *What Lies Beneath* shows viewers that people become ghosts when they die and are able to save the living. In *The Others* we are taught that not even the dead know exactly what happens when we die. The heroine Grace and her two children are dead but they are not aware of this fact. They think that their house is haunted by ghosts, when in reality the dead is haunted by the living who are trying to have a life in the house Grace still lives in. Grace is too stubborn to see, she clings too much to her Bible, to see what is really going on. Seen from Mary Wollstonecraft's perspective, Grace shows us how today women can learn too much. That women, by having too much education, are no longer in harmony with their surroundings. Grace can only come to terms with her faith, when she acknowledges that she does not know everything and that that is a good thing.

In explaining death and where your soul goes when you die, *The Lovely Bones* takes things a step further. The heroine Susie is already murdered when the film begins and tells her story from her own personal heaven, or the 'in-between'. In this film the viewer is told that after you die, you can not only make contact with the living and help them, you can also have a better time than you ever had when you were alive. Another example, Mary Wollstonecraft would say, of how women are kept ignorant by nice stories about wonderful the future will undoubtedly be. But this is actually not all that *The Lovely Bones* shows its viewers. This is the top-layer that not many critics were able to look beyond but the film has a very important subconscious level. Susie

was murdered by her neighbor, by someone she knew and trusted. Just like Claire in *What Lies Beneath* who is almost murdered by her husband, she warns the audience that not everything is what it looks like, not everyone can be trusted. Even when you think that nothing will ever happen to you, as a woman you have to remain vigilant at all time.

Not so different then, is the first Dutch Gothic novel I have analysed: *De Tienduizend Dingen*. This novel was written by Maria Dermoût, who was a Dutch woman born in the Dutch East Indies. Her novel is situated in the past and in an exotic country, but unlike Ann Radcliffe Maria Dermoût had actually been in the country she describes. This causes a better understanding of the country and the costumes of its inhabitants. *De Tienduizend Dingen* contains at least six murders and gives a Eastern point of view on the subject death. The heroine Felicia meets the souls of the murdered people at the end of the book and comes to term with their deaths. This teaches the reader that it is important to remember and honour the past, but to not forget to look forward and especially to not forget to life yourself. Strong women are also found in this novel, women who do not comply to whatever is considered normal in the society they life in. Like Rebecca, most women in *De Tienduizend Dingen* fight for their own way of living. Fortunately only one woman in this novel has to pay for this with her life. Defamiliarisation is an important theme in all Gothic fiction, but most of all in *De Tienduizend Dingen*. Maria Dermoût herself was not sure of what was her home: the Netherlands or the Dutch East Indies. She never completely felt a part of either country.

Another example of Gothic horrors within a family is *Buitenstaanders* by Renate Dorrestein. Renate Dorrestein is seen as the Netherlands' Gothic writer par excellence and has a good eye for defamiliarisation and the oppression of women. In her novel she lets a, at first sight, normal family enter a house filled with abnormal people. This house is haunted by a young girl called Sterre who committed suicide. The house turns out to be a dependence of a psychiatric asylum and all the inhabitants, except one, are psychiatric patients. It is a novel against the psychiatric institutions and the violent nature of men and the part women play in the lives of men. At the end of the novel the heroine Laurie has the choice to forget that her sons had murdered an innocent girl at the house and that her husband was a horrible man that cheated on her and degraded her. But, just as Claire in *What Lies Beneath* chooses to stand up to her husband and find out what happened to his mistress, does Laurie need to choose what she does not like. Her only choices are, living in an illusion or living in a horrible reality. Either way, Laurie will never know happiness.

Gothic fiction has not changed since the first wave. The definition of what is Gothic has changed though. What was considered just another romantic or horror story, is now seen as a



Gothic story. The themes of these novels are unchanged since the beginning: defamiliarisation, turning the normal and abnormal around, showing the marginal and oppressed, showing the horrors of society and most of all, the part gender roles play in society. Women are always the victim in Gothic novels, but it is mostly the way women cope with this victimization that is interesting. Woman readers and viewers of Gothic fiction can learn a lot from Gothic fiction. For example to always choose the right way even if it is not the easiest way. Or to help other women. That you should learn as much as you can, but there is still no harm in admitting that you do not know everything. Being vigilant and critical towards men, even your own husband. But most of all, I think, that you should always live your life your way and not let anybody stand in the way of what you really want.

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## Notes

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- <sup>3</sup> Botting e. a., *Gothic II*, 1.
- <sup>4</sup> Rosemarie Buikema & Lies Wesseling, *Het Heilige Huis. De gotieke vertelling in de Nederlandse literatuur* Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 26-27.
- <sup>5</sup> Buikema, *Het Heilige Huis*, 28.
- <sup>6</sup> Gary Kelly, *English Fiction of the Romantic Period 1789-1830* (London: Longman, 1989), 42.
- <sup>7</sup> Anna Green, *Cultural History* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillian, 2008), 37.
- <sup>8</sup> Robert Miles, 'The 1790s: the effulgence of Gothic' in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, Jerrold E. Hogle, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 41-62, 55.
- <sup>9</sup> Agnes Andeweg, *Griezelig Gewoon. Gotieke verschijningen in Nederlandse romans, 1980-1995* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011), 11.
- <sup>10</sup> Simon Gunn, *History and Cultural Theory* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2006), 27.
- <sup>11</sup> Gunn, 33.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibidem, 37.
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- <sup>14</sup> Terry Castle, 'The Spectralization of the Other in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*' in *The Female Thermometer. Eighteenth-century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny*, Terry Castle (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 120-139, 124.
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- <sup>16</sup> Ellen Moers, 'Female Gothic' in: Fred Botting en Dale Townshend (ed.), *Gothic. Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies II* (London: Routledge, 2004) 123-144, 123.
- <sup>17</sup> Buikema, 24-25.
- <sup>18</sup> Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own. British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (London: Princeton University Press, 1982), 16-17.
- <sup>19</sup> Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey* 1818. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pxxxix.
- <sup>20</sup> Karen Flint, *The Woman Reader 1837-1914*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 24.
- <sup>21</sup> John Tinnon Taylor, *Early Opposition to the English Novel. The Popular Reaction from 1760 to 1830* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1943) 53.
- <sup>22</sup> Flint, 24.
- <sup>23</sup> Botting, *Gothic II*, 3.
- <sup>24</sup> Stuart Curran, 'Women Readers, Women Writers.' In *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*. Curran, Stuart, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 177-195.
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- <sup>26</sup> Scott MacKenzie, 'Ann Radcliffe's Gothic Narrative and the Readers at Home' in: *Studies in the novel*, Volume: 31, Issue 4 (December 1, 1999), 409-431, 424.
- <sup>27</sup> MacKenzie, 425.
- <sup>28</sup> Flint, 22-23.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibidem, 30.
- <sup>30</sup> H. C. Halberstadt-Freud, *Electra versus Oedipus. Psychoanalytische visies op de moeder-dochter relatie* (Amsterdam: Van Gennep, 1997), 100-101.
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- <sup>34</sup> Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication*, 195.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibidem, 193.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibidem, 194.
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- <sup>39</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *Mary, A Fiction and The Wrongs of Woman* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976) 72.
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- <sup>41</sup> Wollstonecraft, *The Wrongs of Woman*, 39.
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- <sup>47</sup> Diane Long Hoeveler, 'Frankenstein, feminism, and literary theory' in: *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft* Esther Schor, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p46.
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- <sup>55</sup> Gary Kelly, *English Fiction of the Romantic Period 1789-1830* (London: Longman, 1989) 121.
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- <sup>66</sup> *Ibidem*, 436.
- <sup>67</sup> *Ibidem*, 454.
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- <sup>70</sup> Thompson, 198-199.
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- <sup>80</sup> <http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20000721/REVIEWS/7210304/1023>
- <sup>81</sup> <http://edition.cnn.com/2000/SHOWBIZ/Movies/07/21/whatliesbeneath.review/index.html>
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- <sup>94</sup> Buikema, 12.
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- <sup>96</sup> Schouten, 22.
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