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## Haunting Perennial Girlhoods

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*Published in:*  
Modern Language Review

*DOI:*  
[10.1353/mlr.2022.0000](https://doi.org/10.1353/mlr.2022.0000)

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*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Publication date:*  
2022

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
Manizza Roszak, S. (2022). Haunting Perennial Girlhoods: Infantilization and the Transnational American Gothic from Gilman to Césaire. *Modern Language Review*, 117(1), 1-27.  
<https://doi.org/10.1353/mlr.2022.0000>

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## Haunting Perennial Girlhoods: Infantilization and the Transnational American Gothic from Gilman to Césaire

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Modern Language Review, Volume 117, Part 1, January 2022, pp. 1-27  
(Article)

Published by Modern Humanities Research Association

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/mlr.2022.0000>

MODERN  
LANGUAGE  
REVIEW

Volume 117 Part 1 January 2022

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## HAUNTING PERENNIAL GIRLHOODS: INFANTILIZATION AND THE TRANSNATIONAL AMERICAN GOTHIC FROM GILMAN TO CÉSAIRE

Readers have long viewed Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper' as an exemplar of American Gothic fiction, one whose 'imprisoned'<sup>1</sup> narrator and 'dark, demonic male'<sup>2</sup> villains make it feel intimately familiar. If late twentieth-century feminist critics once failed to 'account for the Gothic and uncanny elements present in the text',<sup>3</sup> a whole generation of later scholars has instead focused determinedly on how the story's play with Gothic conventions and its critique of patriarchal systems 'function together in the narrative',<sup>4</sup> building on Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's initial work to 'reintroduce' Gilman's text 'into the history of the literary woman's struggles, disabilities, and self-liberation'.<sup>5</sup> In the process, one of the most captivating components of Gilman's political Gothic has become the haunting 'process of infantilization'<sup>6</sup> that famously plagues her narrator protagonist. The image of Gilman's narrator as a crawling baby has captivated readers such as Carol Margaret Davison, who describes the 'final complex and horrific vision of the senseless and crawling, infantile narrator' as 'literaliz[ing] [. . .] women's position in America'.<sup>7</sup> The scene, of course, is only the culminating moment in a larger, deeply gendered experience of entrapment, in which the narrator's post-partum depression threatens to ensnare her in a never-ending nightmare of artificially imposed girlhood. As the narrator is confined in a 'nursery'<sup>8</sup> and treated as a helpless dependant in need of protection by an all-knowing husband, she brings us with her into a claustrophobic universe that stretches out horrifically

<sup>1</sup> Dennis R. Perry and Carl H. Sederholm, *Poe, 'The House of Usher', and the American Gothic* (New York: Palgrave, 2009), p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> Ruth Bienstock Anolik, *American Gothic Literature: A Thematic Study from Mary Rowlandson to Colson Whitehead* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2019), p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Mary Jacobus, 'An Unnecessary Maze of Sign-Reading' (1986), repr. in *Readers and Reading*, ed. by Andrew Bennett (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 94–111 (p. 98).

<sup>4</sup> Perry and Sederholm, *Poe, 'The House of Usher', and the American Gothic*, p. 24.

<sup>5</sup> Annette R. Federico, *Gilbert and Gubar's 'The Madwoman in the Attic' after Thirty Years* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2009), p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> Dana Seitler, *Atavistic Tendencies: The Culture of Science in American Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), p. 185.

<sup>7</sup> 'Haunted House/Haunted Heroine: Female Gothic Closets in "The Yellow Wallpaper"', *Women's Studies*, 33 (2004), 47–75 (pp. 48, 66).

<sup>8</sup> Charlotte Perkins Gilman, 'The Yellow Wallpaper', in *'The Yellow Wallpaper', 'Herland', and Selected Writings* (New York: Penguin, 2009), pp. 166–82 (p. 168). Subsequent references to this edition are given in the main text, identified by the abbreviation YW.

before us, quite as arresting as in any Gothic tale of imprisonment. Before the publication of ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’, Gothically infantilized women in varying permutations had appeared in earlier English Gothic narratives by women writers from Ann Radcliffe to the Brontës, as well as in stories by contemporaries of Gilman’s such as Edith Nesbit. Later, these suffering fictional women-children would continue to permeate United States literary production, kept alive by writers such as Shirley Jackson and even ‘vampire novelist’ Anne Rice.<sup>9</sup> In the meantime, Gilman’s efforts to propose a newly ‘sex-neutral medical model’ for the treatment of ‘nervous disease’<sup>10</sup> relied on her savvy deployment of this trope.

As familiar as it may already be, the Gothic conceit of womanhood as a sort of nightmarish perennial childhood takes on new resonance when it is viewed from a perspective that is more transnational, translinguistic, and diachronic in its reach. Read in this way, Gilman’s story becomes freshly interesting: we are invited to ‘move beyond “The Yellow Wallpaper”’ not just to ‘other, lesser-known work’<sup>11</sup> of Gilman’s—as others have increasingly done—but to any number of other texts authored by writers from the United States to Mexico and Martinique and from the late nineteenth century to our contemporary moment. All of these literary works centre on figures of domineering men and horrifyingly infantilized young women: by turns a young wife or mother, a young lover, or sometimes a sheltered young person whose only meaningful relationship is with the father who controls her. Such women have populated stories ranging from Rosario Ferré’s very famous ‘La muñeca menor’ (‘The Youngest Doll’) and Carlos Fuentes’s ‘La muñeca reina’ (‘The Doll Queen’), with its ‘dead image of eternal childhood’,<sup>12</sup> to newer texts such as Daína Chaviano’s short story ‘Estirpe maldita’ (‘Accursed Lineage’). Both Ferré’s and Fuentes’s works have increasingly been read as employing—and crafting their own distinct versions of—the twentieth-century Gothic. For its own part, ‘Estirpe maldita’ comes from a collection that Chaviano herself has referred to as an exemplar of Caribbean Gothic writing.<sup>13</sup> Then there are examples from

<sup>9</sup> See e.g. Nick Freeman, ‘E. Nesbit’s New Woman Gothic’, *Women’s Writing*, 15 (2008), 454–69; Roberta Rubenstein, ‘House Mothers and Haunted Daughters: Shirley Jackson and Female Gothic’, *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*, 15 (1996), 309–31; Gina Wisker, ‘Love Bites: Contemporary Women’s Vampire Fictions’, in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, ed. by David Punter (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 224–38.

<sup>10</sup> Jane F. Thrailkill, ‘Doctoring “The Yellow Wallpaper”’, *ELH*, 69 (2002), 525–66 (p. 529).

<sup>11</sup> Jennifer S. Tuttle and Carol Farley Kessler, ‘Introduction’, in *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: New Texts, New Contexts*, ed. by Tuttle and Kessler (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2011), pp. 1–24 (p. 7).

<sup>12</sup> Antonio Alcalá González and Ilse Bussing López, ‘Introduction’, in *Doubles and Hybrids in Latin American Gothic*, ed. by González and López (New York: Routledge, 2020), pp. 1–15 (p. 11).

<sup>13</sup> Cristina Jurado and Daína Chaviano, ‘El gótico caribeño de Daína Chaviano’, *SuperSonic*, 26 April 2017 <<https://www.supersonicmagazine.com/no-ficcioacuten/el-gotico-caribeno-de-daina-chaviano>> [accessed 20 April 2020]. Chaviano comments: ‘No he leído a los autores del *new weird*,

the realm of drama, including Octavio Paz's rewriting of Hawthorne's 'Rappaccini's Daughter' and Aimé Césaire's *Une tempête*, both of which revolve around Gothically repressed and infantilized daughter figures with a symbolic resonance, and which harness the experience of live theatre in bringing these meanings to life. Although my purpose in this essay is not to settle questions of influence, I should note (as I have previously commented in writing about the transnational American Gothic) that I share Sandra Casanova-Vizcaíno and Inés Ordiz's conviction that these variously emerging literary currents constitute similar 'responses to modernity'<sup>14</sup> and its discontents rather than straightforward instances of literary influence flowing unidirectionally from Europe and the United States to the rest of the Americas.<sup>15</sup> In fact, a decolonizing reading of these texts requires us to reject the received assumption that their Gothicism originates with Radcliffe, the Brontës, or Gilman herself, keeping in mind that an indigenous American Gothic, for instance, existed much earlier in the space of the Americas.<sup>16</sup>

The Gothicism of Paz's and Césaire's plays in particular has not been much remarked on, perhaps precisely because they are works of drama rather than fiction. Gothic theatre in general was 'relatively neglected'<sup>17</sup> as the twentieth century drew to a close and today remains a subject of 'critical reticence',<sup>18</sup> though recent edited collections such as Kelly Jones, Benjamin Poore, and Robert Dean's *Contemporary Gothic Drama* and Antonio Alcalá González and Ilse Bussing López's *Doubles and Hybrids in Latin American Gothic* either focus exclusively on or incorporate some attention to dramatic writing. There is also a tendency to yoke works such as *La hija de Rappaccini* and *Une tempête* irrevocably to their earlier iterations, 'Rappaccini's Daughter' and *The Tempest*, so that reading the newer works together with other Anglophone texts becomes a rare and strange-seeming exercise. For both of these reasons, in this essay I am particularly interested in thinking through what might happen if we place a now canonical work such as 'The Yellow Wallpaper' in conversation with Paz's

así es que no tengo manera de comparar mis relatos con esa corriente. Por ahora, prefiero clasificar estos relatos como gótico caribeño ('I haven't read any "new weird" authors, so I don't have a way of comparing my stories with this trend. For now, I prefer to classify these stories as Caribbean Gothic'; my translation).

<sup>14</sup> Glennis Byron, 'Global Gothic', in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, ed. by Punter pp. 369–78 (p. 370).

<sup>15</sup> See Sandra Casanova-Vizcaíno and Inés Ordiz, 'Introduction: Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Persistence of the Gothic', in *Latin American Gothic in Literature and Culture*, ed. by Casanova-Vizcaíno and Ordiz (New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 1–12.

<sup>16</sup> See e.g. Michelle Burnham, 'Is There an Indigenous Gothic?', in *A Companion to American Gothic*, ed. by Charles L. Crow (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), pp. 223–47.

<sup>17</sup> Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 263.

<sup>18</sup> 'Introduction', in *Contemporary Gothic Drama: Attraction, Consummation, and Consumption on the Modern British Stage*, ed. by Kelly Jones and others (London: Macmillan, 2018), pp. 1–18 (p. 4).

and Césaire's reworkings of canonical English and United States literary production. While Paz and Césaire pull diversely from a Gothic literary history that is multicultural and transnational, all three of these texts are also united by the haunting figures of women who are infantilized and imprisoned by men. Taken together, they suggest a number of questions. Most importantly, what do writers, readers, and audiences get out of these perennial Gothic girls? How do they connect to one another?

It may be helpful if, in beginning to address these issues, we acknowledge the evolving and varied socio-political significations of these haunting, unending girlhoods in a longer literary-historical context. This history offers multiple rationales for the literary endurance of the Gothic woman-child in the space of the Americas, not just as a 'stand-in for cultural anxieties'<sup>19</sup> but also more revolutionarily as a tool for uncovering and rejecting flawed and oppressive paradigms and structures. As Diane Long Hoeveler has argued, Gothic depictions of women's disempowerment in the work of earlier writers such as Radcliffe are complex in that they facilitate 'the female author's careful manipulation of the masochistic pose' as her heroines 'act out, overdo, and hyperbolize' accepted 'codes' for women's behaviour, only to 'triumph in the end'.<sup>20</sup> For Gilman, Gothic infantilization functions differently: rather than operating as a posture assumed by women for strategic purposes, it is an artificially imposed and inescapable state that persists through a final scene in which the story's narrator remains physically imprisoned in the space of the nursery. Even in interpretations of the story's ending that stress the liberation of the narrator's ghostly double, the woman in the wallpaper, the literal fact of the narrator's continuing entrapment counterbalances any resulting aura of 'triumph'. The final product is a gut-punching portrait of how gender inequality and the mistreatment of mental illness operate jointly in the atmosphere of the fin-de-siècle middle-class American home—a portrait whose explicitly stated purpose, as Gilman would later describe it, was to disrupt and reshape the treatment of women's mental illness and the trajectory of their mental health. While Judith A. Allen encourages us to consider that perhaps 'the rest cure itself is overemphasized [in Gilman scholarship] as the genesis of Gilman's feminism and work as a public intellectual',<sup>21</sup> the lasting reverberations of the story's textual argument and its conversion of Silas Weir Mitchell into an 'infamous'<sup>22</sup> figure gesture towards its continuing effectiveness in achieving Gilman's self-identified aim. In other words, the events of 'The Yellow Wall-

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>20</sup> 'Professionalizing Gender: The Female Gothic, Beating Fantasies and the Civilizing Process', in *Comparative Romanticisms: Power, Gender, Subjectivity*, ed. by Larry H. Peer and Diane Long Hoeveler (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1998), pp. 101–32 (pp. 113–15).

<sup>21</sup> *The Feminism of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Sexualities, Histories, Progressivism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 24.

<sup>22</sup> Leona Sevick, 'Catholic Expansionism and the Politics of Depression in *Death Comes for the*

paper' may not have shaped Gilman into the writer and 'social reformer'<sup>23</sup> she became, but Gilman's narrative indelibly shaped the discourse on the 'rest cure'—and, in the process, offered a compelling testament to the appeal and the rhetorical effectiveness of its particular brand of Gothicism.

In *La hija de Rappaccini* and *Une tempête*, the oppressed woman-child fares no better than Gilman's narrator; she never manages to unshackle herself from her condition in any unequivocal way. The horrifying persistence of this dilemma across Paz and Césaire underscores the transnational perils of a patriarchal system in various permutations, creating echoes of Gilman in both works. In pursuing these ideas, all three texts engage assertively with problematics of gender that were normalized and reinforced by Shakespeare's and Hawthorne's original renderings of the 'proto-Gothically' or Gothically helpless girl. Yet Paz and Césaire also force a reckoning that Gilman's text pointedly avoids: a confrontation with the ways in which white women's chronically gendered subordination has been intertwined with discourses and systems of white supremacy, slavery, colonialism, and neo-imperialism in the Americas and beyond. Through the Gothic figure of Beatriz and her nightmarish end, Paz's play exposes the fissures in a positivist narrative of Western cultural superiority grounded in false ideas of science and logic, a mythology that has dramatically influenced both Latin American colonial history and US neo-imperialist aggression while threatening the safety of an entire world haunted by the fear of a nuclear apocalypse. Paz's allegorical manoeuvrings suggest a sinister role for white women in these cultural developments, one that is borne out by real histories in the Americas. Meanwhile, in his Gothic reimagining of *The Tempest's* Miranda and her relationship to a monstrous father, Césaire dares audiences to reckon with the mythology of the infantilized, virginal white woman as it has been weaponized against African diasporic communities and Black men specifically in the Atlantic world. While postcolonial readers will be familiar with this strand of thought in *Une tempête*, what is worth considering more closely is the way Césaire appropriates the trope of the Gothic perennial girl to achieve this end.

In these ways, Paz and Césaire critically extend the conversation that Gilman invited late nineteenth-century American readers to join and that her contemporary admirers have continued. Horror-laden renderings of infantilized women under figurative and sometimes literal lock and key are central to their meaning-making project, reaffirming the multilayered political relevance not only of this specific trope but of the Gothic genre more generally, which writers of colour and those outside the geographic realm of the 'traditional'

Archbishop', in *The Cambridge Companion to Willa Cather*, ed. by Marilee Lindemann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 193.

<sup>23</sup> Allen, *The Feminism of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, pp. 24–25.

## 6 *The Transnational American Gothic from Gilman to Césaire*

white Euro-American Gothic have continued to reshape aesthetically and thematically in order to reflect a complex matrix of concerns. Read side by side, Gilman, Paz, and Césaire offer up potent examples of the shifting significations of protracted Gothic girlhoods—their relevance to issues of race and colonialism as well as gender and mental illness—and thus help to account for the staying power of this trope in transnational American literary history.

### *Gilman's 'Little Girl'*

Accounts of the specifically Gothic process of infantilization that takes place in 'The Yellow Wallpaper' tend to emphasize the most literal manifestations of that experience as its most horrifying ones, dwelling understandably on the story's terrifying climax and its image of the 'creeping' narrator (YW, p. 181).<sup>24</sup> In truth, however, it is not just these moments—in which the narrator most closely resembles an actual, crawling infant—that yoke the Gothic with the figure of Gilman's woman-child.<sup>25</sup> Instead, even at times when the narrator's infantilization is more figurative or subtler, it is Gothically shaded in ways that horrify and haunt. The metaphysical imprisonment of a forced unending childhood becomes a spellbindingly awful variation on the trope of the imprisoned Gothic heroine, one that contributes deeply to the story's socio-political weight.

At the simplest level of interpretation, 'The Yellow Wallpaper' is about a woman's desperation in the face of social control. Unhappily settled for the summer in an old country house in a remote location 'quite three miles' from the nearest village, the story's unnamed narrator<sup>26</sup> has recently given birth to a child and has been instructed to treat her post-partum depression by ceding to the control of her husband. We learn that he 'hardly lets [her] stir without special direction', emphasizing 'perfect rest' and 'air' (YW, pp. 167–68) along with 'cod liver oil and lots of tonics and things' (YW, p. 173) and that all-important hallmark of the 'rest cure': copious amounts of food. The narrator is also accordingly barred from socializing with 'stimulating people' (YW, p. 170) and even from writing, which she must do surreptitiously when the housekeeper is away. All this is quite factually accurate in that it accords with the protocol recommended by Mitchell, who treated Gilman for her own post-partum depression. Mitchell prescribed 'a meat-rich diet and weeks or months of bed rest' for 'nervous' women while advocating 'prolonged periods of cattle rop-

<sup>24</sup> See Davison, 'Haunted House/Haunted Heroine'.

<sup>25</sup> Seitler reminds us that this detail is grounded in 'Silas Weir Mitchell's recommendation that nervous women undergo an actual process of infantilization/primitivization in order to redevelop into healthier individuals' (*Atavistic Tendencies*, p. 185).

<sup>26</sup> While one interpretation of the story's end suggests that the narrator's name may be Jane, this remains ambiguous (see Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet, *The Poetics and Politics of the American Gothic: Gender and Slavery in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (New York: Ashgate, 2010)).



ing, hunting, roughriding and male bonding' as a 'method of treating nervous men'.<sup>27</sup> As the narrator's psychological condition predictably deteriorates in the face of this gendered treatment, and as her feelings of frustration escalate, so too do the new mother's visions of another woman or even 'a great many women' (YW, p. 178) trapped in the wallpaper of the room to which she is confined, which some have speculated 'may have been—or is—a room in an asylum' rather than a playroom for children as the narrator believes.<sup>28</sup>

Gothic elements from the haunted house to the self-harming heroine play an essential role in these scenes of horror, deepening the visceral terror of the narrator's position. While these details are by now very familiar to those of us who know the story well and especially to those of us who study Gothic literature, it is worth rehearsing a few nuances that will also turn out to be particularly central in Paz and Césaire, intensifying all three writers' depictions of horrifying perennial girlhood. Not only is the property chosen by the story's dangerously confident husband a predictably sprawling and desolate 'ancestral hall' (YW, p. 166); it is also simultaneously an old house in itself and a new house to the family, allowing for the possibility of long-suppressed secrets within its walls and for the possibility that the house's new inhabitants will discover them as they get to know the place. These two conventions are equally recognizable: the Gothic secret often serves to 'disrupt [. . .] the continuity or unity of the self',<sup>29</sup> while the 'the gloomy old house or castle' is well suited to the genre's interest in 'the sublime'<sup>30</sup> in its both American and European permutations. In 'The Yellow Wallpaper', the secret will never become perfectly clear: is the property indeed a former asylum haunted by the ghosts of its past inhabitants, who themselves would have faced Gothically horrific forms of mistreatment given the stigmatization of mental illness in the nineteenth-century United States? The question is impossible to answer definitively. Still, the narrator's confident assertion that there is 'something queer' about this house that has been 'let so cheaply' (YW, p. 166) will give way to decided 'disruptions' of the 'unity' of her sense of self, whether her visions are a symptom of post-partum psychosis or an experience of literal haunting.<sup>31</sup>

Such ambiguity can be characteristic of the Gothic, which so often 'is sited in a twilight borderland between familiar and strange'.<sup>32</sup> Either interpretation

<sup>27</sup> Anne Stiles, 'Go Rest, Young Man', *Monitor on Psychology*, 43.1 (January 2012) <<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2012/01/go-rest>> [accessed 23 May 2018].

<sup>28</sup> Perry and Sederholm, *Poe, 'The House of Usher', and the American Gothic*, p. 30.

<sup>29</sup> Ellen Brinks, *Gothic Masculinity: Effeminacy and the Supernatural in English and German Romanticism* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2003), p. 69.

<sup>30</sup> Charles L. Crow, 'Fear, Ambiguity, and Transgression: The Gothic Novel in the United States', in *A Companion to the American Novel*, ed. by Alfred Bendixen (Chichester: Blackwell, 2012), pp. 129–46 (p. 129).

<sup>31</sup> See Jacobus, 'An Unnecessary Maze of Sign-Reading'.

<sup>32</sup> Crow, 'Fear, Ambiguity, and Transgression', p. 129.

is also compatible with the idea of the ghostly figure or figures as quintessential Gothic doubles, ones that for Cynthia Murillo represent ‘the New Woman, the triumphant alter-ego to the slowly fading “True Woman” at the fin de siècle’<sup>33</sup>—although readers need to be careful here, lest they fall into the trap of reading mental illness as ‘a metaphor’, which Laura R. Kremmel reminds us is ‘a dangerous and [. . .] outdated move when reading disability in literature’.<sup>34</sup> Although other ‘Female Gothic’ narratives sometimes work more concretely with the concept of the double, confronting readers with eerie scenes populated with twins and namesakes, Gilman’s version is equally convincing, using the human–hallucination or human–haunt pairing to underscore the horrifying entrapment of its protagonist as well as her double’s potential for liberation. Meanwhile, in the narrator’s devolution into self-harm as she bites at the wallpaper—‘it hurt my teeth’, she reveals (*YW*, p. 181)—‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ subtly echoes scenes of death by suicide in novels of female imprisonment such as its precursor *Jane Eyre*.<sup>35</sup> Even the narrator’s wish to ‘jump out of the window’, which she claims would be just a form of ‘admirable exercise’ (*YW*, p. 181), recalls a suite of other Gothic narratives by women writers in which ‘the avowed intention [. . .] to exercise the ultimate preference of death over life’ invites ‘gendered readings of suicide and its motivation’.<sup>36</sup> This mélange of conventions complexly blends experiences of feminine liberation and oppression, underscoring the poisonous nature of a patriarchal system with a poisonous approach to questions of women’s mental health, even as it gestures towards the possibility of change. Both work towards Gilman’s self-identified aim of ‘sav[ing] people from being crazy’,<sup>37</sup> or, in other words, from being victimized by the ‘rest cure’ and its paternalistic approach to women’s experiences of mental illness.

It especially matters that Gilman sounds these Gothic notes because by doing so, she lends an air of tangible horror to the infantilization of her protagonist, which is my real focus here. Husbands who address their wives with terms of endearment such as ‘little girl’ and who use cloying expressions such as ‘Bless her little heart!’ (*YW*, pp. 174–75) are a fixture in late nineteenth-century realist narratives without a shred of the Gothic in them. Read in the context of the narrator’s hauntings or hallucinations, her doubles and their manifold mean-

<sup>33</sup> ‘The Spirit of Rebellion: The Transformative Power of the Ghostly Double in Gilman, Spofford, and Wharton’, *Women’s Studies*, 42 (2013), 755–81 (p. 756).

<sup>34</sup> ‘The Asylum’, in *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Gothic*, ed. by Clive Bloom (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), pp. 449–65 (p. 454).

<sup>35</sup> In Brontë’s novel, Bertha Mason is infantilized as well as imprisoned and dehumanized under the care of her husband and her ‘attendant’, Grace Poole. Significantly, Brontë uses the same term to refer to the servants who ‘attend’ little children such as Jane’s pupil Adele.

<sup>36</sup> William Hughes and Andrew Smith, ‘Introduction: The Most Gothic of Acts—Suicide in Generic Context’, in *Suicide and the Gothic*, ed. by Hughes and Smith (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), pp. 1–17 (pp. 1, 10).

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Thrailkill, ‘Doctoring “The Yellow Wallpaper”’, p. 527.

ings, and the ghostly house where this all takes place, such words take on a more deeply sinister resonance. They viscerally horrify and terrify us as much as they intellectually provoke us. As a Gothic trope in itself, however, the act of infantilization hinges most centrally on the monstrosity of the narrator's controlling husband, who prefigures Paz's and Césaire's own power-hungry male doctor scientists.

The generically named John is not cast as a straightforward villain in 'The Yellow Wallpaper'. His wife describes him as loving, if misguided: 'Dear John!' she comments in one moment. 'He loves me very dearly, and hates to have me sick' (YW, p. 173). Still, the objective facts of the story reveal the horrific quality of John's behaviour as, like the prototypical Montoni in Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, he 'assumes increasingly terrifying and tyrannical proportions' and 'abuses his [. . .] power' within the domestic sphere, attempting various means of disempowering the women in his life.<sup>38</sup> In Gilman, the exercise of this power requires the theft of the narrator's agency to the degree that even the simple act of disagreeing with her husband is exhausting and makes her 'cry' like a confused child 'before [she] had finished' (YW, p. 173). It also entails physical experiences of imprisonment as John obsessively forbids his wife from 'walking about' (YW, p. 174) at night, requires her to 'lie down for an hour after each meal' (YW, p. 176), and refuses to let her leave the house to visit friends or return to their home. That these events take place in a nursery means that the narrator's confinement is tantamount to a stifling, abusive return to infancy. The other men who exist at the borders of the narrative, including the narrator's brother and Mitchell himself, are revealed to operate similarly: they all 'say [. . .] the same thing' (YW, p. 166) about the narrator and women like her. Together they form a sort of community of jailers not unlike the villains in English Gothic narratives such as William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* or Matthew Lewis's *The Monk*, though the putative social acceptability of the men's actions lends itself to a different sort of critique that is necessary for the 'Female Gothic' in its questioning of gendered superstructures. The figurative 'magic' deployed against Gilman's narrator specifically enables her to be turned, as if by some malevolent force, into a little girl instead of a grown-up, so that only her Gothic double seems capable of escape.<sup>39</sup> In all of these ways, the narrator's forced perennial girlhood at the hands of her husband is rendered Gothically horrifying and not just realistically offensive. That her imprisonment seems unlikely to end as might

<sup>38</sup> Davison, 'Haunted House/Haunted Heroine', p. 51.

<sup>39</sup> In contrast, Markman Ellis describes how in Lewis's novel magic functions as a socio-sexual tool for 'securing' the 'desire' of the villain ('Enlightenment or Illumination: The Spectre of Conspiracy in Gothic Fictions of the 1790s', in *Recognizing the Romantic Novel: New Histories of British Fiction, 1780-1830*, ed. by Jillian Heydt-Stevenson and Charlotte Sussman (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), pp. 77-98 (p. 88)).

happen in a ‘Radcliffean [Gothic] romance’ only increases the horror of her position.<sup>40</sup>

While Mitchell’s ‘rest cure’ did promise women a return to adult life upon their recovery, this promise was relatively meaningless in a fin-de-siècle United States context in which women’s socio-legal status remained functionally that of children, echoing Mary Wollstonecraft’s complaints about the ‘state of perpetual childhood’<sup>41</sup> into which eighteenth-century British women had been forced. Some protections for women’s property rights had been in place for several decades in a number of US states, but the larger problem was unchanged for women who continued to be unable to vote, faced ‘more than one hundred restrictive divorce laws’<sup>42</sup> from state to state, and encountered ‘severely restrictive judicial interpretations’<sup>43</sup> even in seeking to have their property rights legally upheld. A legal approach to gauging the status of women in fin-de-siècle US society must of course also be complemented with an understanding of the pervasive daily attitudes that undergirded these statutes and courtroom practices: attitudes that are neatly summarized in Gilman’s narrator’s calm opening statement: ‘John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage’ (YW, p. 166). In this socio-legal atmosphere of condescension and control, the stakes of Gilman’s Gothic rendering and her narrator’s horrifying entrapment in girlhood were correspondingly high, calling for women readers to mobilize their feelings of horror at the protagonist’s plight in the service of their own liberation, whether that might simply mean demanding a ‘sex-neutral model’ for the treatment of mental illnesses such as post-partum depression, or whether it might mean working more systemically in resistance to the patriarchal architecture of the United States. Speaking more broadly, Gilman’s work thus became part of a canon of Anglo-American women’s writing that challenged male-centric ways of knowing enshrined in texts from Shakespeare to Hawthorne and beyond: texts that had been treated as culturally foundational in ways that ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ itself would not be treated for nearly a century.

Despite its significance in these respects, Gilman’s story covers limited ground. After all, as much as ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ is now itself received as a canonical work of ‘American’ literature, it does not reflect the contours of America in the broader sense of the term, which, when used outside of the

<sup>40</sup> Siân Silyn Roberts, *Gothic Subjects: The Transformation of Individualism in American Fiction, 1790–1861* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), p. 151.

<sup>41</sup> *A Vindication of the Rights of Women, with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1891).

<sup>42</sup> Emma Sterry, *The Single Woman, Modernity, and Literary Culture: Women’s Fiction from the 1920s to the 1940s* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 4.

<sup>43</sup> Joan Hoff Wilson, ‘The Legal Status of Women in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries’, *Human Rights*, 6 (1977), 125–34 (p. 128).

United States, is importantly meant to refer instead to the Americas at large.<sup>44</sup> The implications of the story's setting in a 'colonial mansion' (*YW*, p. 166), one that implicitly recalls the transnational complications of the United States' imperialist history, are not something that Gilman more explicitly interrogates. Closer to home, the narrative also does not deeply examine the experiences of the working-class women for whom the expansion of women's property ownership rights was least likely to be meaningful and to whom the 'rest cure' most decidedly did not apply, nor does it address the differing experiences of women of colour in the late nineteenth-century United States.<sup>45</sup> In fact, as early as 1989 Susan S. Lanser drew attention to the ways in which Gilman's narrative actually echoed racially charged and problematic elements of her own philosophy, though relatively few readers have followed her lead.<sup>46</sup> Lanser reminds us that in spite of Gilman's 'strong theoretical commitment to racial harmony, her unconventional support of interracial marriages, and her frequent condemnation of America's racist history, Gilman upheld white Protestant supremacy' in many respects.<sup>47</sup> In keeping with what Lanser casts as this blind spot of Gilman's, for all that it focuses on the experiences and perspectives of the 'middle-class white woman',<sup>48</sup> 'The Yellow Wallpaper' does not interrogate or problematize that woman's own particular role—her complicity, even—in the larger social structures that have instrumentalized her as a tool for oppressing others. These admissions are important because they invite readers of Gilman to engage in fresh interpretative modes. Whereas late twentieth-century 'white academics [. . .] failed to question the story's status as a universal women's

<sup>44</sup> This linguistic intricacy, while it is a simple, long-understood fact for many people living outside the United States, has only recently begun to gain popular attention in the US media. See Karina Martinez-Carter, 'What Does "American" Actually Mean?', *The Atlantic*, 19 June 2013 <<https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2013/06/what-does-american-actually-mean/276999/>> [accessed 2 November 2020].

<sup>45</sup> In contrast, non-fictional writings such as Gilman's *The Home: Its Work and Influence* were more extensive in their discussion of class, considering how '[t]he Housewife having become the Lady of the House, and the work still having to be done in the house, others must be induced to do it' (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002), p. 105.

<sup>46</sup> Writing about 'The Yellow Wallpaper' and *Jane Eyre*, Dani Cavallaro suggests that, speaking figuratively, Jane too is a 'child [. . .] at the mercy of a ruthless economy that thrives on the other's disempowerment'. For her, both narratives employ an 'imperialist ethos' built on 'the association between femininity, childlike deference, and colonial exploitation' (*The Gothic Vision: Three Centuries of Horror, Terror, and Fear* (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 164). See also Thomas Peyser (following note).

<sup>47</sup> 'Feminist Criticism, "The Yellow Wallpaper", and the Politics of Color in America', *Feminist Studies*, 15 (1989), 415–41 (p. 429). Working from Lanser's initial comments, Thomas Peyser has argued convincingly for a reading of Gilman's 'sociological writings' that similarly highlights Gilman's discomfort 'with the fact that globally disseminated patriarchal practices lump her together with those she considers her racial inferiors', more specifically, women of colour (*Utopia and Cosmopolis: Globalization in the Era of American Literary Realism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 75).

<sup>48</sup> Elizabeth Ammons, *Conflicting Stories: American Women Writers at the Turn into the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 35.

text',<sup>49</sup> recognizing these fissures creates a compelling rationale for reading writers such as Paz and Césaire alongside Gilman as a way of contextualizing and expanding on the story's Gothic vision of American gender, class, and race. The haunted or haunting figure of the trapped woman-child offers a kind of intertextual through-line and a way into this method of reading.

### *Mad Scientists and Deadly Daughters: Rereading Paz*

Understudied in general in comparison with works such as 'The Yellow Wallpaper', *La hija de Rappaccini* is not a text that critics typically reach for in discussing the (even transnational) American Gothic. Anna Brickhouse's exploration of the play as a 'surreal' representation of the 'conquest of Mexico, in which colonial domination is represented obliquely in the violation of a woman's body', does not engage with the presence of the Gothic uncanny in its pages.<sup>50</sup> Lois Parkinson Zamora's earlier study of Paz, Fuentes, and eighteenth-century Japanese writer Ueda Akinari locates the Gothic more in Ueda's 'tales of the supernatural' than in Paz's play, though she remarks that all three writers' works employ 'abstract personages, idealized locations, and symbolic interplays of light and dark' that 'suggest a kinship to [. . .] magic [*sic*] realism' and thus, in her view, an indirect link to Gothic writings as well.<sup>51</sup> Yet Paz actually preserves much of the straightforward, explicit Gothicism of Hawthorne's earlier short story, even while imbuing it with a quite different socio-political resonance, and despite also identifying several other sources of inspiration for both his own work and Hawthorne's earlier one.<sup>52</sup>

Other writers have previously traced the relationship between Hawthorne and Paz, and the Gothicism of Hawthorne's original text is well known, so here I am more interested in thinking through the echoes of Gothic girlhood that reverberate from Gilman's narrative to *La hija de Rappaccini* and, later, to Césaire.<sup>53</sup> In Paz's hands, this Gothic trope does not just reflect powerfully on Mexico's colonial history and relationship of neo-imperialist influence with

<sup>49</sup> Lanser, 'Feminist Criticism, "The Yellow Wallpaper", and the Politics of Color in America', p. 423. Having worked to 'call into question the status of Gilman's story—and the story of academic feminist criticism—as sacred texts', Lanser's essay similarly suggests that Gilman be read side by side with women writers of colour, though Lanser does not focus on overtly Gothic texts in her reading recommendations (*ibid.*, p. 416).

<sup>50</sup> 'Hawthorne in the Americas: Frances Calderón de la Barca, Octavio Paz, and the Mexican Genealogy of "Rappaccini's Daughter"', *PMLA*, 113 (1998), 227–42 (p. 237).

<sup>51</sup> "A Garden Enclosed": Fuentes' *Aura*, Hawthorne's and Paz's "Rappaccini's Daughter", and Uyeda's *Ugetsu Monogatari*, *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos*, 8 (1984), 321–34 (p. 332).

<sup>52</sup> Paz has commented that the play 'is adapted from a short story by Nathaniel Hawthorne' but 'combines two [theatrical] traditions [. . .] the Japanese Noh theatre and the Spanish *auto sacramental*' (Sebastian Doggart and Octavio Paz, 'Interview with Octavio Paz', in *Latin American Plays: New Drama from Argentina, Cuba, Mexico, and Peru* (London: Hern, 1996), pp. 27–28 (p. 27)). He also takes care to note that 'Hawthorne's source—or the source of his sources—lies in India' (*ibid.*, p. 27).

<sup>53</sup> See Zamora, "A Garden Enclosed", and Brickhouse, 'Hawthorne in the Americas'. See also

the United States. It also problematizes positivist Western conceptions of scientific knowledge that are deeply relevant to that history while engaging other contemporary, related, and globally relevant dilemmas as of the time of the play's writing, such as 'the nuclear danger'.<sup>54</sup> The figure of the imprisoned perpetual girl dominated by her father not only works allegorically to elucidate these topics but also points to specific roles played by white women in perpetuating the injustice, danger, and imbalances of power inherent in these regional and global dynamics. Importantly, Paz's play accomplishes this without occluding questions of gender themselves or without using the feminine as a sort of purely abstracted, symbolic object. Instead, Paz also undoes some of the sexist, infantilizing language used by Hawthorne's original narrator to describe his Beatrice, even as the play gestures towards the weaponization of Western women in these long-standing cultural battles. Paz thus shares some of Gilman's revolutionary moves while taking up questions of transnational, multiracial American culture and history that are unspoken in 'The Yellow Wallpaper'.

Odd ideas have at times emerged about the history of Paz's relationship with the United States. In acknowledging Paz's time spent on US shores, Nick Caistor emphatically proclaims that '[t]he two years he spent in the United States marked Paz deeply. He never shared the anti-US feelings that were one of the essential attributes of "progressive" Mexican intellectuals. Instead, he was greatly impressed by the way that United States society had *embraced modernity*.'<sup>55</sup> Whereas Caistor uncritically uses terms that Paz's own works would deeply problematize, the reality of Paz's perspective on its neo-imperialist neighbour is quite a bit more complex—and more critical—than such statements allow for. We can see this, for instance, in non-fictional writings such as his 1950 *El laberinto de la soledad*, which does not hesitate to confront the history of US military and socio-economic aggression towards Mexico, and which also expresses blunt criticism of some elements of US culture that Paz sees as distinct from those of Mexican culture, despite his categorization of both states as forms of 'la civilización de Occidente' ('Western civilization').<sup>56</sup> There, Paz does not mince words in commenting on the Mexican–American War and its aftermath:

En el siglo XVII la sociedad mexicana era más rica y próspera que la norteamericana. [ . . . ] En 1847 los Estados Unidos invaden México, lo derrotan y le imponen terribles y onerosas condiciones de paz. Un siglo después, se convierten en la primera potencia

Nedda G. de Alhalt, 'Amor: Occidente y Oriente (apuntes para un estudio comparativo sobre *La hija de Rappaccini* de Hawthorne y Paz)', *La Palabra y el Hombre*, 79 (1991), 276–90.

<sup>54</sup> Doggart and Paz, 'Interview with Octavio Paz', p. 28.

<sup>55</sup> *Octavio Paz* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), p. 59, emphasis added.

<sup>56</sup> *El laberinto de la soledad* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2019), p. 476; trans. by Lysander Kemp and others (New York: Grove, 1985), p. 357.

mundial. [. . .] En cuanto a nuestra relación con los Estados Unidos [hoy]: sigue siendo la vieja relación entre el fuerte y el débil, oscilante entre la indiferencia y el abuso, la mentira y el cinismo. La mayoría de los mexicanos tenemos la justificada convicción de que el trato que recibe nuestro país es injusto.<sup>57</sup>

In the seventeenth century, Mexican society was richer and more prosperous than American society. [. . .] In 1847, the United States invaded Mexico, occupied it, and imposed on it terrible and heavy conditions of peace. A century later, the United States became the dominant world power. [. . .] As for [Mexico's] relationship with the United States [today], that is still the old relationship of strong and weak, oscillating between indifference and abuse, deceit and cynicism. Most Mexicans hold the justifiable conviction that the treatment received by their country is unfair.

Paz also engages in important acts of allyship and witnessing as he acknowledges the United States' acts of genocidal suppression of indigenous communities, its continuing struggles with racial injustice, and the repression of US women, whom he describes as having obtained the 'derechos' ('rights') that they do have 'como entidades neutras o abstractas' ('as neuter or abstract entities') without a corresponding, much-needed 'feminización' of the culture of the United States.<sup>58</sup> This conclusion, while it may at first appear superficially essentialist, nevertheless hits on something that many 'younger "third-wave" women' in the United States would emphasize in demanding that gender equality not be reduced to the practice of 'integrating' girls and women 'into a male world and proving they could do masculine things'.<sup>59</sup> Instead, they argued, 'embracing girliness'<sup>60</sup> was also required—and Paz recommends a similar remedy in his critique of US culture.

These assertions are relevant to a reading of *La hija de Rappaccini* that seeks to understand the play not just as a 'gendered and eroticized dramatization of Mexican colonial history'<sup>61</sup> but also as a similarly critical response to the machinations of its northern neighbour. While the text is set in Italy like Hawthorne's original, the act of rewriting Hawthorne puts Paz into conversation with an American literary and cultural context that includes the United States' invasion of and neo-imperialist incursions into Mexico, as well as this earlier colonial heritage and the positivist visions of scientific and cultural superiority that have guided both histories. Along with a series of other Gothic gestures, Paz's rendering of the Gothically imprisoned perennial girl works in the service of these layers of critique.

As Paz has pointed out, the plot of *La hija de Rappaccini* closely follows

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 491–93; 371–72.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 487; 367.

<sup>59</sup> Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, 'Feminism and Femininity; or, How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Thong', in *All about the Girl: Culture, Power, and Identity*, ed. by Anita Harris (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 59–67 (p. 59).

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Brickhouse, 'Hawthorne in the Americas', p. 236.



that of Hawthorne's story. Audiences are presented with a girl, a garden full of poisonous plants, a 'mad' doctor scientist, and a newly arrived young male interloper: a student who finds himself captivated by what is taking place next door. The girl, Beatriz, has been raised to take on the same poisonous qualities as her father's garden, making the infatuation of her Naples-raised neighbour (whom Paz calls Juan) into a literally dangerous proposition. The climax of the action involves an antidote that Juan believes will cure Beatriz of her condition but that her father claims will kill her. In contrast to Hawthorne's narrative, where Beatrice dies tragically, *La hija de Rappaccini* leaves room for a plurality of interpretations. As translator Sebastian Doggart asks, 'Does the antidote kill Beatrice or release her into the outside world?'<sup>62</sup> In its own way, this ambiguity is reminiscent of the effect created by Gilman's narrator and her double, with their diverging fates as Murillo has understood them. As I will describe later in greater detail, what remains clear in Paz's ending is Beatriz's persisting experience of infantilization. Her continuing, hapless subordination to one man or another constitutes a form of unending imprisonment, even as she imagines 'going back to [herself]' in possible death: 'No, regreso a mí misma', she tells her would-be lover and her father.<sup>63</sup>

Some of the Gothic elements of both Hawthorne's story and Paz's play rise easily to the surface of this summary. The conceit of the poisonous garden interestingly adapts the trope of the 'consuming' and 'nightmarish wilderness' that Maisha L. Wester identifies with the contemporary African American Gothic and its play on earlier Euro-American Gothic conventions.<sup>64</sup> In this case, the threat posed by nature is man-made, which only intensifies the fright it inspires. Rappaccini's horticultural talents and their influence also call to mind what Robert Miles describes as 'the desire aroused by the Gothic garden (sexual desire but also desire for self-realization)'.<sup>65</sup> This 'Gothic garden', Miles suggests, 'is always [. . .] stretched between two states, one where fruition is promised, and one beset by denial'.<sup>66</sup> Although Miles applies this typology to Hawthorne and not to Paz, who is not mentioned in his study, the concept applies equally to *La hija de Rappaccini* or perhaps even more so, given the play's ambiguous ending and its reliance on surrealist, archetypal images of 'los Amantes. [. . .] [D]os figuras, una color del día, otra color de la

<sup>62</sup> 'An Introduction to Latin American Theatre', in *Latin American Plays*, pp. vii–xxv (p. xxiii).

<sup>63</sup> Paz, *La hija de Rappaccini* (Mexico, D.F.: El Colegio Nacional, 2008), p. 54; Paz, *Rappaccini's Daughter*, in *Latin American Plays*, trans. by Sebastian Doggart, pp. 1–26 (p. 24). Subsequent references to this edition are given in the main text, identified by the abbreviation HR. Page references to the original text will be followed by those to the translation.

<sup>64</sup> *African American Gothic: Screams from Shadowed Places* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 247.

<sup>65</sup> *Gothic Writing, 1750–1820: A Genealogy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 77.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

noche ('the Lovers. Two figures, one the colour of day, the other the colour of night': *HR*, pp. 17; 4). Then there is the Gothic conceit of the secret, which, as in 'The Yellow Wallpaper', animates and energizes the plot as both Juan and Beatriz struggle to understand the nature her father has imbued her with. What is less obvious from the synopsis above is the heavily Gothic nature of the rest of the play's setting, which easily recalls Gilman's 'ancestral hall' (*YW*, p. 166). We learn from the opening stage directions that Juan's new room is 'alta y estrecha, un gran espejo cubierto de polvo, atmósfera desolada [. . .]. Al alzarse el telón, la escena permanecerá a oscuras' ('tall and narrow, a dark mirror covered by dust, a desolate atmosphere [. . .]. As the curtain rises, the stage remains in darkness': *HR*, pp. 15; 3). While readers of the play will experience these descriptions as akin to straightforward narration in a work of fiction, its live audiences are viscerally confronted with an immersive, haunting atmosphere that in this way is even deeper in its Gothicism. From the start, Paz offers audiences what Jones, Poore, and Dean describe as 'the sensory appeal of the Gothic', which 'seeks to unsettle through its effect and affect upon its audiences, evoking and invoking fear', 'horror', and 'claustrophobia', among other things.<sup>67</sup>

A work from a period in Mexican theatrical history that roundly 'reject[ed] straightforward naturalism' and 'realism',<sup>68</sup> *La hija de Rappaccini* also incorporates uniquely symbolist Gothic features that distinguish it aesthetically from earlier Euro-American Gothic narratives. Most obviously, the character of the Messenger functions as a literal embodiment of the Gothic interest in fortune-telling from *Jane Eyre* to Graham Greene's *The Ministry of Fear*, though without the trope's usual xenophobic undertones.<sup>69</sup> The opening stage directions describe the Messenger as a 'personaje hermafrodita vestido como las figuras del Tarot, pero sin copiar a ninguna en particular' ('a hermaphroditic character dressed like one of the Tarot figures, though not any particular one': *HR*, pp. 15; 3). At the start of the play, the Messenger displays a series of Tarot cards to the audience, describing 'los Amantes' along with 'la Reina nocturna' or 'the Queen of the night', who is characterized as 'la dama infernal [. . .] la pastora de los muertos en los valles subterráneos' ('the lady of hell [. . .] shepherdess of the dead in the underground valleys': *HR*, pp. 16; 3-4). Replete with references to hell, death, and night-time terrors, this opening imagery Gothically inflects the entire play, and the Tarot cards function not unlike Gilman's 'great many women' in their uncannily symbolic heft.

As in 'The Yellow Wallpaper', these Gothic features matter because they

<sup>67</sup> Jones, Poore, and Dean, 'Introduction', pp. 3-4.

<sup>68</sup> Daggart, 'Introduction to Latin American Theatre', pp. xxiii, xvi.

<sup>69</sup> See e.g. Sara Wasson, *Urban Gothic of the Second World War: Dark London* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Julia M. Wright, *Representing the National Landscape in Irish Romanticism* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2014).

enhance the atmosphere of horror surrounding the already terrifying fate of Paz's Beatriz, whose poisonous nature simultaneously threatens to entrap men in death and represents her own infantilizing imprisonment in a universe designed diabolically by her father. In simple, early moments before the secret is revealed, Beatriz's father patronizingly dismisses her feelings about their solitary life, telling her, 'Basta, basta. No se puede tener todo' ('Enough, enough. You can't have everything': *HR*, pp. 25; 8). Echoes of Gilman's John emerge here, recalling his insistence that his wife 'take pains to control' (*YW*, p. 167) her desire for access to the outside world. By themselves, these details only subtly invoke Gothic tropes of control and imprisonment. Read in their larger context, however, they feel immediately foreboding, adding to the affective depth of the experience that Paz promises to a live audience.

Like the physician husband and brother in Gilman's narrative, the eponymous doctor Rappaccini is also endlessly confident in his scientific abilities and employs them to 'terrifying and tyrannical proportions' as he unabashedly shapes and controls the daily existence and the character of his daughter. The monstrous nature of these efforts most fully emerges at the play's end, when Rappaccini trumpets his success in making both his daughter and her would-be lover 'invencibles, semejantes a los dioses [. . .] vencedores de la vida, impenetrables, augustos donadores de la muerte' ('invincible, like gods [. . .] life's victors, impenetrable, grand donors of death': *HR*, pp. 52–53; 23). While the doctor's stated aim is to empower rather than to suppress and subordinate his daughter, and while he even proposes to allow her an adult life with the now poisonous Juan, this promise is an illusion. The end result of Rappaccini's scientific experimentation is the denial of Beatriz's agency; her childlike, horrific imprisonment in the role her father has chosen for her; and her emotional torture once she discovers what he has done. Knowing the truth, she cries, 'Padre, si me condenaste a la soledad, ¿por qué no me arrancaste los ojos?' ('Father, if you wanted to condemn me to solitude, why didn't you pluck out my eyes?': *HR*, pp. 53; 24). As Gothic a jailer as Gilman's John or his English forebears, Rappaccini here reads as only marginally less symbolist than the pitiless and exploitative figure of El Carcelero (the Jailer) in Carlos Solórzano's play *Las manos de Dios*, which David Dalton has recently suggested that we begin to read as Gothic. Rappaccini has endeavoured to ensure that Beatriz will never enjoy an adult existence designed differently from the one he has selected for her—that she will instead continue to function as a mere instrument of his experimentation.

Meanwhile, the antidote to Beatriz's condition, proffered by Juan and operating as a promised gateway to love and marriage, offers a way for Beatriz to recover her 'verdadera naturaleza' (her 'true nature': *HR*, pp. 53; 23) only as Juan defines and understands it, through the time-honoured handover

of women like Gilman's narrator from the control of their fathers to that of their husbands. Given the diction Beatriz chooses in the play's final moments, her uncertain fate forms a kind of negative answer to the 'transgressive [. . .] ambiguity' of 'female corporeality'<sup>70</sup> in Mexican Gothic texts such as Daniela Tarazona's *El animal sobre la piedra*: Beatriz drinks and imagines her body being atomized, exclaiming, 'Jardín de mi infancia [. . .] ¡cúbreme, abrázame, quémame, disuelve mis huesos, disuelve mi memoria!' ('Garden of my infancy [. . .] cover me, embrace me, burn me, dissolve my bones, dissolve my memory!': *HR*, pp. 54; 24). The rebellious sensuality of these images notwithstanding, neither interpretation of Paz's ending—the one that ends in death or the one that ends in a life with Juan—would allow Beatriz to transcend her perennial girlhood in selecting a path offered by neither father nor lover. Her words suggest that she seeks a way to live on her own terms, but the logic of the play asserts the impossibility of this ideal. The play's dramatization of the trapped and infantilized Beatriz's relationship with these nightmarish forms of patriarchal masculinity gives her a palpable sisterhood with Gilman's protagonist, who suffers from a similar inability to determine her own fate.

Assisted by these multiculturally Gothic elements, *La hija de Rappaccini* engages broader questions of gender as well as the culturally specific and 'mythic' history of 'La Chingada'<sup>71</sup> that Brickhouse takes up in her reading of the play. The tension between the Gothically terrifying appearance of Beatriz's deadly power and its profound limitations recalls Paz's comments in *El laberinto de la soledad* about the tension between the apparent 'rights' of women in the United States and the deeper-running devaluation of their femininity. Because Beatriz is so archetypically shaded, cast as a sort of universal figure in a surrealist version of Italy that could actually be anywhere in Euro-America, Beatriz's horrific fate also simultaneously underscores the larger entrapment of Western women—both in the United States and elsewhere—in de facto and de jure systems of *couverture*. This form of witnessing on Paz's part works as a gesture of allyship with a transnational community of women while flipping the script that historically had used the purported repression of non-Western women as a rationale for colonial governance and white saviourism. In other moments, the play not only testifies to the problems of Western patriarchal systems but makes some subtle linguistic moves towards subverting them. Whereas Hawthorne's original narrator refers to Beatrice as 'half childish and half woman-like', echoing Beatrice's own description of

<sup>70</sup> Ines Ordiz, 'Monstrous/Wondrous Transformations of the Female Body: A Reading of Daniela Tarazona's *El animal sobre la piedra* and the Gothic', in *Doubles and Hybrids*, ed. by Alcalá González and Bussing, pp. 30–43 (p. 35).

<sup>71</sup> Brickhouse, 'Hawthorne in the Americas', p. 236.

herself as ‘a poor heartbroken child’,<sup>72</sup> Paz’s play limits this language to the dialogue of its male characters, situating it as a function of their subjective perception of Beatriz rather than an objective fact of her character. As ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ does for its narrator, *La hija de Rappaccini* carves out more space for Beatriz to challenge the convictions of the men in her life, though Beatriz proves similarly incapable of maintaining this position of resistance and in this way fails to resist their paternalistic attitudes more systemically, with this failure culminating in the play’s viscerally arresting conclusion as Beatriz drinks the liquid that may kill her. While disrupting essentialist ideas of femininity as perennially childlike, Paz thus continues to document the actual horror of confinement within these patriarchal superstructures. Like so many ‘Female Gothic’ texts despite its male authorship, *La hija de Rappaccini* achieves what Hughes and Smith describe women writers of Gothic narratives attempting as they produced ‘gendered readings’ of socio-political life from their engagement with the genre.

This interpretation of Paz suggests that the trope of Gothic infantilization has such staying power across temporal, geographic, and linguistic boundaries because these gendered injustices have themselves persisted, and because the figure of the imprisoned Gothic woman-child continues to be a rhetorically effective, affectively resonant means of confronting them. However, *La hija de Rappaccini* also points towards new political implications of these literary women and their experiences of entrapment. When asked if ‘the danger of scientific experimentation’ was the ‘primary theme’ of the play, Paz almost seemed to bridle at that limiting choice of words, instead replying evasively that the text ‘does show a clear distrust of certain scientific experiments’.<sup>73</sup> Despite Paz’s reticence, he went on to suggest that ‘the reality of our times has given [him] the reason’ for such a focus, confronting us with the pitfalls of ‘biological manipulations’ and ‘the nuclear danger’.<sup>74</sup> And indeed, the play’s terrifying action invites readers and audiences to put more specific questions of ‘nuclear danger’ into conversation both with these questions of women’s liberation and with centuries-long patterns of colonial and neo-imperial conquest visited on the Americas by the United States as a now nuclear power.

Rappaccini’s confidence in the superiority of his scientific vision recalls the cultural bias that led ‘indigenous sciences’ to be deemed ‘unscientific’ by Western ‘colonizing agents’—and that therefore provided would-be white saviours from Europe to the United States with a rationale for colonial and neo-imperialist projects.<sup>75</sup> By extension, the doctor’s characterization as a

<sup>72</sup> ‘Rappaccini’s Daughter’, in *Young Goodman Brown and Other Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 285–315 (pp. 296, 312).

<sup>73</sup> Doggart and Paz, ‘Interview with Octavio Paz’, p. 28.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Edward Shizha, ‘Counter-Visioning Contemporary African Education: Indigenous Science

Gothic villain obsessed with infantilizing and imprisoning his daughter becomes a powerfully allegorical critique of these same colonialist attitudes. In linking the play so explicitly with issues of nuclear proliferation, Paz also casts his rendering of Rappaccini as a symbolist re-evaluation of how these same positivist values—in essence, ‘the assumption that scientific progress’ as it was understood in Western circles ‘was the road to human perfection’<sup>76</sup>—have brought humanity to the brink of complete destruction. While its deployment in Paz’s Gothically surreal drama is at times oblique, this idea would also appear in no uncertain terms in Paz’s 1990 Nobel Prize acceptance speech, in which he proclaimed that ‘la existencia de armas nucleares es una refutación de la idea de progreso inherente a la historia’ (‘the existence of nuclear weapons is a refutation of the idea that progress is inherent in history’).<sup>77</sup> Meanwhile, like the white women whose presence in ‘American military camps’ served to sanitize the Mexican–American War as a ‘civilizing mission’,<sup>78</sup> or even like an unwitting version of the later generations of ‘white, conservative, anticommunist women’ who stoked the fire of the Cold War’s nuclear age in order to defend ‘the American way’,<sup>79</sup> Beatriz has been instrumentalized and weaponized for her father’s violent purpose: she carries in her breath the Gothic poison that he has devised. Through Beatriz, then, *La hija de Rappaccini* gestures symbolically not just towards the colonial narrative of La Chingada or the persisting devaluation of what is perceived as feminine in US culture but also towards the way in which, while proclaiming their innocence, white women in the United States participated in a string of globally traumatizing histories. In these representations of feminine complicity, Paz reinvents the thematic implications of Gilman’s Gothic woman-child.

### *Gothicizing Miranda*

The Gothic in Césaire’s *Une tempête* works differently from the way it does in *La hija de Rappaccini* in that it brings formal undercurrents to the surface that are much less visible in *The Tempest*. The idea of the latter as being at least ‘proto-Gothic’<sup>80</sup> is not entirely alien; for some, ‘Prospero’s island’ recalls ‘the islands in the world of the late Gothic’.<sup>81</sup> Prospero’s identity lies at the

as a Tool for African Development’, in *Indigenous Discourses on Knowledge and Development in Africa*, ed. by Edward Shizha and Ali A. Abdi (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 78–93 (pp. 86–87).

<sup>76</sup> Robert Gilpin, *American Scientists and Nuclear Weapons Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), p. 27.

<sup>77</sup> ‘La búsqueda del presente’, 8 December 1990 <<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1990/paz/25350-octavio-paz-nobel-lecture-1990/>> [accessed 10 November 2020].

<sup>78</sup> Laura E. Woodworth-Ney, *Women in the American West* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2008), p. 116.

<sup>79</sup> Mary C. Brennan, *Wives, Mothers, and the Red Menace: Conservative Women and the Crusade against Communism* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2008), pp. 31, 36.

<sup>80</sup> Susanne Gruss, ‘Jacobean Gothic and the Law: Revengers and Ineffectual Rulers on the Early  
[See opposite for n. 80 cont. and n. 81

intersection of science and magic such that his character frustrates any attempt at a 'wholesale disenchantment of the play', and some readings suggest that his sorcery literally makes Miranda lose her 'cognitive autonomy'.<sup>82</sup> In the earlier rendering, however, these elements are variously tempered: Prospero's immediate concern for the passengers of the ship off the island's coast softens any early sense that we might have of him as a horrifying 'mad' scientist, and Miranda's lack of independence from her father, in comparison with Beatriz's fate, reads as a sort of humdrum everyday struggle against an overprotective patriarch. This is not to say that Miranda in *The Tempest* is not deeply oppressed; as generations of feminist interpreters have elucidated, she has in fact been dominated and infantilized by Prospero.<sup>83</sup> Yet the scenes of Miranda happily playing chess with the suitor her father has selected for her and then departing with him for a grand wedding in Naples are 'realistically' rather than 'gothically haunting'.<sup>84</sup> They disturb us with their cheerful aura of repression—but the literal ghosts and shadows, the terrible violence and disconsolate grief are all missing from Miranda and Prospero's relationship.

Against this superficially sunny backdrop, *The Tempest* comes nearest to the Gothic in the enslavement and degradation of Caliban, whom Andreas Höfele describes as 'embod[ying] the monstrous legacy of a Renaissance' that fin-de-siècle texts such as Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* would 'construe [. . .] as both irrepressibly Gothic and ominously modern'.<sup>85</sup> The play's infamous description of Caliban as 'a savage and deformed Slave', which appears even in the dramatis personae and so cannot be dismissed as a simple by-product of Prospero's subjectivity,<sup>86</sup> marks Caliban as a figure who has

Modern Stage', in *Gothic Transgressions: Extension and Commercialization of a Cultural Mode*, ed. by Ellen Redling and Christian Schneider (Zurich: LIT, 2015), pp. 35–53 (p. 36).

<sup>81</sup> David Dabydeen and Nana Wilson-Tagoe, *A Reader's Guide to West Indian and Black British Literature* (London: Hansib, 1986), p. 93.

<sup>82</sup> Nathaniel Amos Rothschild, "'volumes that | I prize": Resources for Studying and Teaching *The Tempest*', in *'The Tempest': A Critical Reader*, ed. by Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 188, 190.

<sup>83</sup> See e.g. Lorie Jerrell Leininger, 'The Miranda Trap: Sexism and Racism in Shakespeare's *Tempest*', in *The Women's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. by Carolyn Ruth Swift and others (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), pp. 285–94; Ann Thompson, "'Miranda, Where's your Sister?": Reading Shakespeare's *The Tempest*', in *Feminist Criticism: Theory and Practice*, ed. by Susan Sellers and others (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), pp. 45–55; Jessica Slights, 'Rape and the Romanticization of Shakespeare's Miranda', *SEL: Studies in English Literature 1500–1900*, 41 (2001), 357–79.

<sup>84</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, 2nd edn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), p. 340.

<sup>85</sup> Andreas Höfele, 'The Rage of Caliban: Dorian Gray and the Gothic Body', in *Gothic Renaissance: A Reassessment*, ed. by Elisabeth Bronfen and Beate Neumeier (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), pp. 244–64 (p. 244).

<sup>86</sup> While contemporary postcolonial writers have embraced and recuperated the figure of Caliban, rejecting these descriptors as 'racist slander' (Höfele, 'The Rage of Caliban', p. 248),

been imagined from the play's very inception as Gothically horrifying. Here and elsewhere, the play perpetuates racist notions that dominated possible source texts such as *A Discovery of the Bermudas, Otherwise Called the Isle of Devils* (1619), while also displaying a kinship with the 'American cultural practice', itself a fixture of the white American Gothic, 'of equating monstrosity with deviation from a white, able-bodied physical ideal'.<sup>87</sup> In contrast, the play employs various means to justify Prospero's identity as a slave-holder and aggressively sanitizes his character when, with deliberate benevolence, he sets both Ariel and Caliban free. This turn in the play makes it more possible for contemporary actors playing Prospero to imagine him as 'combining a gruff authoritarianism with a great generosity of spirit'.<sup>88</sup> With similar rationales, nineteenth-century critics such as the Reverend Henry N. Hudson had gone so far as to proclaim that Prospero's 'magical and mysterious powers are tied to truth and right'.<sup>89</sup> Such a combination does not exactly make for a Gothic villain.

While this is not an essay about the relationship between *Une tempête* and its precursor, understanding the contours and boundaries of *The Tempest's* proto-Gothicism makes it easier in this case to identify exactly where the haunting and the ghastly are located in the rewriting—especially since *Une tempête* is in some ways more subtly Gothic than either 'The Yellow Wallpaper' or *La hija de Rappaccini*. From the beginning of the play, Césaire makes good on its Gothic promise. With language that is far more negative than what appears in the opening of *The Tempest*, both Miranda and Prospero describe their island home explicitly as a 'prison'.<sup>90</sup> Prospero soon shows a callous disregard for the suffering created by his shipwreck—so much so that the 'esclave [. . .] mulâtre' Ariel begs in anguish not to be forced to commit such cruelties in the future: 'C'était pitié de voir sombrer ce grand vaisseau plein de vie. [. . .] Maître, je vous demande de me décharger de ce genre d'emploi' (*T*, pp. 22–23). In this moment, Césaire notably edits *The Tempest*, where it is only later that audiences learn that Prospero has only traumatized and not killed the ship's occupants. By then, the damage is done; the atmosphere of the play has already become thick with the horror of Prospero's unfeeling

the play itself is aggressive in its demonization of Caliban's character (see e.g. George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992); Michelle Cliff, 'Caliban's Daughter: The Tempest and the Teapot', *Frontiers*, 12.2 (1991), 36–51).

<sup>87</sup> Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, 'American Monsters', in *A Companion to American Gothic*, ed. by Crow, pp. 41–55 (p. 44).

<sup>88</sup> Elizabeth Klett, *Cross-Gender Shakespeare and English National Identity: Wearing the Codpiece* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 97, emphasis added.

<sup>89</sup> See Hudson's introduction to the play in his edition of *The Tempest* (Boston: Ginn, 1887), p. 14.

<sup>90</sup> Aimé Césaire, *Une tempête* ([Paris]: Seuil, 1969), p. 20. Subsequent references to this edition are given in the main text, identified by the abbreviation *T*.



scorn, both for his victims and for ‘intellectuals’ like Ariel who might feel a ‘crise’ of conscience at such brutalities (*T*, p. 23). As in Paz, we can imagine the pain of a live audience’s visceral confrontation with this scene: the emotional anguish wrought by a villain ‘plus dur qu’un rocher’ (*T*, p. 19). In this context, Prospero’s ‘science prophétique’ (*T*, p. 22) and his other talents, whether supernatural or otherwise, take on a ghastly quality. He becomes a clearer companion of both Paz’s Rappaccini and Gilman’s John, a Gothic villain who ‘abuses his [...] power’ in ‘terrifying’ ways just as Davison says of the quintessentially wicked Montoni. He also comes to resemble and prefigure a long line of villains in Gothic texts by Black writers throughout the Americas who used Gothic tropes to capture the evil of the ‘domineering racist’.<sup>91</sup>

This atmosphere of horror colours Prospero’s relationship with Miranda, so that her unending girlhood not only feels akin to Beatriz’s imprisonment in her father’s poisonous garden but also more figuratively resembles the psychologically torturous experience of Gilman’s haunted protagonist, herself victimized by an egotistical man determined that his victim ‘ne parviendra [...] pas à [lui] faire croire [qu’il est] un tyran!’ (*T*, p. 87). It does not help that Miranda’s captor is no garden-variety patriarch but is instead a literal torturer of multiple human beings, since Prospero’s enslavement of both Ariel and Caliban is far from being sanitized as it is in *The Tempest*. This new Prospero ominously promises to free Ariel only ‘à [son] heure’<sup>92</sup> (*T*, p. 23), and he both verbally and physically brutalizes Caliban, whom he forces to live in ‘une grotte infecte’ (*T*, p. 26). To these injuries Prospero adds the insult of cunningly gaslighting his victim: without shame, he proclaims himself to be Caliban’s white saviour. Even Prospero’s naming of Caliban, a quintessentially colonialist form of abuse, reads as a sort of intensified and differently racialized version of Edward Rochester’s renaming of Antoinette as Bertha in Jean Rhys’s retelling of *Jane Eyre*; it carries all the awfulness inherent in the idea of replacing a person’s identity with one chosen by their captor.

Because the cruelty that is cast as complexity of character in *The Tempest* is made into unambiguous monstrosity in *Une tempête*, Miranda’s imprisonment by her controlling father takes on a more Gothically horrifying quality by association, despite her own blithe responses to her father’s machinations as she and her fiancé ‘jouent aux échecs’ (*T*, p. 81). We watch in dread as Miranda unknowingly plans to marry a man who is an unwitting emissary of the tyrannical and brutal patriarch, so that even in leaving the island and her father—who remains behind in Césaire’s version—Miranda seems

<sup>91</sup> Artea Panajotović, ‘The Monstrous South: Gothic Characters in William Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*’, *SIC: A Journal of Literature, Culture, and Literary Translation*, 8.1 (2017), p. 8.

<sup>92</sup> During the equivalent moment in *The Tempest*, Prospero commits to freeing Ariel within two days, seeming to show restraint rather than caprice.

unlikely ever to be free of his legacy or to achieve agency outside her arranged marriage. When she does resist this imposed unending subordination to her father's will, Prospero responds with invalidating responses to Miranda's feelings—'Allons, petite fille! Du calme!' (*T*, p. 19), he cries when she expresses grief at the shipwreck, echoing Rappaccini's 'Basta, basta' and John's noxious terms of endearment. In Césaire's hands, as in Gilman's and Paz's, these exclamations read not as humdrum moments of sexist condescension but as emotionally manipulative and abusive expressions of control against a nightmarish backdrop. The final result gives Miranda a painful sisterhood with these other women, a relationship buoyed by their shared difficulty in extricating themselves from entrenched processes of infantilization and disempowerment.

No matter how resigned she may be, Césaire's Miranda invites a critique of gender dynamics in white Western societies that have denied the competence and the power of young women for generations, again disrupting the colonialist ideology that has historically painted the oppression of women as a non-Western problem to be analysed and solved by white people. Reading Miranda thus, I also interpret Césaire, like Paz, as taking up issues that at times have been considered exclusively the province of the woman-authored 'Female Gothic'. While some have suggested that *Une tempête* 'fails' where issues of gender are concerned by harmfully basing its revolutionary postcolonial message on 'disempowering [...] constructions of women's sexuality', I would argue that by maintaining Miranda's 'minimal'<sup>93</sup> presence in the play, Césaire testifies powerfully to these persisting gendered power structures, opening up provocative possibilities for readerly resistance to these norms rather than uncritically perpetuating them. The Gothic horror of Miranda's position is so clear that the play does not need to forge 'a shared resistance to the patriarch'<sup>94</sup> between her and Caliban in order to do this resistive work; it merely needs to act as a witness to the truth of what women like Miranda face. Her kinship with the entrapped Beatriz and with Gilman's protagonist becomes a way for the play to continue this American conversation about gendered forms of injustice across boundaries of time, nation, language, and literary form.

As Miranda remains a docile woman-child rather than changing into a grown-up revolutionary, maintaining her distance from Caliban allows Césaire to pursue other equally important revelations as the play confronts the very real historical role of white women in upholding systems of colonial domination and control. In this way, far from ignoring 'the complex *sexual*

<sup>93</sup> Jyotsna G. Singh, 'Caliban versus Miranda: Race and Gender Conflicts in Postcolonial Rewritings of *The Tempest*', in *Feminist Readings of Early Modern Culture: Emerging Subjects* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 205–25 (pp. 205–06).

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 205.

ideologies underpinning colonialism',<sup>95</sup> *Une tempête* examines the weaponization of white women's putative sexual purity and innocence in the service of this form of white supremacist violence. The critical moment comes when Césaire's Caliban responds to *The Tempest's* original accusation of attempted rape: his supposed bid, in Act 1, Scene 2, to 'people [. . .] this isle with Calibans'. The twentieth-century Caliban instead responds: 'Violer! Violer! Dis-donc, vieux bouc, tu me prêtes tes idées libidineuses. Sache-le: Je n'ai que faire de ta fille' (*T*, p. 27). This rewriting is critical because it nullifies 'Caliban's sexual threat to Miranda' as the 'greatest' rationale for 'Caliban's enslavement' in the original text,<sup>96</sup> again reassigning the quality of Gothic monstrosity to Prospero rather than to the enslaved Caliban. In rejecting the received wisdom of Caliban's 'libidinous' nature, Césaire reveals how Miranda's body—like Beatriz's if less literally—has been horrifically weaponized in the service of a corrupt and brutal power structure that audiences can literally see playing out before them on stage, with all of its violence and degradation. The play thereby invokes and critiques the long history in which white women's supposed fragility, sexual innocence, and need for protection have been used throughout the Americas to rationalize the abuse of Black men under slavery, European colonialism, American segregation, and the contemporary US system of criminal justice.

As the ending of the play suggests, this species of complicity has also victimized white women, who, in embracing their imposed perennial girlhood and the benefits of protection by a white supremacist society, have allowed themselves to be used to maintain and protect an arrangement that has continued to oppress them and others. Césaire's Miranda has been all too happy to play this role, even implying that the appearance of the Yoruba god Eshu somehow represents a threat to her safety: 'Il n'a pas l'air particulièrement bénisseur!', she insists (*T*, p. 68). Yet Caliban will have the last laugh. It is not for nothing that his final line—and the one that ends the play—is 'LA LIBERTÉ OHÉ, LA LIBERTÉ!' (*T*, p. 92), whereas Miranda's final exclamation is 'Vous savez, accrochée à votre étoile, Monseigneur... Je suis prête à affronter les démons de l'enfer!' (*T*, p. 81, emphasis added). If, as Chantal Zabus suggests, *Une tempête* was devised as a way of signalling the 'decline of Western civilization' and the (at least partial) rising up of Caliban,<sup>97</sup> the play also points out that the latter has happened in spite of the implicit violence of a woman who is all too comfortable with the status quo that has confined them both.

While this general idea will be familiar from earlier postcolonial readings

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>96</sup> Leininger, 'The Miranda Trap', p. 289.

<sup>97</sup> *Tempests after Shakespeare* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), p. 53. Zabus reminds us that 'the deprivileging of Prospero is a slow process that has not ended with the close of the twentieth century' (*ibid.*, p. 54).

of *Une tempête*, what I hope to draw out is the degree to which the play's line of argument depends on the trope of the perennially infantilized Gothic girl. Witnessing Miranda's entrapment in a grotesque, disempowering form of childhood that ironically gives her the ability to injure those around her and that—unlike Beatriz—she has knowingly embraced, Césaire's audience is invited not just to see but to emotionally recoil from this history of complicity. Nearly eighty years after the publication of 'The Yellow Wallpaper' and a decade and a half after the publication of *La hija de Rappaccini*, writing in a different country and a different language, Césaire has easily demonstrated the continuing relevance and the continually shifting meanings of the haunting figure that these three texts share.

### *Haunting Perennial Girlhoods*

As works of live theatre, Paz's *La hija de Rappaccini* and Césaire's *Une tempête* have the power to immerse audiences in a visceral experience of the physical and emotional Gothic: the dimly lit and dusty rooms as well as the more diffuse horrors of human pain in the face of brutality. Just as they play on the unique promise of their literary form, the two texts also carve out new layers of socio-political meaning from sophisticated deployments of Gothic conventions with their own varied and complex transnational and multicultural roots. If Gilman's Gothically shaded narrative of infantilization and imprisonment gestures towards a new way of addressing at least some women's experiences of mental illness in a patriarchal society, *La hija de Rappaccini* and *Une tempête* make similarly exciting and often heart-rending moves in different directions, using this Gothic trope to force a confrontation with colonial and neo-colonial histories, systems of racial violence and oppression throughout the Americas, and the globally traumatizing spectre of post-war nuclear proliferation. Yet in asking what Beatriz and Miranda can tell us about white women's place in and complicity with these histories, we can also continue to see Paz and Césaire raising some of the same questions about patriarchal systems that Gilman herself pursues—and at times mounting their own challenges to limiting conceptions of their women protagonists' identities. Like 'The Yellow Wallpaper', *La hija de Rappaccini* and *Une tempête* leave little room for readers to dismiss or attempt to normalize gendered conditions of oppression or to dismiss women as 'little girls' by nature, even as they cast a critical eye on the ways in which white women have allowed themselves to be instrumentalized by white men in perpetuating racial injustice and US hegemony.

The singular uncanniness of girlhoods that are never allowed to end turns out to be the engine that drives these interconnected revelations home, so that

for readers and audiences, grieving for the lives that Beatriz and Miranda are not allowed means reckoning in anger with the systems that both disempower and weaponize them. Reading Gilman, Paz, and Césaire side by side suggests that the figure of the infantilized Gothic woman-child has remained a fixture in transnational American literary production because she works so flexibly in the hands of diverse writers, drawing out these persisting questions and making them affectively resonant. The repetition of this trope across historical and geographic boundaries as well as those of language and literary medium testifies to its importance as a way of resisting established paradigms and mobilizing for change.

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