BAD HABITS

TEMPTATION & THE DIVIDED SELF


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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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(Joanna Burnett Morrison)
“Bad Habits: Temptation & The Divided Self” is a thesis comprising an original work of fiction and a critical accompaniment, which use the lunatic asylum, the theatre and the uncanny motif of the double, in the context of nineteenth-century Fremantle, to interrogate social conformity and the patriarchal repression of female sexuality.

Victorian society polarised women into either selfless, virtuous angels of the house or fallen women beyond redemption. While the former exemplified an unforgiving, patriarchal notion of femininity, the latter bore the stigma of ‘moral insanity’ and, given the right circumstances, could lead to a period of incarceration in the lunatic asylum. Thus, in fledgling Fremantle, psychiatry and the gothic lunatic asylum were deeply implicated in enforcing a patriarchal ideology on women.

The Victorian rhetoric of virtue considered women more susceptible than men to the contaminating forces of such cultural phenomena as novels and the theatre. As such, actresses were both cause and effect of social contamination: not quite fallen, but similarly tainted. The protagonist in my historical fiction is an actress who experiences an uncomfortable dual consciousness when on stage as her ‘awareness’ watches from the wings, surveyor of herself surveyed. This duality is further entrenched when she is photographed by a local portrait artist and is admitted to Fremantle’s lunatic asylum for wilful and ‘promiscuous’ behaviour, diagnosed as suffering symptoms of ‘moral insanity’.

ABSTRACT
Deprived of her freedom, she learns to view her past as something shameful and unnatural and is thus triumphant when she makes permanent the cleavage between her new conscience and her old. It is only on her release that she discovers the consequences of that division: an uncanny but inescapable relationship with her living, breathing double.

Today, women are bombarded with images of the ideal feminine and girls are sexualised at an increasingly young age, and so a discussion of femininity, as defined by patriarchy, and the way it shapes a woman’s identity are as relevant as it has ever been.

“Bad Habits” is designed to evoke a gothic Fremantle in which to explore motifs that arise in the numerous texts on the gothic and the uncanny manifestation of the divided self. These literary texts, read alongside those which analyse the fixation of Victorian society on the bodies, minds and weaknesses of women, have provided the framework for a critical analysis of the finished work.
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Photograph of the Fremantle Lunatic Asylum, c1940: courtesy of the Fremantle Local History Collection: Fremantle City Library

Joanna Burnett Morrison
Falling asleep was an act of surrender as the boat rocked and heaved on the waves, sailing for the small town of Fremantle at the mouth of the Swan River. May dreamed of shadowy forms on a stage that moved like ocean swells.

On the journey’s final morning, she watched from the deck as the boat pulled up against the landing jetty, a bony arm of wood and stone reaching out into the water. The huddle of buildings looked so alone, clinging quietly to life on a coastline that stretched on forever.

Liam, May’s doomed lover in the play they were bringing to Fremantle, took her by the elbow and steered her along the deck to where their director, Mr Beebe, stood talking to a bemused young man about his show. The burly, balding Beebe played May’s husband, Liam’s rival, on the stage, and his eyes sought always to remind May of this artificial, yet somehow pervasive, intimacy.

‘Yes, yes, I penned it myself,’ Beebe was confiding to the dark-haired stranger as May and Liam drew closer. ‘Semi-autobiographical, you might say.’

Liam and May exchanged knowing glances. Both shared a certain unspoken contempt for Beebe, but their mutual empathy ended there. May saw in Liam a cold, vainglorious soul and she resented having to love him on stage, and though she routinely exposed her soul to him in this way, Liam saw only that she looked good on his arm.

‘And what have we here?’ Mr Beebe intoned. ‘It’s the starlet herself. Thank you, Liam. Mr Samson, may I present Miss May Ellen Moss. Mr Samson lives in Fremantle, May. He is one of the founders of the local dramatic company.’

‘Pleased to meet you, May Ellen,’ the man said, with an elegant lift of his eyebrows as he bent to kiss her hand.
‘The pleasure is mine,’ May said, studying his dark-eyed face. She smiled at him, a polite smile that revealed none of the words she secretly applied to him; wealthy, petulant, indulgent. She pitied him a little, though she felt perhaps he deserved a case of Beebe, who would not give him a moment’s peace until he had set them up in a hall somewhere to deliver their performance. Liam stiffened and squeezed her arm against his ribs possessively, and she let him, knowing it paid to keep him happy.

Beebe found Fremantle distasteful from the moment his feet touched the sand. ‘Small place, small people,’ he said, speaking like a world-weary gentleman. He didn’t like the dust, or the wind, or the shape of things; there was too much space, too much white, too many pale and shallow cliffs. Mostly he objected to the water. ‘Give me a landlocked haven any day’, he said, shielding his eyes.

May found the isolation of the town disquieting, it was so small in a world so vast, but she loved the river, the way it wound calmly between two banks and shimmered with mesmeric secrets.

In the early morning, while the rest of the troupe slept, she crept out of the hotel room and wandered through the town, enjoying the fresh cool air she knew wouldn’t last. Wood smoke poured from low chimneys and small boys stared at her when her presence drew them out of their imaginary crusades. She smiled at them. Not many smiled back.

On her way to the hill on the edge of town, where she expected to find a fine view of the ocean, she passed a boatyard with several unfinished hulls suspended in angular, wooden exoskeletons. She kicked a stone through the dust on the track which ran past empty blocks of scrub marked out by timber slats.
From the top of the hill, the lighthouse commanded attention, white and resolute, guardian of all the houses and buildings that spread from it with no apparent logic or design. To the right of it, the north, was her hotel, filled with stale sleepy air, and near it a strange, derelict observatory, known to locals as Manning’s Folly. Its silhouette echoed the round tip of the lighthouse, but it was shorter, a little less altruistic. May stared at it and tried to imagine its panoramic view.

She liked the spaces between the buildings, where the trees and the sky were left to their own devices and anything could happen, but as she sat there, watching the town wake up household by household, she felt a dark, shifting panic at the thought of the space behind her, pulling away into incomprehensible vastness.

May watched from the wings as the two men circled each other on the stage. Suspense rose from the audience like ocean spray as Liam gripped a heavy chair, keeping it between himself and Beebe, who held him pinned with glinting, fierce eyes.

She knew they revelled in this scene and as always their lines flowed smoothly. It was really only when Beebe struggled with the order of images and ideas in his lengthier outpourings, or when Liam stood mute, his eyes betraying his forgotten lines, that the magic dissipated. But it seemed the audience couldn’t really tell a mangled monologue from an unblemished one in Beebe’s case, and May had learned to work around Liam’s silences, so that the momentary ripples in the mirage were easily smoothed out and forgotten.
Waiting in the wings, May was unusually nervous, even though she had offered her soul to an audience of strangers a hundred times, and a hundred times enjoyed feeling their eyes on her, draining her, offering adoration in return. But she knew it was a fleeting, misguided love, a love that faded with the limelight and was as shallow as her skin.

A familiar sense of foreboding settled over her as she prepared to invite her possessor in, the doomed woman who inhabited her body night after night to play out her small spiral of defeat. She filled her lungs, feeling too many muscles stretch taut in her neck, then breathed out as far as she could, ignoring the shadowy stage crew who relished this ritual exorcism. She rolled her head from side to side and shook her arms from her shoulders right down to the tips of her fingers, which she stretched to the floor against the resistance of her bodice and sleeves. It wouldn’t be the first time if they tore. Easily mended, Judith always said.

Judith, the stage manager, issued directives with her eyes and hands alone. Her minions worked in the wings, hissing at each other to pull the curtains aside or set tables and chairs on their proper markings. Judith kept one eye on them and the other on the dimly lit script, ready to prompt away any awkward silences.

One such minion, dressed in black from head to toe, stood poised to remove the staircase that anchored scenes to the living room. Two others waited to carry on the tables and chairs for the outdoor garden scene, while still another stood ready with the red silk flowers in their cheap vases, waiting for the cover of darkness at the end of May’s brief scene.
May sighed out the residual fragments of herself and invoked the wan Gertrude, who glided her out on to the stage and slowly draped her on the chaise-longue. The overhead lights, contrived of iron and carefully monitored glowing limestone, brought her blue dress to life, making it look expensive and elaborately beaded. She allowed the hush to stretch and deepen until it was quiet enough for her voice to steal softly out.

‘I seem to have spoiled everything,’ she lamented, letting her voice tremble, just a little. ‘For too long I thought of nothing but him, though I knew he was forbidden. I thought only of his goodness and strength and I forgot all I had to be grateful for, and now I am alone with my shame. I deserve no less. I knew it would be this way, even as I allowed myself to be seduced.’

She paused, creating a space for the murmurings in the audience, the guilty intakes of breath that always followed the delicious word. She moved her hand to her stomach beneath the thick fabric and looked out into the dim faces as though through an elevated window at gathering clouds.

‘And here lives, grows daily, my penance.’

The lights dimmed on her tender, fearful face and the curtain-pullers dragged the velvet veil closed, burying her in darkness. She stood and padded quickly off the stage, undressing as she went, brushing past the row of chorus members waiting to go out on stage. They twittered and whispered to each other and stifled giggles, and several pairs of hands reached out to help her with the hooks and eyes that kept her dress together.

There was no room for modesty in the single dressing room. They had all seen her in her underdress and stockings, her hair loose and her face bare, even the youngest members of the troupe, the twins Michael and Henry, who took turns portraying her child
in later scenes. One at a time, the little boys were like any other children; smooth young faces, eyes soaking up people and things, a steady press of questions. But when they were together, they were silent and impenetrable, beyond mothering, their childlike faces masking ancient souls. She watched them in her mirror, amazed at their synchronicity and their fascination with silence.

Back in the wings, freshly powdered and adorned, she watched as Beebe fumbled through a convoluted tirade. She stared at the bead of sweat that quivered on the end of his nose, imagining it was her mind holding it there, and that it was her silent command that allowed it to fall into the dank eternity of his waistcoat.

When she stepped out to join him, to fawn over and adore him, she left in the darkness a shadow of herself; a shadow self she called Ellen, who was otherwise always with her, whispering in her ear or laughing her distant laugh; a tissue-thin presence who watched her, waiting with infinite patience for her to come out of the light.

Beebe sent May to the portrait photographer opposite their hotel, hoping her image on new posters might draw a bigger crowd. She sat on a hard chair in the waiting room, staring at a wall of framed portraits, where silent people gazed out from their newly purchased pieces of time, looking strained and drained of colour but proud and expensive. She dreaded being captured in one of those frames and hung on a wall, her stage costume exposed for eternity as a glaring, cheap imitation of class, but she followed the photographer’s assistant quietly, past a plush red curtain and into a dim room where the
windows were dressed in the same heavy fabric. He gestured toward the bench in front of
the curtains and left her there, alone.

She sat on the stool and looked around, bumping back against the headrest and
feeling its smooth wood with her hands. After several long minutes she stood up and
wandered around the room, drawn to a box near the door. It was a large crate, its splinters
covered in silk. She lifted the lid and released a musty cloud, then leant over to see what
was inside. In the dim light she made out a variety of props: a doll, a small spade,
parasols and hats, a wooden gun.

‘Hello,’ a man said, suddenly close behind her, and she jumped, dropping the lid
with a guilty crash. ‘I’m Jonathon Jones,’ he continued, unperturbed, ‘but Jones is what
they call me.’

She watched him in silence. His arms moved loosely against his body as he
stooped over his shrouded camera. His hair was dark, his large light eyes intriguing, and
she felt a gentle pull toward him, as if he was tugging at the thread of her being, drawing
her closer. He looked up at her with raised eyebrows and just the slightest smile.

‘You want some publicity shots, I understand?’ he said at last.

She nodded and looked away. ‘Yes, thank you,’ she said and cleared her throat.

Her mouth was suddenly dry.

‘Take a seat, over here,’ he said, guiding her back to the stool with one hand on
her back, close to her hip, barely perceptible through the old silk of her dress.

She sat and he arranged the headrest behind her, his warm hands brushing lightly
against the skin of her neck. She looked up at him and for a moment was lost in the sky
greyness of his eyes, his dark fern lashes, but she looked hastily away, down at her hands, unable in the space between them to breathe.

He took small liberties with his hands, brushing loose strands of hair off her neck, and she sat perfectly still, lest movement encourage him, or make him withdraw his touch.

Moved by her large watchful eyes and the nervous stillness of her face, Jones put his head under the silk drape to study her through the lens. She was wary of entrapment, and though she looked at him steadily, her eyes deflected his gaze.

He asked her name, and his voice was gentle, like his hands. Desire traced its cool, forbidden fingers along her skin, stirring the shadowy Ellen out of her light sleep.

‘May Ellen Moss,’ she said, lowering her eyes for just a moment, then lifting them again.

‘You’re quite beautiful, I suppose you know,’ he said, watching a blush steal up her neck.

He did not know it was Ellen who blinked in the dim room then, brushing off the trappings of May’s well-bred restraint. He did not know it was Ellen whose eyes grew soft, whose neck grew a little longer, and who dropped her chin, subtly, deliberately, drawing him in. He could not have known, even though it was like watching her emerge from someone else’s portrait.

‘I suppose I do,’ she said, with the smile he had been waiting for. He savoured more than usual the stretched moment of the open shutter, but when it was over, when he revealed himself again as the man beneath the silk drape, Ellen had gone, had slipped back into the forbidden reaches of May.
When she came to collect the picture the following day, he expected her to be delighted at how beautifully he had captured her inner self, but instead she frowned.

‘Is that me?’ she said.

‘Yes, of course,’ he said smiling, surprised by her naïveté. ‘Portraiture at its very best.’

He slid the image into an envelope and pulled out his invoice book. When he looked up, intending to claim the quoted price, his pulse quickened. His words evaporated into the narrowing space between them. There it was in her liquid eyes, the allure he had captured in the portrait, though this time he had no lens, no drape, no warm caress of words.

‘So, you recognise me then?’ she said.

‘I do,’ he said, holding her gaze.

She stepped toward him and lifted her hand to stroke his neck, then moved her fingers around to the back of his head, sliding them into the warmth of his hair.

Liam dragged May along the street, through dust and industry, and eyes that narrowed as they passed. His grip was as tight as his jaw, and she floundered and tripped behind him in silence.

She was blinded at first by the darkness of the hotel lobby, but she didn’t need to see as he dragged her up the stairs. In the passage outside the room he turned to her, sweat glistening on his upper lip. With one hand he squeezed her arm until it hurt, and with the other he grabbed her hair, but seeing the coldness in her eyes, he loosened his
grip and threw open the door, pushing her into the room, towards the chair near the washbasin.

She recovered her balance and looked around for Beebe. She could sense him in the room and felt suddenly ill, realising the gravity of what Ellen had done.

‘I caught her red-handed,’ Liam said, his voice trembling, ‘on that damned photographer’s desk.’

‘Sit down, May,’ Beebe said from the bed under the window. He stood up, the creaking bedsprings loud in the airless room. ‘Sit,’ he said, lunging toward her, and she did.

‘Did you get the picture?’

She held out his coins and shook her head. ‘It didn’t work. I have to go back for another sitting.’ She would rather die than let Beebe have that image of her, to look at any time he liked. She wanted Jones to have it, to look at and touch with his hands the way he had touched her. The memory warmed her like a slow smile even as guilt crept through it like a stain.

‘May Ellen Moss,’ Beebe said, pacing around the small room, enjoying the role she had cast him in. ‘Why do you insist on letting the devil in?’

He paused for effect.

‘You are our angel, remember? You are our pure and fragile heroine, albeit a little misguided, perhaps.’

His finger slid along her jaw and came to rest under her chin. She said nothing, stared at the stubble on his cheek, trying not to inhale or feel the heat of his coarse finger.

‘Some angel,’ spat Liam.
‘You know, if this is how you want to pass your time,’ Beebe said, ignoring him and leering right up close to whisper in her ear, ‘you might at least let us charge the bastards for their pleasure.’

She wiped the spittle from her neck and studied the buttons on his shirt.

‘Look at me!’ he thundered, but she looked out of the window, through the grime, at the sky.

‘Right,’ he said, his cold calm returning. ‘I warned you last time, didn’t I? If you can’t cure yourself of your harlot ways, if you can’t exorcise the devil yourself, then I will have to do it for you.’

May looked at Liam, whose fury had abated and left him sagging pale against the door. ‘I’ve heard they take girls like her at the asylum,’ he said.

A smile distorted Beebe’s face as the words stalked the silence.

She had been in solitary confinement for days, endless days divided only into light and darkness, sound and silence. The walls of the cell stretched up into an endless hole, the hungry mouth of Hell, waiting for the right moment to swallow her whole.

She remembered the sound of the doctor’s shoes behind her the day he and two nurses delivered her to the stone room with its high barred window and angular bed. He told her to make herself at home, and on his way out enjoyed the clean sound of the bolt sliding into place. He had his quiet office to look forward to, and dinner, and a bed with fresh sheets.
May was alone, sitting on the rough woollen blanket that infected the damp hot air around it with its smell of urine and soap and sweat. The dark walls absorbed nothing, made terrible echoes when she called out to the doctor, just in case he was standing outside the door, waiting for her to concede. But he wasn’t there, of course. He had had enough of the place for one day. He would give her another go in the morning.

Scared by the sound of her breathing against the silence and the closeness of the walls, May felt Ellen welling up inside her; the quickening of her heart, the tears beginning to slip down her hot face, the pain in her clenched throat.

She stood and leaned her cheek against the cool windowless door, her ear against the thick steel just in case there were voices beyond it. She shouted for the doctor several times and pounded on the heavy metal, but there was nothing. No sound. She was alone.

Panic washed over her and wrenched a tortured scream from her throat. She sank to the floor and cried until she was empty, and cold, though her head burned. She could taste the cell’s dankness in her shuddering breaths.

She stayed there for hours, unable to move. She tried singing to herself, loudly, to fill the dark space, but she grew tired and eventually her singing dwindled to a fearful whisper, and then to an eternity of silence, interrupted only by waves of anguish from the neighbouring cells. As the anchorless hours passed, she learned like a blind woman to live in the world through her ears. In the pale light of early morning, birds warbled and whistled, sometimes close to her window, and she closed her eyes and listened, though their visits were fleeting and left her even more aware of her stark deprivation. She listened for other sounds of the morning; footsteps on stone, coughs, the occasional greeting between members of staff.
To pass the time, she studied drawings on the walls, made with what must have been charcoal, thrown in through the bars out of sympathy or in anticipation of a long confinement.

At last, in the airless heat of late morning, she heard the doctor slide the heavy bolt to one side. He brought a chair into her cell and sat on it, holding a handkerchief against his nose until he could tolerate the thick smell. He opened his book and ran a finger slowly down the page. He was a handsome man, who smelled good and smiled at her, though with eyes devoid of warmth.

He asked her questions, watching her closely and writing her answers neatly on the page with a sharp-nibbed pencil. Then he began to speak, enjoying the desperate attention of her eyes and the way his voice resonated in the space.

He said femininity was a privilege that made for a fine life. He said virtue was by definition precarious, but such was the nature of power. With a sympathetic smile, he said men were troublesome creatures when it came to women, but that a lady’s patience was always rewarded. If she would acknowledge the error of her ways and absorb his lessons in morality, he would let her go, but she would have to promise to resist the aggressions of men. Next time, he warned, she might not be so fortunate.

Though he could not have named her, May knew it was Ellen he meant her to vanquish. It was Ellen’s lust and pointless yearning that had had May committed, and she had already decided they were feelings she could do without.

The doctor smiled and nodded at the fierce determination in May’s eyes as she promised that she would be good, that she would be like everyone else. Her strength from
then on would lie in her ability to rope herself off, to stifle her feelings until she and the
object of her affection had proven themselves worthy.

Ellen felt that the doctor’s scent alone made him worthy, but May pushed her
down, pushed her away, and ignored her protests. She imagined Ellen falling to the floor
like an old skin, or rising out of her like the finest mist; but as she felt her new purity
wending its way through her body like ink fed into her blood, she did not see Ellen
quivering in the corner, did not see the shock of betrayal in her eyes. Nor did she see
Ellen’s growing elation as she discovered the freedom of her new body, which was
weightless enough for her to slip through the high bars of the window, unseen, and
disappear quietly over the towering stone walls.

May was returned to the wards to await her release, while beyond the grinding
gate Ellen’s body grew firm in her new human skin. Free to do as she wished,
empowered by forces unseen, she took the form of the image that proved her existence;
the portrait pressed between the pages of an album in a studio on High Street.

A heavy sky rolled in over the town. Ellen tilted her head to feel the freshness on her face
and savour the salt on her lips. Now free of May, she felt new and excited by the
possibilities of having a body all to herself, but beneath her optimism was a growing
sense that she had been cut adrift from the world. As she walked, she held imaginary
conversations with May in her head, nursing the wound of her rejection even as she tried
to dismiss it.
She passed through the dark whalers’ tunnel, barely aware of the rabble of children rushing past, veering out into nothing but sound. Their voices dissolved into the hushing waves beyond the tunnel’s mouth, and she followed them as if in a dream, hoping that May would soon be returned to her, even if only to remind her that they were better off apart.

Boats emerged from the glare, anchored in the shallows or overturned and drying on the white sand. Enormous tree stumps lay stacked and draped with seaweed and the cliff loomed steep at her back, curving out to cradle her. For a moment all sound was suspended, but for a seagull’s lament and the gentle waves lapping on the shore; then a laugh rang out and a hammer resumed its steady clang.

At the water’s edge, she opened her arms to the vastness she had craved while in the asylum. She stood like that, enjoying the presence of water and the breeze, until the grey glare began to hurt her eyes and she withdrew to the cool sand in the shelter of the cliff. She pressed her lips against the skirt over her knees, looking out over the calm shifting ocean, grateful that the heat had abated.

As she listened for the hush between waves, she felt her wait was almost over. She sensed that May was free, just as she had sensed her ongoing confinement as a vague pain in her temples, a pain that lifted as she stood and brushed the sand from the funnels of her dress, heading back to the oval darkness of the tunnel.

The light at the end beckoned as she passed the shadowy forms of others moving through the briny damp. Anxiety crept up on her at the thought of where and how she might find May. Her breathing grew shallow, her muscles tense, but she pressed on, driven by an uncomfortable sense of urgency.
She stepped out on to the wide quiet end of High Street and walked in the
direction of the town hall and the hum of trade. She was careful not to stand in any of the
dark masses of manure as she crossed the street, dodging the children who wove their
webs of fancy through the perfume and the dust.

She found May, standing dwarfed by the town hall, alone but holding in her hand
the leash of a small black dog. She and May stood mirroring each other in a pocket of
silence sucked out of the voices and creaking carriage wheels trundling past.

‘So, there you are,’ Ellen said, smiling a contained smile. She didn’t want May to
see her relief or, worse, her need. She need not have worried. All May saw was her blue
dress and those strange eyes that betrayed all her secrets.

May shivered, suddenly cold, as though some menace had closed over her to
block out the sun. She had imagined the wispy form of Ellen lifting out of her and
dissolving into the air, or drifting away with low clouds over the sea, but never that she
would be waiting for her on the outside, her living, breathing double, free to shame her in
any way she chose.

‘I like your dog,’ Ellen said.

Pup wagged her tail and looked up at them, a leggy black mutt with streaks of red
in her curls and an inquisitive, expressive little face. May looked at Ellen mutely, then
turned and crossed the road.

‘Hello, lovely Pup,’ Ellen said, following them down High Street. ‘Where did you
find her?’
‘She followed me,’ May replied, indicating the direction of the asylum with an impatient hand, instantly regretting talking to what could only be a figment of her imagination. But the figment nodded and walked on beside her.

May studied Ellen’s face. She had the same dark hair as her own, the same green eyes and, as with May, one of her front teeth slightly overlapped the other. She recognised the way Ellen wore her hair and the stage pearls around her neck, and it was with growing unease that she realised she was looking at the impossible incarnation of her own portrait.

‘I suppose you must be happy to be out of that unholy place,’ Ellen said, dredging up the memories May had been trying to bury; memories of cold metal and goose bumps, of the doctor’s dry hands on her skin. The banished smells and sounds stole back; the filth and the wailing and the relentless clanging, the moaning just inches away, the stench of stale skin.

‘I was nothing compared to some of them in there,’ she said.

‘I know, I remember.’

May shivered again and looked at her surroundings, confused and annoyed. They had stopped outside the hotel, the only place May remembered as home in this alien town, but they had not gone in, because the welcome she remembered had a price and she could not pay it. She frowned and rubbed her arms, finding herself back at the intersection of Pakenham and High streets with Pup and Ellen watching her closely, waiting for her next move.

‘You have nowhere to go, do you?’ Ellen asked.

‘No,’ May replied, begrudgingly.
‘The troupe’s moved on without you, haven’t they?’

‘I suppose they have.’

‘You can come with me if you like. I’ve found a good place to hide. I’ll build a fire.’

May looked at Ellen as though she had offered to bury her alive, but the late summer wind was cold, channelling its way through the streets, and the thought of a fire licking at twigs and blackening wood was an enticing one.

‘Are there others there?’

‘No, not a soul, unless you count the ravens. And the ghosts.’ Ellen felt she may have said too much, but the solitude of the past few days meant that now that she had someone to talk to, she could not hold back. ‘Mostly they’re good ones,’ she continued, ‘but you have to be a bit careful of the old master, even though he’s always drunk and his reflexes are slow. And his wife, she’s a bit jealous, prefers to be avoided. It’s what she’s used to.’

May shrank back with a look on her face that made Ellen want to shake her by the shoulders.

‘Don’t worry,’ she said instead. ‘Pup will protect us. Won’t you Pup?’

She could see May’s mind working, weighing up the devil she knew with all the devils she couldn’t foresee, until at last she nodded and the three of them headed in the direction of the folly.
Ellen’s face was lit by the small fire. Her eyes gleamed in the orange light as sparks swirled up from its heart.

‘Have you ever stood near the whalers’ tunnel and looked east down High Street, to where the road disappears into the sky? While you were still inside I would stand there and imagine that someone or something was about to ride in and wreak havoc on this place.’

May listened, watching the flames in the darkness. They were in the observatory of the abandoned Manning’s Folly on Pakenham Street, once the grand home of the rate-collector and his wife, but now just a hulking block of stone and moth-eaten windows; the same observatory whose view May had imagined that first morning on the hill. It was a clear night and a million stars watched over the ocean murmuring in the darkness below.

‘Picture their smug little faces, contorted in pain,’ Ellen continued. ‘Who would come to save them? No one, that’s who. No-one would make it in time.’ She smiled as, in her mind, the town burned and people ran; guards down, fear exposed.

‘Why do you say such things?’ May asked.

‘Because I think them,’ Ellen replied. ‘You used to think them too, remember?’

The fire seemed to lose some of its heat as her smile faded and her eyes crept under May’s skin. Revellers hooted and sang somewhere in the distance. Nobody knew they were there, and most of them thought the building was cursed anyway, so they stayed away, except to throw stones through the remaining windows.

May heard her own voice, stronger than she felt, but timid nonetheless.

‘Tell me why you’re here. Please. How?’

A wave broke on the sand and pulled back like a shiver.
At last Ellen spoke. ‘I don’t know.’

Somewhere below there was a heavy, repetitive thud; a fist pounding on a table. It was followed by a roar and a crash, and then footsteps on the stairs. A woman’s voice, scornful and foreign, drifted in smoky fragments to the observatory, and then there was silence. Terror crept over May and coiled itself around her.

‘Don’t worry,’ Ellen said. ‘It’s the same every night; some kind of ritual re-enactment. Keeps them alive, I think, remembering the bad things.’

She put more wood on the fire and offered May her swag for the night. May accepted, though she didn’t think she could sleep, not with the day’s events turning over in her mind. It was all so improbable; Ellen in the flesh, offering her shelter for the night in a husk of a place; this shell with no furnishings to pound a fist on and no china to shatter in long-dead fury.

But she did sleep, in the early hours of the morning as the fire sank down into its murmuring coals and a grey dawn spread along the horizon. Ellen didn’t know sleep. To her, the swag meant warmth, not escape from consciousness. She watched May lying there, breathing deeply, steadily, every muscle relaxed; and she thought perhaps she would have to try it. It looked good.

Pup stirred and opened her eyes. She stretched herself out with a yawn then padded over to the fire and to Ellen, who welcomed her with a scratch of the soft skin on her neck. She sank sleepily into Ellen’s lap, resting her head on warm human thigh. Ellen stroked her and together they watched over May until morning.
The dark sky withheld the rain. May was in the second storey of the folly, staring at the petulant smudge on the horizon, and Pup was beside her, one ear twisted to the side, listening. It was becoming a dusk ritual, listening to the ghosts of the gentleman and lady of the house taunting each other in the yawning labyrinth below. Ellen was out collecting firewood.

May was surprised to find she was not afraid. Instead she found it comforting, somehow, to listen to other people’s misery; a welcome distraction from the thoughts that plagued her and the internal dialogue she carried on with Ellen, whatever the distance between them. And it was a distraction from the memories, although on this particular occasion, waiting for the rain, she found herself slipping almost willingly into the past, to a day inside the walls, before her time in solitary confinement, when she was still just one of the unloved and unlovable women in the hot, dry yard of the asylum.

They were all standing around or sitting in the heat, bickering tiredly over the scarce shade, longing for water, not just to drink but to sink their bodies into; cold, clean, plentiful water. Judith was strapped to the bench, as usual, in the blazing sun, no hand to shield her cracked lips and dry baking eyes. She moaned in the hot, exhausting stillness.

May contemplated the wall, but it was impossibly high and she knew the only escape available to her was inward. She revisited the lush and shady place of her dreams, with dripping ferns and tall trees and vast, cool lakes, where she imagined a fallen tree; a magnificent, grey giant, sinking slowly into the ground, its branches draped like arms over its head to block out the sunlight. She imagined its final groan and the terrible thud
of its fall; imagined running her hands over its roots, pulled up and probing the air, though incapable of drawing life. Ferns would be growing nearby, their small shoots pushing up through the decaying wood. Sometimes the tree would sigh, as though merely sleeping. It was a comforting kind of death, a slow, peaceful seeping of life into soil. In her mind, May sat on the trunk and rustled the fern shoots with her naked feet. She liked being bootless, liked to squelch her toes through the grassy mud.

She was so immersed in this inner escape that she almost missed Sara-Jane’s ritual, but she caught the movement out of the corner of her eye and found herself once again present in the dull, stifling day. Sara-Jane swayed, smiling at no-one in particular, and wandered down the hill slowly, loosening her garments. Suddenly she broke into a run and started ripping frantically at her clothes, almost tripping in her hurry to step out of them. She ran in the direction of a heavily populated patch of shade, where women scrambled to their feet and scattered at the sight of her, so blissfully naked in her flaccid flesh. The medical staff ran after her and grabbed her roughly with coarse hands. She struggled against them as they threw a blanket over her and dragged her away. Her vague smile was gone, but May thought she saw her curtsey as she was taken off into the shadows, to be clothed in fresh cotton and dosed with opiates.

May imagined the women in the yard looking up at the stubborn grey sky now, as she did from the folly, although they would doubtless have been herded in for supper already, given their medication and sent semi-conscious to bed.

She gave up on the rain, deciding instead to take advantage of Ellen’s rare absence and go for a walk on the beach. As she crossed the second floor’s eternity of grey
light and stone, she broke into a clumsy run, Pup loping beside her, stirring ravens into 
lazy satin flight.

Ellen breathed in the smell of strawberries and lemons, a leisurely scent that mingled 
with the thick odour of people and horse manure. May’s frown was deep as she 
negotiated the shoulders and parcels of other buyers, her mind a restless blur, pressed in 
by the heat and the voices clamouring for customers. She could tell Ellen watched her, 
though she pretended not to.

May thought back to their morning visit to the river mouth, where she’d sat in the 
sand and the wind, her impatient eyes on the folly, wishing for the shelter of its heavy 
walls but knowing they still had the market place to contend with. She’d resisted their 
detour via the water, but Ellen had insisted on putting her feet in and May knew she was 
incapable of bargaining the way Ellen could, persuading the storekeepers to trust that 
they would get their money one day, tenfold.

Trees grew close to the water’s edge, sturdy in the sand, their bark cool to the 
touch. A small boat rocked gently not far away, and two men sat hunched in it, watching 
their lines cut through the water as seagulls swirled silently overhead.

Ellen wandered down to the water, arranging her hair into that hasty, loose style 
the Doctor had called an invitation. May wore her hair back in a tight coil, restraining 
those same wisps that Ellen allowed to fall forward over her face for longer than was 
decent. The careless fall struck May as blatantly suggestive, and it opened up a dark, 
reluctant space inside her, a sucking void of envy and regret.
Ellen was knee deep in the water, holding up and to one side the stage costume that looked so lavish from a distance and when the light was right, as it was then; a glare, reflected off the fine-skinned ripples and smoothing out the cheap blemishes in the fabric. Eyes closed, Ellen abandoned herself to her other senses, feeling the gentle breeze, the cool water, the salt drying on her skin.

May wouldn’t have dreamed of exposing her bare legs like that, regardless of how powerful the temptation or how heavy the promise of escape.

Ellen’s hair writhed out of its coil and grew damp in the sea air and May blushed at the smile that crept across her face. It was a bliss that belonged somewhere else, somewhere private, behind closed doors. Flashes of such moments floated up from time to time, unbidden, from May’s past; moments of warmth and fingers and goose-flesh, and kisses and close-up skin, but she knew how to push them away and send them on to Ellen, who seemed immersed in them already, there in front of the tomatoes. Her eyes glazed over and her hand moved to her neck, where it massaged taut muscles. One corner of her mouth lifted in a silent smile.

May kept going, hoping Ellen would lose herself in the dirty potatoes and butter beans or simply blur into the beetroot. Or maybe she would just dissolve into someone else, a stranger; someone to be feared but not encountered on a daily basis. She tried to concentrate on her plans to leave the folly and find work as a live-in servant. That would be an honourable and worthy profession, something modest and private.

It would be a blessed relief to have to avert her eyes. On stage they had to be open wide, drawing the hungry audience in to taste her desire and torment, to judge every shining manifestation of her artifice. She had to gaze at Liam, adore him in his pearl-
button waistcoat and love the cold smile lurking behind his eyes, and all for the pleasure of those silent rows of watchful strangers. As a servant, she could keep her head down, would be expected to, and nobody would be watching.

Ellen was beside her again, unhurried, as though she’d never been left behind in the ramshackle maze of stalls. Ellen. May mouthed the name with contempt and considered the uncouth being it described, her tormentor, who loved nothing more than to feel, who crawled backwards in time into her unexplored places to find any old shard or fragment of memory that might stir up an emotive response of some kind; who savoured the flavours of all her sins and all the injustices of her past; whose tongue moved over her teeth at thoughts and whose careless hands massaged her scalp in public.

Ellen was incapable of separating her mind from her senses and it seemed to May a weakness; a self-inflicted wound just waiting for someone to walk past and press on or pour something into, something searing and probing and pervasive. But May had given up trying to enforce the principles of separation and privacy on Ellen, who insisted on openly sharing her sensory experience of the world. She refused to be muted.

May shuddered at all the possible ways Ellen might shame her, and at her power and willingness to do so. Ellen was not afraid of what the world was capable of, not afraid of the capacity of others to hurt and condemn, because she nursed a similar capacity inside herself. She was prepared to make a noise, to use her body to fight, to spit in the face of submission.

It was all May could do to walk quietly beside her, to not reach out and pull her hands down to stop them playing with her hair and her ostentatious costume and touching everything they passed, betraying her infuriating sense of entitlement. She thought long
and hard about how she might arrange a more demure outfit for Ellen, but Ellen caught her out every time, caught her watching and knew her thoughts. She didn’t say anything, just looked at May with her teasing eyes and smiled in that slow, omnipotent way, egging her on, trying to stir her into verbalising her resentment.

‘You won’t win,’ hissed May. ‘You won’t.’

But Ellen turned away, back to her sensual enjoyment of life, back to the warmth of memory, knowing that she had won already. They walked on in simmering silence; between them a tension that one of them loathed and the other one fed on.

Pup watched them through heavy lids and raised a drowsy brow. Her left ear twitched off a fly. The wind had picked up since the morning, and it rattled the myriad of windows in the vacant floors below.

‘All I learned was false seduction,’ May said, remembering with uneasy clarity the smell of Liam and the small, perfect reflections of herself in his eyes.

Ellen said nothing for a while, just bundled kindling for the evening fire. They had started building it in the lower level of the observatory, a perfect square of stone with two balconies and four windows, where ragged curtains made the glow less visible from the street. They didn’t want to arouse suspicion.

‘I used to watch you on stage,’ Ellen said, a little coldly. ‘You were very convincing.’

She stacked logs into a tepee over the kindling while May filled the billycan from the bucket they had lugged up the stairs that morning.
‘They taught me well, I suppose’ May replied, sounding almost nostalgic.

‘Or maybe you were born to it,’ said Ellen, standing up and fixing her eyes on May. May’s throat tightened as she remembered those eyes watching from the wings, watching with others as she invoked the fallen Gertrude. She had always preferred to think of herself as an innocent, even passive participant in those nightly possessions of her body, but Ellen thought otherwise, and May shivered at the memory of her voice, whispering to her in the dark of the emptiness of her soul.

‘You’re the natural,’ May retorted. ‘You’re the one that got me into trouble, don’t forget, giving yourself to that photographer like that.’

Ellen continued to stare and the billycan grew heavy in May’s hands.

‘That is not what I meant, May,’ she said calmly, taking it and setting it up over the flames. ‘And if you think about it, I’m the one that made all that false seduction real for you.’

May could think of nothing to say and the silence between them stretched thin, until the water began to spit and splutter into the flames. Ellen took it off the heat and made tea, then picked up her cup and climbed the ladder. May followed and the two of them stood in the cool air, looking out to where the asylum was just visible, a diminished reminder of the price of rebellion. Pup whined and scratched plaintively on the floor of the squat below as Ellen stared at the magnificent building, in her mind taking it apart stone by stone, starting with the gruesome wall. May shivered and turned away, looking out towards the ocean and its promise of space.
Ellen had overheard talk of the convicts, gangs of them quarrying limestone on the outskirts of the town. Mostly it was the women who talked about them, in hushed tones; pondering their crimes and the whereabouts of their poor wives, if they had any.

Although the guards didn’t often bring them through the town, Ellen had seen one or two chain-gangs stirring up the dust, shuffling and clanging through the silence of the free folk, who stared, bewitched.

In chains, these men seemed to her faded and defeated, but only until she caught their eyes; then she could see why they were the ones piecing together this incarnation of Home. They were eyes that spoke of a hard world, of gritted teeth, of taunts from men no better than themselves but for the so-called grace of God. In them she saw families and friends lost, she saw hope fighting despair, she saw desire and dreams, and evidence of exhaustion; and their bodies, pushed hard all day by the relentless establishment, were strong and sweat-soaked, unlike those of their clean and refined captors. Although of course there was something to be said for refinement.

She relayed these thoughts to May as they walked along the trundle tracks of the fledgling wharf, scuffing limestone rocks and balancing along the felled trees that lay in rows, waiting to be sunk deep into the ocean bed.

‘Remember?’ she teased. ‘Remember how it feels? Remember the taste of skin?’

May stayed several feet ahead. She didn’t want to be reminded of her old, sleepless longing for a man’s touch. Dusk was slowly turning to darkness. The hammers had stopped, the men had gone and the engines were silent. Water rocked the weary vessels and slapped up against their hulls, and in the fading light, May and Ellen made their way into town for their ritual of watching.
By day, the high street was civilised, respectable, filled with purposeful people getting on with things, dry mouthed in the dust. But by night there was no veil. Instead, the streets belonged to a different sort of people, driven by a different kind of purpose. They dropped their backstage whispers and gathered like moths to the flame, wearing that look on their faces, the gambler’s look.

May and Ellen sat side by side in a sheltered doorway. The shop behind them was closed and padlocked and they sat in almost total darkness, gradually becoming more visible to each other, and perhaps to those they watched being drawn past them into the warmth of the hotel bars.

But those who burst through the doors into the fresh night air hours later did not see them. Intoxicated, they did not see much at all, stumbling and singing and draping their arms over each other. They were not at all the same people who went in, seeming instead to have exchanged their inhibitions for an eerily childlike freedom.

May relished being unseen in that small dark space. Watching people emerge from the shadowy streets, watching them betray themselves to anyone who cared to see, she felt that at last she was in the audience and free to judge.

A part of her had enjoyed being on stage, being watched while being someone else, but it was alarming how easily she became that someone else, and what was worse, she suspected that after the lights had gone down and the applause had died, she remained permanently embedded in the minds of those who had paid to see her, so that they could revisit her image at any time, to do with it as they saw fit. She had always felt a little smaller the morning after, like a paler shade of herself.
But the missing shades had always grown back, and so she had kept on doing it, risking everything for that complex cocktail of invigoration and shame, but not anymore. Now she felt she understood Ellen’s contempt. If there was one thing they did share, she thought, it was an aversion to the stage.

They walked together as the day gave way to dusk. The horizon was visible, but dense and grey. Sunset would not be much of an event, which meant they stood a chance of having the hilltop to themselves.

Ellen stopped to look at the limestone body of the asylum which loomed into view as they climbed the hill. May wanted to walk on, feeling that familiar shudder that made her want to break into a run, but this time she forced herself to look at the grand building. She remembered how at first it had seemed such a beautiful thing, proud and romantic with its heavy winding wall; until she learned what it was; until she was dragged inside its airless corridors.

Memories clung to her like something damp and dirty. Smells and sounds rushed back, threatening to overwhelm her, but she closed her eyes, steeled herself against them, allowing a complete memory to slip in with the fragments. She was hanging countless prison sheets out to dry in the blustery sea breeze; her daily immersion in cotton and the fresh, noxious smell of starch. The sheets flapped and swelled in against her, emboldened as the wind grew fierce. They began to twist and wrap around her legs, pushing up cold against her face, so that she couldn’t breathe. Panic gathered in a heady pulse as she
flailed around, trapping herself further in the demonic, suffocating whiteness, until at last she fell to the ground and managed to extricate herself, gasping for air.

She breathed deeply on the hill, still watching the walls, reliving the sensation of release, seeing again those sheets jerking on the line, trying to draw her back in but shrinking instead behind her. The asylum too tried to suck her back, down into its bowels, but she resisted and found herself breathing more easily, still free, on the safe side of the wall.

Ellen was watching her with a strange half smile. May almost smiled back, though she did not want compassion from her other tormentor, the one she could not shake; Ellen, evidence of her past, the reason she was confined in the first place. So instead, though she was excited about the asylum’s diminishing power over her, she scuffed at the ground and resumed her walking.

‘Do you remember the play?’ Ellen asked, falling into step.

‘Of course,’ May replied warily.

‘Do you remember the stupid things he made us say?’

‘How could I forget?’

The hill grew steeper and May’s pulse throbbed in her temples as she tried to ignore the direction the conversation was taking.

‘I have been thinking, you know,’ Ellen went on in her normal voice. ‘Maybe we should go back.’

‘Back to Melbourne?’ May thought of her mother, of the distant rooms and echoes of her childhood.
‘No,’ Ellen said. ‘I think we should go back to the stage, make ourselves some money.’

May kept her head down, kept walking, confused by Ellen’s apparent change of heart. She remembered being drawn out of her body, leaving Ellen in the dark while she walked the pale boards; Ellen, who had surely despised the fraudulence of her craft. She remembered being naked in the strip of lights, in front of a silent sea of people, witnesses to her implication in the preposterous world of Beebe’s invention. They had watched her every move closely, as she herself would have done, entranced by the blur between her body and her soul, wary of all that exhibitionism and false, woven allure.

Seeing herself in memory, in such a gauzy state of existence – a mere vessel for someone else’s story – she was flooded with anxiety. She remembered the look in the eyes of those who clapped and nodded, and she remembered that heavy lost feeling, that somehow, in spite of all her efforts, she had given the game away.

‘Back to the stage?’ she said, numbly.

Ellen nodded, growing impatient. She was tired of May’s reticence and her ghoulish interpretation of things. ‘May, they do not come to steal your soul, for goodness sake. They come simply to be transfixed, to be whisked away for an hour or two in the dark. That’s it. That’s all there is to it.’

May listened with growing amazement, but her reluctance was not so easily swept aside.

‘Your job is to tell them a story, May,’ Ellen continued. ‘You give them a little magic and then bow for them, let them think they know you and love you, and then you go on with your life. It’s not that complicated. And what difference does it make if they
do remember you and play with the memory a little bit? They know as well as you do that they can’t control you, not in reality.’

May almost laughed, hearing Ellen talk of reality, but she was too stunned to laugh. She had been so sure that Ellen saw her acting as an unforgivable distortion of truth, a dark art, just a small step away from outright prostitution.

‘I don’t understand, Ellen. You were so cold about my acting, saying I was born to it, like some deformed character, spawn of the devil.’

‘Spawn of the devil?’ Ellen laughed. ‘If I was cold it was only because you betrayed me.’

‘But I thought…’

‘Your guilt has been hard at work, May. The truth is, you were exposing, not distorting yourself, and, most unforgivable of all, you were enjoying it.’

May was silent and her eyes darted back to the asylum, which breathed down there, inside its walls, biding its time.

Ellen leaned in close. ‘No-one will know we were in there. And anyway, we have not been reckless. We have kept our unnatural desires in check, have we not?’

‘I don’t know, have we?’

But Ellen didn’t rise to the bait.

‘Why don’t we pay a visit to Mr Jones? We’ll get him to take your portrait again and make posters. We can ask him to book the town hall for the show and sell tickets for us.’

They had reached the top of the dry hill, expecting to find a clear view of the ocean and an answer to the puzzle of the teasing clouds, but instead they found
themselves a stone’s throw from hungry-looking men, men who’d staked everything on finding gold and were setting up a tent camp, right there, with the best view in town.

May turned on her heels and headed back down the hill, but Ellen lingered, giving the men that knowing look of hers. May called her on; they were too close to the asylum for that sort of behaviour, and she had promised herself that whatever else she did, she would never, ever go back in there.

Jones had a sign on his wall instructing his subjects on how best to prepare for a sitting. Visit him while fresh, not flustered; don’t slouch, but remember to relax into your headrest, which will support your head and keep it perfectly still.

His most recent sitters lingered in his memory after they left; the enviable tenderness between them preying on his bachelor mind. A newly married couple, they had chosen an awkward pose, her head on his shoulder, gazing up at him as he stared down the future. In the finished product the husband had looked furious, his eyes narrowed with class and ambition so that he had the unintended look of a man about to pummel you just for looking.

His new wife looked as if her head were about to roll off her neck, eyes first, owing to the angle of the headrest. ‘Why didn’t you say something?’ her husband asked on the way out, gently massaging her neck.

Fortunately, though, Jones took several pictures per sitting. He could tell which of them his clients would want to see and he only ever presented them with the ones he knew they would buy; the ones in which they looked like the pioneers they were,
civilised against all the odds in this bleak town, surrounded by their well-behaved, straight-backed offspring.

And it was a bleak town, in his view. The buildings were much like those back home, elaborate and designed to embody the resilience of empire against prevailing winds, but the dusty streets and the sweat and the flies undermined the lofty atmosphere such architecture sought to evoke.

Some days he hid from the dust, hid from the flies and the heat and buried himself in his despondency. He closed the shop doors and sought solace in his life’s work; the albums stacked up in the back room, filled with those portraits he never showed his sitters, the ones he captured while they were preparing their expressions, or relaxing them once they thought the posing was done.

He captured these brief revelations as smudged movement - heads blurred in inappropriate eye contact; forbidden envy, loathing, desire - and filed them away. They made him smile, so unlike the images he displayed on his wall to advertise his compositions and all the moods he could create with his chemicals in the dark room. Some might call them the waste products, the off-cuts, but to him, their accumulation was his real work, a work no-one would see until generations had passed and someone stumbled on his time capsule, which he intended to fill with the true history of Fremantle’s founding fathers and mothers and bury under cement in his courtyard.

With his door closed against the whitewashed limestone glare, he sat with his feet on his desk and catalogued the items he would bury with his albums. He drafted an explanation for each object and a rationale for his portraits, contemplating how to succinctly express what he hoped to achieve. So far he explained it as sending
authenticity downstream, to float along uninterrupted and be discovered by future
generations, who would be enlightened in some small way, in spite of the best efforts of
the establishment and its people to maintain their proud and distorted version of history.

His time capsule was where he played Creator, shaping a universe of cracks in the
mirror, where people could not hide their stories and where his eye was the singular eye
of an all-seeing god.

He knew it was an exercise in power and he knew it was underhanded, perhaps
even unfair. He knew that the real crime was not in the taking of the photographs, but in
the keeping of them, that he was essentially depriving people of their right to authorise
the release of their stolen images into the archives of space and time. But really, he
countered, was there any such right? Wasn’t the whole business of entitlement one of the
most tiresome things about society? And wasn’t power exactly what he wanted to deny
them?

But there were worse days, when even his time capsule was not enough to sustain
him, and he sat alone in his dusty, creaking room contemplating his life. He thought
about home, England, where his brothers were making their way with style, enjoying life
in a climate more suited to it, where the grand promenades and buildings were the
original articles instead of mere imitations. There were days when he despised Fremantle,
and the fact that the eastern end of High Street might have been the end of the world,
except that it was an infinite glare instead of deep dark space.

He dreamed of going back home and admitting he had been hoodwinked by the
government’s promises of land and a life like no other. He would take back all the
scathing remarks he’d made over the years about his parents’ lives and the decisions
they’d made. He imagined the changed faces of the friends he had left behind and picked over the details of the lives they would surely be leading by now. He even wrote letters in which he hinted at a world trip and a possible return home, but the fantastic words ended up in the fire because it always came down to one thing; between him and his return were months of heaving, stinking seasickness and sheer unrelenting terror, rolling around in a man-made death machine at the mercy of water and waves, the same waves that surged and swelled and pulled him apart in his dreams, or rose and kept rising, to destroy the strongest ships and flood entire nations.

So far he had twenty-three albums. His favourite was one of the most recent, the one that contained the portrait of Miss May Ellen Moss. He thought of her often; the quiet, wary way she had about her when she arrived in his studio and her dismay when she saw the portrait. She had been so distant, and then so unexpectedly warm, until she was dragged away by that swarthy young man with the virulent eyes.

He remembered how his body stiffened when she stepped forward, then relaxed completely when she touched his neck with her cool, deft fingers, sliding them up his scalp and scratching them just gently through his hair.

He kept that album close at hand, in his desk, so that he could open it up to her page any time he liked. He found himself thinking of her too often and he knew it made him vague and forgetful and sometimes rude to customers, but only slightly, not enough that decorum would allow them to take him up on it, and really, he told himself, he didn’t care if he offended them and they never came back. He stared at her dark eyes looking out at him with something akin to love, and he wished ardently to live that moment again.
He made bargains with fate; that he would give up his career, his studio’s prime location on High Street, even his time capsule, just to have her come towards him the way she did again and take the liberty of tasting his bare skin.

When she did step through his door, he was totally unprepared. He was standing by the window, using the light to examine a loose thread in his waistcoat. She smiled. His hair was ruffled and there was something disarmingly earnest in the way he leaned in to shake her hand.

‘It’s been a while, hasn’t it?’ he said.

‘Yes, it has.’

‘Fifteen weeks, I would say.’

She raised her eyebrows and nodded, but said nothing, distracted by his eyelashes, which were long and frequently lowered, almost coyly. She wanted him not to hide, and yet was glad he did.

He thought suddenly of the album he had left on his desk, open to her page, and looked away again, hoping she had not noticed the sideways movement of his eyes. But she had and there was a spellbound moment before she followed them with hers. She stepped closer to have a proper look and turned the album around for better light and he was terrified she’d back away from him and head straight out the door, but when she looked up she was smiling.

‘I knew I would be safe here with you,’ she said.
Ellen lay in Jones’s bed, which was made of heavy wood and high off the ground. She felt with her fingers the feathers in the mattress beneath the twisted cotton sheets.

The bed was in the room above his studio, and Ellen lay listening to the sounds of the day outside, watching the sunlit stream of dust float in through the window. She looked at Jones, who stood by the other window in a collarless shirt, watching her.

‘I think you should put your hat and tie on,’ she said. ‘Then you really will look from the street like an ordinary decent gentleman just going about his business.’

He smiled and raised an eyebrow.

‘Who wants to be an ordinary decent gentleman?’

He felt with thumb and forefinger the material of his shirt. ‘Remind me please why I put this on?’ he asked, prowling on to the bed to hang over her on all fours, curls falling forward over his slightly distorted face. His eyes were green with flecks of grey. One of his front teeth overlapped the other, just as hers did, although she couldn’t at that moment remember which of hers overlapped which, right or left. Her tongue moved involuntarily to check.

‘I can’t recall why you got up, never mind the shirt,’ she said, pulling herself up on to one elbow. She touched his nose with hers, and felt his eyelashes blink against her skin. She kissed slowly his eyes, first one and then the other. He scooped up her hair and put his hand gently under her head, supporting the weight of it. His skin smelled musky and tasted of salt.

The magic wavered at the sound of someone knocking on the door downstairs. He kissed her, and a warm bliss suspended them in time, like the dust, but the knock persisted and the spell was broken.
‘I must have forgotten an appointment,’ he said, dropping his face into the pillow beside her head.

‘Well,’ said Ellen, ‘I suppose I should come down with you and get my clothes.’

‘Don’t you dare,’ Jones said, instantly regaining his strength and pinning her arms over her head so that he could tickle her with his free hand. She squirmed and laughed, kicking her legs in protest. The knock came again.

‘You’re lucky,’ he said, releasing her hands and slithering away to pull on his clothes.

He took the stairs three at a time and almost lost his footing on the last one, but regained his balance and swept through the curtain. He slid Ellen’s abandoned dress and shoes behind his desk and went to the door, tucking his laces into his shoes and doing up his trousers as he went.

When he opened the door, his first reaction was to laugh. It had to be some kind of practical joke, surely? But the smile faded from his face as coldness passed over him like a shadow; although the resemblance was uncanny, he knew it was not physically possible for May to have beaten him down the stairs. He looked up at his window, a foolish reflex, as though expecting to see her looking down at him. But there she was, out there amongst the rest of them, fully clothed and unaware of her presence upstairs. A dog sat next to her, oblivious to the unsightly lolling of its tongue.

‘I had an idea I wanted to talk to you about,’ she said, in the same voice that had tickled his ear only moments earlier.

‘Uh, I suppose you had better come in,’ he said, frowning and stumbling over his words. They stepped into the room and Pup sniffed her way along the skirting board.
‘I know it’s been a while,’ May said. ‘And you probably don’t think very highly of me.’

He felt uneasy at the way she looked at him; expecting what, exactly? His hand darted to the stubble he kept handy for just this sort of perplexing situation. Her hair was very different, very neat, and the dress she wore was of a darker, coarser fabric. Her eyes were distracted, somewhat furtive, and he was taken with a sudden urge to smooth out the frown that creased her forehead. But otherwise she was identical to the woman he had just left in his bed.

‘He thinks very highly of you, May,’ Ellen said from the bottom of the stairs. ‘I can vouch for that.’

May and Jones stared, and Ellen, dressed in Jones’s trousers and shirt, allowed the moment to reach its full awkward potential before she spoke again. ‘So what took you so long?’

‘I’ve been standing outside the general store waiting for you, as we agreed, for hours. What are you wearing?’

‘You were late so I came ahead of you. And these are trousers; very comfortable.’ She smiled as Jones leaned in and spoke to her quietly, as though afraid to disturb some delicate balance, perhaps that of his sanity.

‘I thought you were May,’ he said.

‘No,’ said Ellen, laughing. ‘No, I’m not May, not any more.’

‘Oh,’ he said. ‘Well.’

May shot a warning look at Ellen, who shook her head and laughed; a short, breathy laugh.
‘What she means is,’ May said, reaching deep for plausible words. ‘People used
to call her May, back in the old days, when we were little. She hated it.’

‘Oh, I see,’ Jones said, still thrown off centre by their resemblance and the
unearthly energy that hummed between them. At last he spoke.

‘And did they call you Ellen?’

May swallowed. Her mouth was suddenly dry. ‘No, not very often. I think that’s
what annoyed her the most.’

The silence stretched taut.

‘Well,’ Jones said at last. ‘Which one of you did I photograph? And which one
came to collect the picture?’

They responded almost simultaneously.

‘It was me.’

‘I did.’

Ellen laughed and shook her head again, then grabbed her clothes and ran up the
stairs with Pup close at her heels. Jones scratched his head and paced around the dimly lit
jarrah room, looking at May with a baffled, somewhat hurt expression. ‘I’m sure I called
her May, several times,’ he said. ‘She didn’t correct me, not once. I really thought she
was…well…you.’

‘No, her name is Ellen.’

‘Oh, I see,’ he said more to himself than to her.

‘We were supposed to come to see you together today,’ May said, trying to hold
on to his attention. ‘I waited and waited and then decided to come and talk to you by
myself. Obviously she had the same idea, but for different reasons.’
Jones followed her eyes to his fly, which was not quite buttoned all the way up, and to his shoelaces, which were spilling out from where he had tucked them in. He bent to the floor over one shoe and began pulling at the laces, tying them tight across the brown leather. Then he moved over to the other one, but he did so almost as an afterthought, not really looking at his fumbling fingers. He was feeling, though he hated to admit it, as though he’d been duped somehow, taken for a ride by the woman who was so silent upstairs while this twin of hers kept on talking.

‘I was the one you photographed, Mr Jones, and she was the one who came to collect it. She’s always been a little bit…unpredictable.’

Jones nodded slowly as she spoke, giving the appearance of listening, but she could see his eyes weren’t focused on her. He was clearly quite politely waiting for her to finish. She looked around the studio as though she found it distasteful, and yet there was something territorial in her eyes.

‘Did she tell you she was sent to the asylum?’ she asked. ‘They locked her away after Liam found the two of you together in here.’

She hoped the revelation might repulse him, that he would feel unclean for having touched a woman tainted by the cursed place. She wanted him to realise he had been tricked and to come to her for comfort, though, of course, she would not provide it. But his eyes filled with something else, something far removed from disgust. They filled with tenderness and pity, and all for Ellen.

Suddenly May wanted very much to hurt him. He was after all the one who drew Ellen up and beckoned her out. It was for his pleasure and for Ellen’s, not hers that she spent weeks in the dark, with only panic and fear and disembodied remorse, toxic and
creeping under her skin. It was his dark magic that gave Ellen the power she needed to
imprison May in that filthy place so she could use her image as a body and wreak havoc
on her life. And now, faced with the original article, Jones could think only of her; selfish,
lustful Ellen.

Her eyes narrowed at him, this man who enabled Ellen to steal her freedom and
her boldness and leave her with only the weakest parts of herself. She wanted to scream
at him, ‘It was me you called beautiful! It was me, not her!’

But it would be useless. He would only recoil from the venom behind the words
and run even faster up the stairs. It was Ellen he wanted, the woman of no virtue, and
there was nothing May could do about it because she had fallen right into Ellen’s trap.
She had severed the ties, cut her loose, leaving only the good and the obedient and the
empty May behind.

‘Look,’ he said at last. ‘I’m worried about your sister. She’s very quiet up there. I
think I should go and see if she’s all right.’

But there was no need.

‘It’s okay,’ Ellen said. ‘I’ve come down instead.’

She was dressed and ready to go and Pup headed straight for the door as Ellen
sauntered over to Jones. She put her hands around his neck, and May watched as she
kissed him, a slow kiss that he returned even as he knew he should throw her arms off
and insist she never return. Ellen rested her forehead against Jones’ and searched his eyes.
‘We will be back tomorrow,’ she said. ‘Have your camera ready.’
Jones fumbled a little as he set up the head rest. Still in the grip of the idea that had kept him up most of the night, his concentration had been slipping all morning. He wanted to show his album of secrets to May and Ellen, and in his mind, over and over, he played out the moment of revelation.

He had tried during the sleepless night to remind himself that his albums were the heart and soul of his time capsule, without which he had nothing. He had told himself to go to sleep or read a book or get up and get some fresh air, but instead he had rolled over and drifted closer to sleep, only to find himself there again; leading them into his back office, turning the pages for them, watching their faces to see if they understood what he was trying to do.

To show them would be madness, and yet, as he lay there alone and morning crept closer, it seemed suddenly very sad to bury his life’s work for some other generation, to deprive himself of the reactions of his peers. What was the point if the eternity it won him would be experienced only by others? With no time capsule, the ground fell away into nothing, and yet it seemed suddenly weightless anyway, the kind of project anyone in his position could have thought up. At the end of the day, he thought, it was a small, sad achievement for a man’s life.

So at last, in the quiet, early hours of the morning, he had resolved to do it; but he had promised himself he would wait, at least until the portrait was done. He didn’t want to do anything that would scare May. He remembered how she had kept herself closed from him during that first sitting, the wariness he’d had to melt from her eyes.

He prepared his camera as Ellen drafted the layout of the posters at his desk behind him. May stood in front of the mottled mirror, examining herself in Ellen’s
elaborate dress. When she had worn it on stage it had smelled only of powder and her sweat, but now it smelled of other people’s lives; of Pup and tobacco, of the town itself, and of Ellen, an intense body smell that made her blush when she lifted her arms.

‘We need to wash the dress,’ she said, to no-one in particular. It was disconcerting to see herself dressed like Ellen, wearing her hair loose in that way, her eyes raised in a similar defiance but with an unmistakeable, added edge of anxiety. May touched her neck in that Ellen gesture and massaged the stiff clump of muscle there. She hadn’t stretched for a long time, hadn’t felt the need. But she felt it now.

‘I’d like to get this portrait over and done with, please, Mr Jones,’ she said, turning away from her unsettling reflection. ‘Are you ready?’

‘I will be. I just need one minute.’

While he wiped his hands and prepared the film, May sidled up behind Ellen. After her flagrant disrespect the day before, May had resolved never to convey her bitterness to Ellen in words, even though it was clear Ellen knew her every thought. But now, restless and uncomfortable and oddly nostalgic, her resolve melted away and she found herself incapable of holding back the words; incapable and unwilling. She wanted to cause some damage. She wanted to do something irrevocable.

‘It was deliberate wasn’t it?’

‘What are you talking about?’

‘You wanted Liam to catch me with him because you knew they would put me in that vile place,’ she hissed. ‘You knew once they had me bodily confined you could get out and have the lovely Mr Jones all to yourself, didn’t you?’
‘May, that’s ridiculous,’ Ellen replied, infuriating May with her easy, unflustered smile. ‘How could I know they would lock us up? Or that you would do precisely as you were told? You’re the one who cast me off, remember? And anyway, I was just doing what we both wanted to do.’

Jones watched them, these two women in his studio; so alike and so different, caught up in what appeared to be an intense sibling rivalry. He had looked for differences between them and found none that were obvious. Those that were noticeable lay in their eyes, the different ways they looked at him and at each other. May regarded Ellen with an uncomfortable mixture of distaste and fear, while Ellen’s expression tended to be slightly smug. But when she looked at Jones, it was as though his words were reaching her through water, meaningless compared to what she was thinking. May, on the other hand, watched him closely, examining his features as though for the first time, with nervous clarity.

‘Well, May,’ he said. ‘I’m ready if you are.’

May gritted her teeth as Ellen laughed and swept one arm out in front of her, as though she needed help finding the way. She sat down so Jones could fix the head rest in place. His warm hands worked with her head, pressing her chin gently downward and pulling her loose hair forward over one shoulder. He suggested she smile, just a little, trying to draw out the face he remembered, the inviting one; the one he didn’t realise belonged now solely to Ellen.

May forced herself to look at Jones, who was standing so close she could smell him. His hands and shirtsleeves brushed against her neck and she remembered the feeling that stole through her body the last time they enacted this scene. This time, she decided,
because Ellen was watching, she wouldn’t shy away from it. And yet, though she waited for it, though she let Jones ease her shoulders down to elongate her neck and though she studied the line of his jaw curving slightly up to meet his ear, she felt nothing at all; nothing but a vague sense of loss.

The wind picked up and became gusty, making the shop creak and groan, like a giant ship. The window panes rattled loudly and sporadically in their frames, and the air was damp with would-be rain.

The portraiture session finished, May and Ellen were changing clothes in the privacy of the studio while Jones stood by the window in the shop front, feeling time slither past. He knew it was now or never; he could not be absolutely sure they would be back, even though they had asked for his help and he had agreed to do whatever he could. Ellen’s small deception still rankled and he wasn’t quite sure he should be quite so obliging, but he had found it impossible to say no.

He paced around the room, sliding misplaced books out of the bookshelf and shunting them back in where they belonged. The dust made him sneeze, which clearly disturbed Pup, who stood and stretched and padded over to another corner, her nails making slow percussion on the floorboards.

They came through the curtain stiffly, May looking exhausted and possibly angry, Ellen looking distracted and vaguely triumphant. Pup stretched her legs again and circled them, sniffing at their feet with easy familiarity. Ellen dropped to her knees and sank her
hands into Pup’s warm, coarse fur, scratching gently and murmuring things into her ear.

Jones rubbed the hair at the base of his skull and felt vaguely foolish.

‘Well,’ said May. ‘Thank you Mr Jones. We will make sure you are paid as soon as possible.’

‘My pleasure, May. I will develop the prints as soon as I have a moment.’ He was momentarily mortified by his own formality, but then reminded himself he was only playing along with the rigidity of Ellen’s twin.

‘In fact,’ he said, clearing his throat nervously, bracing for a flood of irrevocable words. ‘In fact, if you have no plans for the day, I could work on them while you wait. There is something I would rather like to show you.’

He held his breath while they briefly and silently conferred, and was intensely relieved when Ellen nodded. ‘It sounds most intriguing,’ she said, smiling. ‘Except that I am rather hungry.’

‘Well, I have bread and cheese in the kitchen, and tea, if that will suffice?’

‘More than, I should think,’ Ellen replied as May scolded Pup for jumping up and snagging a nail on her dress.

‘Allow me to prepare it for you while you have a look at…the something I want you to see. Come this way.’

He led them back through the red curtain, past the stairs and through a heavy door into a room filled with shelves. Light filtered in through a large window, beyond which was a small, neglected courtyard.

‘Have a seat,’ Jones said, dragging a chair from the corner and placing it beside the other one, which was neatly nestled against a large desk. May and Ellen sat and made
themselves comfortable, as did Pup, on the floor between them, while Jones deliberated over which of his albums to show them first. He decided at last to go with chronology and pulled out the first one, placing it gently on the desk and wiping at the dust with his handkerchief.

‘I suppose they are self-explanatory,’ he began nervously, one hand holding down the cover as May and Ellen eyed it with growing curiosity. ‘But I would like to say something about them, nonetheless.’ He cleared his throat. ‘These are the portraits the customers do not see. You might think I should have destroyed the negatives, or at least given my clients the opportunity to decline appearing in these albums, but I could not destroy them, and I believe obtaining permission would have diminished the work, somehow. I was looking for hidden truths, you see.’

He stopped, looking pale, clearly dissatisfied with his explanation.

‘Well, enough words have been spoken,’ he said at last. ‘See what you think. I will be in the dark room, under the stairs. But if you do need anything, please knock and wait for my word before you come in and expose the room to daylight.’

He was closing the door behind him when he heard Ellen’s voice. ‘Jonathon?’

He put his head back through the door and smiled. ‘Yes, Ellen?’

‘You were saying something about bread and cheese.’

‘Oh, yes, of course, bread and cheese.’ He nodded and backed out again.

‘And tea,’ Ellen called, just before he disappeared.

‘And tea, yes, of course; tea.’

He closed the door behind him, leaving them alone with his secrets.
Ellen washed down each dry mouthful of cheese sandwich with tea. May had a few morsels, but she didn’t give in to her hunger the way Ellen did.

When the plate held only crumbs and her teacup was empty, Ellen began to show interest in the prints. May was studying a young woman whose face was blurred, her shoulders slightly stooped and her upper arm a smudge on its way to fixing her hair. Right beside it was another print of the same woman, but this time she was stiff and upright, and next to her a little boy stood with one foot on a sailboat. May had seen the very same piece of boat in the studio, on the floor next to the prop box.

Jones worked on his portrait of May, feeling restless in his skin, his mind trapped in the jaws of doubt; perhaps the work was not very original, not very exciting at all, and possibly even slightly ridiculous. In his mind’s eye he visited every photographer in town, sneaking his way into every back room and very calmly studying their work, like a professional. He would be stoic when he discovered album after album just like his own, stoic and manly in his disappointment, but even so he emerged from the fantasy with a delicate sweat on his upper lip.

Tendrils of resentment coiled around his heart. The girls without even saying a word had robbed him of his legacy, reduced it to a cheap bit of opportunism. But then he caught himself using that word, legacy; the filthiest of all arrogant and wasteful pursuits, the goal of only the old and defeated, who had given up on achieving glory in their own tenure.

The realisation that he was exactly like those he had condemned was a profound and frightening one. His life’s work amounted suddenly to little more than envy. It
seemed he had been playing the legacy game all along, and there it was for May and Ellen to see, in all its paltry shame. Struck by a strong desire to drag them away from it, he left the prints hanging and marched to the door of the back office.

But he opened it hesitantly and, at the sight of them engrossed in the images, with the soft light catching their hair, his heart swelled. He knew with sudden conviction, again, that there was something in those pictures, something in those smudges and blurred movements that was infinitely more fascinating than the posed and approved ones he sold every day.

He realised as he looked at them that it had been days since he had thought of the old world, days since he had cursed his entrapment in his new incongruous home, and all because he had spent them at the mercy of these new and pendulous emotions, set in swinging motion by those two bowed heads. His resentment crumbled as gratitude swept in.

‘Do you love me?’ he asked suddenly, surprising himself with his audacity but wanting very badly to know. They looked up, looked at each other, and then looked back at him, their simultaneous bafflement rendering them for the first time completely and satisfyingly identical.

‘Which one of us do you mean?’ Ellen asked at last.

‘Either one of you. Both?’

There was a long silence.

‘Jones, that’s a little bold,’ Ellen said at last.

‘I thought there was no such thing as being too bold,’ he challenged, a faint blush creeping up his neck. ‘You said yourself you didn’t believe in it.’
But the reply came from May.

‘Just because I don’t believe in something doesn’t mean it doesn’t exist.’

May veered down Pakenham Street. The rain felt close at last. The sky was dark and the trees writhed and flailed in anticipation. The wind was cold and May worried about Pup, who had run off after a sulky near the town hall. She hoped Ellen had found her and taken her home.

She and Ellen had separated several hours earlier to ensure maximum coverage of the town centre with their posters. May had been to all the hotels and thoroughfares in the southern end of town, as agreed, and she knew Ellen would have been equally thorough in the north, so she was not worried about the small pile of left-over posters she still carried.

‘Starring the illustrious May Ellen Moss, back home after a sell-out tour of the continent, limited tickets, limited shows!’

A small white lie about the tour, but Ellen had waved aside May’s concerns. ‘What harm could it do?’ she had asked. ‘Of course, if we had just done a sell-out tour of the continent, we would not be bringing it to Fremantle, of all places, but then again, stranger things have happened.’

May was not far from the boarded up doors and lofty broken windows of the folly when the sky shuddered and at last relinquished the rain. Water pelted down, and she was drenched by the time she reached the doorframe. She turned to watch the water gathering in the loose dirt layer of the road, turning it into a clayish smear. A gentleman ran along
with his valise over his head, hurrying his wife, who struggled with her skirt and cursed the exuberance of the downpour.

A carriage rumbled past carrying two young women who looked out at the weather with tentative smiles. Rain was often a bad omen, despite the joy of it, but they smiled at May as they passed her by, and she smiled back, surprised. Usually such people didn’t see her at all. She watched the rear of the carriage shrink away, leading her eyes to the south end of the street, where a dripping black blur emerged from the rain, running toward her.

‘Pup,’ she said with relief, dropping to her knees and clearing the wet fur from her eyes. Pup gave her a lick or two, then closed her eyes and without further warning sent her body into a spasm of shudders, spraying May with damp dogginess. May shouted before she could stop herself, but laughed at the look on Pup’s face.

She went out into the rain to rinse off the spray. As she stood there, letting the water soak her, letting it pelt the top of her head like a million tiny paws and tease the gooseflesh across her skin, she felt an enormous burden lifting from her shoulders. Water streamed down her face and into her mouth, pure and clean, and she knew she was laughing like a mad woman, but there was no-one to see her now, and no-one to judge.

The wind was cold off the ocean and she headed back for shelter, hoping Ellen was up in the observatory already and had the fire burning. She felt the usual twinge of fear as she crossed the expanse of the second floor with its regimented windows and shadows, and it was more than momentum and coldness that carried her to the far door, through to the narrow stairwell and up to the observatory.
She could hear Ellen snapping kindling and the familiarity of it stirred an ache somewhere inside her, somewhere she couldn’t quite place. She reached the top of the stairs and stood in the doorway, water streaming from her hair, fabric heavy and clinging to her shivering skin. The warmth of the fire was a caress.

Ellen didn’t notice May until she turned to drop a fresh batch of kindling on the stack, now a metre high against the wall. Her pile of leftover posters was even smaller than May’s, and they smiled at each other, somewhat shyly. Though they knew the rain would surely smudge some of the posters and drag others off the walls, they smiled, because they were out there, up for all to see, which meant the curtain would be sure to go up too. They felt an unfamiliar contentment, knowing that they had dry firewood, they had their lazy-eared Pup, and, although they had to share it, they had the dark shadowy safety of the folly.

Two crew members waited in the middle of the dark stage behind the curtains, each gripping one half of the plush red façade with ready hands. They stiffened as the lights dimmed to black and a hush descended on the audience.

May stood in the wings, breathing away the familiar nerves that crawled under her skin and stiffened her muscles. Her heart quickened at the silence of the hall. As usual she was surprised at the sudden undivided attention of so many people, but the memory of Ellen’s words calmed her. As she stood there behind the wing drape, ready to expose herself again, she heard fragments of Ellen’s speech, delivered that morning on the blustery balcony.
‘It doesn’t matter who they are or what it is they want from you, May,’ she had said. ‘It doesn’t matter if they take a sliver of you when they go, because you are infinite. They can drink and drink from you, and you will never be empty.’

May lifted her shoulders and allowed them to drop, then shook the tension from her arms. She closed her eyes and breathed deeply, pushing the air out. As before, she would trust the limelight operators over her head to keep the pressure steady and the light warm, and as before, the hidden figures beyond the half-light, clothed in black and pressed against the chairs and the upturned chaise-longue from the second act, would mouth the lines they knew as well as the actors did.

But this time they were Ellen’s words, Ellen’s characters, coming to life on the stage, and this time Ellen was not shuddering in the wings without her skin, a disembodied voice in the dark. Instead, she sat at a small desk in the wings, in the dim glow of a gas-light, her head bowed over the curl of her scribbled pages.

Beyond the reach of light, the darkness was no longer menacing. Instead it was a hush, like the gentle murmur of waves at the edge of the desert.
BAD HABITS

TEMPTATION & THE DIVIDED SELF

(Critical Accompaniment)

Photograph of the Fremantle Lunatic Asylum, 1897, courtesy of the Fremantle Local History Collection: Fremantle City Library

Joanna Burnett Morrison
“Bad Habits” is an original story set in Fremantle in the late nineteenth century, an imaginative work, bordering on fantasy that uses the uncanny motif of the double to interrogate social conformity and the divided self, particularly as they relate to repression of female sexuality. Employing elements of the uncanny, I have thrown a dark and gauzy cloak over the colonial port, drawing on and exaggerating its existing gothic qualities to create an isolated, rainless town in which to explore identity and alienation.

The heroine encounters her double in the streets of this nineteenth-century Fremantle after taking to extremes the repression of her sexuality to better satisfy the requirements of a patriarchal society. Using this popular uncanny motif to explore the relationship between an accepted social mask of femininity and the true impulses of an unmasked woman, I have exaggerated the fracturing effects of restrictive Victorian ideas on the identities of women. In order to explore and illuminate the psychosocial origins of the archetypal madwoman and to interrogate the role of patriarchal rhetoric in the creation of gothic and fantasy literature, I employed the themes of confinement and duplication that recur in the works of many female writers since the nineteenth century.

Today, Fremantle’s history lives on in its museums, library and heritage architecture. Earlier generations gaze out from the past in countless photographic images; high-collared colonists posing stiffly in studios or open-shirted workers squinting in the glare, all beckoning the gothic imagination to revive them and tell their secrets. The photographs are somehow dark and austere, and yet they are often over-exposed, as though the apertures of the day simply could not handle Fremantle’s notorious glare.
There is something spellbinding about the dark, timeless river, curving between sandy banks and eucalyptus trees, something enticing about the gaping whaler’s tunnel at the western end of High Street, something misplaced and temporary about the colonial buildings, propped like stage sets on the dense earthen roads. They lend themselves to a sense of powerlessness against an enemy of isolation and maddening heat, and as I researched details of the town’s convict history, the facts reinforced my increasingly Gothic interpretation of the colonial experience.

Fremantle’s lunatic asylum was used by the British establishment not only to keep citizens of the port city safe from the criminally and dangerously insane, but to entrench its ideology of gender roles. English psychiatry during the late nineteenth-century systematically coerced women into repressing their impulses and desires in order to better fit notions of femininity, as defined by patriarchal ideology.

Fuelled perhaps by insecurity, perhaps by fears of female sexuality and a need to bring women’s minds under the control of reason, the patriarchy used the construct of ‘inherent feminine virtue’ as a tool of manipulation and repression, the potential ramifications of which are here explored through a metaphorical duality.

This thesis examines psychiatry and the Victorian cult of femininity, both patriarchal methods of behavioural control and both used to reinforce supposedly innate qualities of womanhood. The ideal woman was presented by this doctrine as a malleable, vulnerable, self-effacing, dependent and typically mentally unstable member of an inferior sex, whose chief role in life was to provide comfort to her menfolk in their pursuit of higher human endeavour. “Bad Habits” explores the context in which writers of gothic literature, a genre closely linked the communication of subconscious fears and
drives, felt compelled to use doubles and terror to convey encoded messages about patriarchal repression and crises of identity.

Gothic literature has been described as ‘a form of fantasy about past history and alien cultures, which has meaning for its present audience through a variety of cultural and political reflexes’\(^1\). Taking reflexes to mean glances, indirect references or allusions\(^2\), it is fair to suggest that meaning in gothic fiction is more commonly alluded to than overtly expressed and that writers of the genre are likely to cloak their critiques of the status quo in subversive symbolism.

There is a wide audience for gothic fiction, in spite of the fact that as a genre it is the descendent of ‘the popular fiction of late eighteenth, early-nineteenth-century England\(^3\), perhaps because people remain fascinated by the social issues and darker human impulses lurking behind the veil of intrigue, aesthetics and metaphors common to the genre.

‘Both the literary form and the commentary on it are permeated by controversy, and this fact alone explains something about the value of a species of writing which remained part of the pulse of literary expectation for three generations of readers, during a period of rapid social change and political transition. More than this, there has been a marked revival of interest in the Gothick novel during recent years, supported by the

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currency of the mode in the modern cinema and the growth of a more broadly cultural approach to the literary genre⁴.

The gothic genre and its popular device, the uncanny, commonly appear side by side in critical literature, particularly since the publication of Freud’s essay *The Uncanny*⁵. The word ‘uncanny’ is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as ‘mysterious, weird, uncomfortably strange or unfamiliar’ and relating to unsafe or untrustworthy people ‘associated with supernatural arts or powers’⁶.

Rosemary Jackson defines the uncanny as ‘a term which has been used philosophically as well as in psychoanalytic writing, to indicate a disturbing, vacuous area’⁷. By revealing that which was hitherto hidden, the literary uncanny ‘effects a disturbing transformation of the familiar into the unfamiliar’⁸, thereby ‘rendering a feeling of estrangement, of being ‘not at home’ in the world’⁹.

Crucial to this thesis is Freud’s description of the uncanny as the resurgence of something that is ‘actually nothing new or strange, but something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed’¹⁰. It is this notion of the uncanny - in “Bad Habits” evoked through use of its most prominent motif, the double¹¹ - which can be linked to the damaging repression entrenched by the highly

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⁴ Sage, *The Gothick Novel*, 8
⁵ Ibid., 22
⁶ *Oxford English Dictionary Online*
⁸ Ibid., 65
⁹ Ibid., 65
¹¹ Ibid., 141
evolved and unhealthily restrictive patriarchal order that sank its roots into the relatively barren soil of Fremantle’s socially and geographically isolated landscape.

Described as a Freudian disciple who pioneered the broader study of the double in poetry, drama and prose fiction, Otto Rank probes ‘the burdensome companionship’ of the second self in his book *The Double* and concludes that ‘the uncanny double is clearly an independent and visible cleavage of the ego*. Analysing the literary psychological, mythical and ethnological sources and illustrations of the double motif so popular in romantic literature, he concludes that the double motif is a study of ‘deep human problems’ relating to narcissism and paranoia, fear of death and an inability to escape the past. Rank describes the literary double as being ‘either personified by the devil himself’ or ‘created by making a diabolical pact’.

In developing the protagonist who undergoes this ego cleavage, May Ellen Moss, a young woman of non-specific age who has a certain amount of breeding and education, I wanted to transcend the archetypal gothic heroine, who is characterised by passivity and innocence. Thus she is a woman of sufficient character to have broken the mould, to the extent that she is an unmarried actress following her own path. In addition, when it comes to the diabolical pact that triggers her experience with her double – a pact between May and society in which she agrees to repress that which is unladylike in exchange for social

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13 Ibid., 23
14 Ibid., 12
15 Ibid., 9
16 Ibid., 7
17 Ibid., 74
18 Ibid., 71
19 Ibid., 6
20 Ibid., 76
acceptance – she is not portrayed as a mere victim, despite the fact that the deal is made inside the gothic lunatic asylum and under significant duress. In the interests of creating a character more interesting and three-dimensional than the passive Gothic maiden to which everything is done and ‘whose only activity is running away’\textsuperscript{22}, May has to be held accountable for her role in the pact.

While “Bad Habits” should be read as a critique of patriarchal psychiatry and those theories that restrict the determinants of character - particularly female character - to external forces, the choice to repress and reject her sexuality was May’s and the responsibility must rest with her. In order to reinforce this message, the character of Ellen - May’s double and the embodiment of her repressed desires - had to be motivated by more than merely obtaining the freedom to enjoy her senses. She also had to be driven to impress on May that she had made an irrevocable mistake in entering into her ‘diabolical pact’ with society, and that while the patriarchy and psychiatry were deeply implicated in the repression of her sexuality, she alone would suffer the absence of true love that was its consequence.

“Bad Habits”, as an exploration of outwardly manifested inner duality, requires no small leap of faith on the part of the reader. Working with an essentially implausible plot I found reassurance in Freud’s assertion that a reader places absolute faith in an author’s created environment\textsuperscript{23}. However, seeking also to achieve an uncanny effect, I had to resist the temptation to create a world too magical or too filled with animistic beliefs as ‘many things that would be bound to seem uncanny if they happened in real life

\textsuperscript{21} Sherman, \textit{Ann Radcliffe and the Gothic Romance}, 18
\textsuperscript{22} Margaret Atwood, \textit{Curious Pursuits} (London: Virago Press, 2005), 30
\textsuperscript{23} McLintock, \textit{Sigmund Freud: The Uncanny}, 156-7
are not so in the realm of fiction\textsuperscript{24}. For example, it is impossible for a fairytale to be uncanny because by definition it presupposes a transcendence of the normal bounds of reality\textsuperscript{25}. Edmund Burke placed value on the role of obscurity in creating a gothic effect, asserting that ‘when we know the full extent of any danger, when we can accustom our eyes to it, a great deal of the apprehension vanishes’\textsuperscript{26}.

Thus I sought to lull the reader into a false sense of certainty in order to render the subsequent events unsettling\textsuperscript{27}. I painted Fremantle as the fledgling settlement it may well have been, populated with ordinary conservative colonisers and their children, horses and prisoners; an ordinary colonial town, bustling along some time in the late nineteenth century. In so doing, I promised the reader absolute normality before I set about betraying it.

The betrayal itself - the splitting of one character into two living doubles - had to be unambiguous if it was to be plausible and engaging. As the most prominent uncanny motif\textsuperscript{28}, the double presented opportunities to explore the complexities of human nature within the gothic genre, but it also presented unique challenges, the first of which was establishing a voice suitable to creating the aforementioned acceptable reality.

In order to achieve the soothing and somewhat detached voice necessary to make the work accessible, I had to strip back the menace and dislocation that was present in earlier drafts. In addition, my early experimentation with alternating the narrative point of view between the protagonist and her double rendered the narrative too murky and, as a

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 156
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 156
\textsuperscript{26} Sage, \textit{The Gothick Novel}, 34
\textsuperscript{27} McLintock, \textit{Sigmund Freud: The Uncanny}, 157
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 141
result, the demands on the reader too great. Thus it was necessary to maintain an objective, third-person narration of events throughout the story.

In drafting “Bad Habits”, I also experimented with a confused chronology of events, attempting to lend to the reading experience the chaotic irrationality of dreams. However, this turned out to be alienating rather than engaging.

Thus, in the interests of the aforementioned false sense of certainty, and since I was already demanding a significant leap of faith, I reverted to the more accessible form of straightforward chronology.

Finally, making a shift from present tense to past tense freed the work - and consequently its readers - from the vulnerability or confusion that can come with being too present or too immersed in inexplicable events. Use of the past tense gave the voice that final element of certainty and distance that was crucial to making the piece work.

In as much as it demonstrates a refusal to observe unity of character and replaces ‘authoritative truths’ with doubt, “Bad Habits” certainly seems to fit the literary genre of ‘Fantasy’. A term ‘applied rather indiscriminately to any literature which does not give a priority to realistic representations’, traditional fantasy is characterised by estrangement and duplication. It is also a genre that can not be understood in isolation from the social context within which it is written, which calls into question the social and cultural forces that are likely to have led to the creation of “Bad Habits”.

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29 Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, 1
30 Ibid., 15
31 Ibid., 11
32 Ibid., 16
33 Ibid., 3
The story conforms to a female literary tradition characterised by confinement and doubles, a tradition which has been attributed to a suffocating patriarchal culture that repressed women and dismissed their creativity. This in turn suggests a link between such a culture and the contemporary western society in which “Bad Habits” was written.

In terms of sexuality and virtue, our society appears to be in the grip of a backlash against the overly rigid repression of the Victorian era and is to a large extent defined by sexual freedom. Repression is no longer the order of the day for women, who instead find themselves living in a youth-obsessed culture in which they are encouraged at every turn to flaunt their sexuality and aspire to be objects of desire. Influenced by an entertainment industry and a culture of consumerism that exploit the power of female sexuality to sell anything from music and mobile phones to cars and beer, women find themselves still trapped on the sexuality spectrum; on one end repression, the other flagrant objectification. Both are extremes of the same order and both have the potential to be equally damaging to the female psyche.

No longer alienated or punished for expressing their sexuality, young women today are more likely to be unwittingly consigned to an objectification fantasy that in fact has little or nothing to do with their own sexual freedom and desires. The so-called music industry, for example, which increasingly approaches the kind of female objectification hitherto associated with pornography, continues to idealise the unthinking, sexualised feminine and reinforces a collective unconscious that embraces her objectification. This message is so pervasive and confusing that young women today, desiring to flaunt their sexuality, believe they are expressing something uniquely theirs, unwittingly catering to a

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34 Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the*
notion of male spectatorship – an ‘absurdity’ of male flattery\textsuperscript{35} – ‘so deeply embedded in our culture that it still structures the consciousness of many women’\textsuperscript{36}.

In “Bad Habits”, Ellen challenges Victorian notions of virtue and presents herself as a different kind of ideal, one that rejects the vigilant patrolling of femininity and values freedom more highly than social acceptance. While May aspires to the Victorian feminine ideal, Ellen dismisses the notion and views May’s conformity with contempt.

In essence, “Bad Habits” is a call to female accountability. It is a story about standing up for one’s own truths or suffering the consequences of betraying them.

\textit{Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination} (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984), 64
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 63
The late nineteenth century was a period of great change in Fremantle. Convict transportation to the port ceased in 1868, after some 10,000 convicts had been transported from Britain over a period of eighteen years, but the spirit of the small, bleak town was tainted by its dominating institutions. Fremantle was intended to be a prison town and the lunatic asylum and convict establishment were impressive buildings, dominating the skyline as emblems of social order and human misery, but the town’s burgeoning mercantile élite had something else in mind. They dreamed of a thriving port city and concentrated their efforts on an essential overhaul of the primitive harbour facilities.

Between 1870 and 1900, this mercantile élite forged a network that was ‘closely knit in kinship, commerce and social position, and united, with two exceptions, within the brotherhood of freemasonry’. ‘Jewish, Catholic and Protestant in religion; gentry, servant and convict in origin; saintly and devilish by disposition’, the collective influence of the sixteen businessmen and one businesswoman was the driving force behind a steady period of growth. Owing to the political clout of this ‘disparate assemblage’, Fremantle ‘changed from a dusty, grey little hamlet, with a ‘harbour’ consisting of a few jetties and an exposed anchorage,

37 John Dowson, *Old Fremantle*, 2 ed. (Crawley: University of Western Australia Press, 2004), 125
39 Ibid.,1
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
to a port city with a fine man-made harbour, a port able to accommodate the largest ships in the world”42.

But there was not much they could do about their geographical isolation. Miles from England and from Australia’s eastern states, Fremantle was also separated from its own capital, Perth, by twelve miles of shallow, barely navigable river and ‘a stretch of road little better than a sand track’43. This isolation must have been keenly felt by the settlers, so determined to create a Victorian-style ‘city’ in a place so hostile to it, and it lends a certain vulnerability to the colourless eyes staring out from grainy snapshots of that other time.

My aim with “Bad Habits” was to breathe life into these old photographs, taken in the days before a fully functioning harbour was part of the Fremantle identity. I wanted to breathe life into the ghoulish aesthetics of the place, particularly the old Fremantle lunatic asylum, now a welcoming arts centre, but in its early days a labyrinth of sanctioned cruelty.

Built by convicts in the 1860s to deal with the growing number of ‘those prisoners who had become a danger to their fellow convicts and those who guarded them’44, early photographs show the asylum as a gloomy, gothic structure with an austere perimeter wall45. With three angular facades pointing skyward, it was a classic example of gothic architecture, which is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as being ‘the style of

42 Ibid., 4
43 Ibid., 3
44 This quote taken from a Fremantle Museum information leaflet titled ‘History of the Fremantle Museum Building’
45 Dowson, Old Fremantle, 126-7
architecture prevalent in Western Europe from the twelfth to the sixteenth century, of which the chief characteristic is the pointed arch⁴⁶.

However, what took place inside the labyrinthine institution was significantly more gothic than its impressive architecture.

Insanity first became a problem in Fremantle in 1857, when the British establishment began shipping convicts, including the criminally insane, to the colony⁴⁷. However, it is also possible that environmental conditions contributed to its prevalence. Dr George Attfield, a convict establishment surgeon, was ‘inclined to think that the intense heat of this climate has a great tendency to gradually produce or rekindle the latent spark of insanity⁴⁸.

For many years, the government turned a deaf ear to the demands of Dr Henry Barnett, who ran the asylum for twenty four years, during which time he sought in vain to raise its facilities to ‘modern’ standards⁴⁹. Overcrowding at the asylum meant that prisoners supervised inmates, ‘pauper lunatics’ were lumped in with ‘paying patients’⁵⁰ and ‘noisy maniacs’ and ‘incurable congenital idiots’ were often left untreated ‘until they improved more or less by accident or died’⁵¹. Dr Barnett requested an assistant and demanded extensions or a new site, but the government dragged its feet until at last it found itself on the receiving end of scathing criticism in editorials published in the local newspaper, the ‘West Australian’.

⁴⁶ Oxford English Dictionary Online (Cited).
⁴⁷ A.S. Ellis, Eloquent Testimony: The Story of the Mental Health Services in Western Australia 1830-1875 (Nedlands: UWA Press, 1984), 19
⁴⁸ Ibid., 20
⁴⁹ The West Australian, 18 November 1897, 4
⁵⁰ Ellis, Eloquent Testimony: The Story of the Mental Health Services in Western Australia 1830-1875, 29
⁵¹ Ibid., 35-8
One editorial, a response to Dr Barnett’s annual report tabled in parliament in 1896, explains that the asylum admitted 90 patients during 1896, 54 more than the previous year, and that would-be patients were being turned away and kept in jail cells until space could be made available.\footnote{The West Australian, 18 November 1897, 4}

Dr Barnett wanted to retain the barrack-style asylum for the ‘chronic and violent’ cases of criminal insanity and create a cottage-based system elsewhere for ‘those with the milder forms of insanity’, the building of which would have cost the government significantly more than the £55,000 it eventually assigned for a new wing to ease congestion.\footnote{Ibid.}

This was some concession, given that in 1895 the superintendent reported near capacity and had an architect draw up plans for a new female wing, all in vain. ‘The repeated and urgent representations of the superintendent were totally neglected: no tenders were called for, and, saving that an occasional party of prisoners were sometimes sent to level the site, nothing was done.’\footnote{“Fremantle Lunatic Asylum: The Annual Report,” The West Australian, 18 November 1897, 2}

Some three years earlier, a ‘West Australian’ editorial had deplored the asylum system in the strongest terms, condemning as ‘shamefully deficient’ the accommodation of ‘those who are afflicted by the stroke of the Almighty, and most commonly for the sins of those who gave them birth’.\footnote{“Fremantle Lunatic Asylum: The Annual Report,” The West Australian, 18 November 1897, 2}

‘For ourselves we entertain but little doubt that at no long period of time, a day will arise when the treatment of the insane during the nineteenth century will be pointed to as one of the great unacknowledged crimes of the older civilization. It will be classed
on a footing with the horrors of the prison system, slavery, the treatment of children in factories and mines, with the old criminal methods, in short with the worst species of cruelty, tyranny and disregard of the claims of the weaker members of the community upon the stronger.\textsuperscript{56}

The same editorial described the conditions in which individuals suffering vastly different illnesses were confined together: ‘Hapless creatures, in all degrees of imbecility and insanity, those who are just not able to take care of themselves, those who have become lunatic from intense depravity, and who retain their ideas and their habits in their confinement, those who occupy themselves daily with the most disgusting practices, the creatures so mad that he or she is utterly unconscious of the effect of what they do or say, or of what others may do or say – these are herded together. In the society of beings, at many of whom one look is enough to inspire feelings of repugnance and horror which can not be conquered, are to be found the man whose defect is some overpowering idea which makes him a monomaniac perhaps on a single subject, but on other questions, and when not under its dominion, leaves him fully in possession of all his sense and powers of observation and feeling, or the woman who may be of a fastidious delicacy, and who preserves her refinement and sensitive qualities, or endeavours to preserve them, among the horrible surroundings to which she is condemned by the callous laws of a people and State that ought to protect her. We take it upon ourselves to say that were the legislators of the world compelled, once a quarter, to visit the asylums they maintain, the grievous wrong which is done these afflicted beings would soon come to an end.’\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{55} The West Australian, 6 July 1894, 4
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
Arguing for an asylum in the country, the editorialist empathised with the existing asylum’s neighbours, subjected to miserable sounds emanating from the institution; but the thrust of his argument was that the patients making such sounds would suffer less if they could ‘busy themselves’ in ‘rustic surroundings’58. ‘The comparative idleness which is inevitable in such an establishment as is maintained in Fremantle, is one of the features most open to reprobation in the interests of those condemned to what is substantially a living tomb’59.

The government at last established a select committee to hold an inquiry into the situation, during which they considered a letter written by a man committed to the asylum for, in his words, a ‘trifling temporary cerebral derangement’60.

Describing the classification of inmates as limited to either rowdy or comparatively docile61, James Shaw explains that ‘the dangerous individuals were either restricted by a primitive form of straight waistcoat or, during periods of rabid violence, were confined in narrow, gloomy cells, where they reigned unquestioned monarchs of all they surveyed’62.

His description of ablutions might be amusing if it were not so sad. ‘A stranger, on perceiving the alacrity displayed by some of the “patients” in disrobing, would have naturally argued that a form of “dementia” antithetical to hydrophobia was very prevalent; a little further observation would, however, have enlightened him as to the “rationale” of this “go-as-you-please” contest for “first water”. The contents of each bath are (or were)

58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
60 Audrey Fowler, "Behind These Walls" (1975), 42
61 Ibid., 45
62 Ibid., 46
considered officially sufficient to deterge the weekly accretions of at least three “patients”’. He paints a bleak picture of the yard, too, where patients spent an average of eleven or twelve hours a day in the open, regardless of the weather, with ‘a wall-less shed’ as the only form of protection against the elements. An ‘oblong expanse of about two acres, shut in by lofty walls, above which appeared the masts of shipping and an occasional roof-top’ was allegedly populated with muttering characters, who wandered aimlessly about while ‘sundry religious and political maniacs “held forth” in stentorian tones to unheeding ears’ while hanging from the branches of stunted fig trees.

‘Round and round the gravelled paths that skirted and traversed the area, tramped or “jogged” restless, wild-eyed, strangely-gesturing sufferers, who jabbered, yelled, cried and cursed in discordant chorus. One forlorn wretch, as he swiftly paced his endless round, sang unceasingly a hideous jargon with a sad, rhythmic refrain, Here was a poor epileptic foaming at the mouth and struggling on the rough stones in a fit – an event of such common occurrence that not even a warder takes heed.

Shaw refers to ‘occasional shrieks and wailing chant from the female quarters’ and ‘blood-curdling ravings of the violent maniacs in the refractory cells, punctuated by the horrible din these unfortunes raised by battering the doors and gratings with their tin utensils’.  

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63 Ibid., 46-7  
64 Ibid., 58  
65 Ibid., 48-9  
66 Ibid., 49  
67 Ibid., 54
‘No-one who has not occupied a similar position can conceive the full horror of the agonised ravings that almost nightly broke my slumbers, as words must utterly fail to convey aught save the mere articulated expressions of anguish’.

It is easy to see how the mere inclusion of such an institution in a work of fiction steers it into the gothic genre.

Another building included in “Bad Habits” for its gothic qualities was a structure known as ‘Manning’s Folly’. The merchant Charles Manning built it on the corner of Pakenham and Short Streets in 1858, and it was demolished in 1928, never having fulfilled his dream of housing his large family and serving as a sanatorium for Indian officers. He built the mammoth ‘folly’, apparently to display his family wealth, but also to pursue his hobby of astronomy, which explains the existence of the stately observatory from which May and Ellen experience their alienation from Fremantle society.

*Ellen’s face was lit by the small fire. Her eyes gleamed in the orange light as sparks swirled up from its heart.*

*‘Have you ever stood near the whalers’ tunnel and looked east down High Street, to where the road disappears into the sky? While you were still inside I would stand there and imagine that someone or something was about to ride in and wreak havoc on this place.’*

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68 Ibid., 55-6
69 Dowson, *Old Fremantle*, 95
70 Ibid., 162
May listened, watching the flames in the darkness. They were in the observatory of the abandoned Manning’s Folly on Pakenham Street, once the grand home of the rate-collector and his wife, but now just a hulking block of stone and moth-eaten windows; the same observatory whose view May had imagined that first morning on the hill. It was a clear night and a million stars watched over the ocean murmuring in the darkness below.

‘Picture their smug little faces, contorted in pain,’ Ellen continued. ‘Who would come to save them? No one, that’s who. No-one would make it in time.’ She smiled as, in her mind, the town burned and people ran; guards down, fear exposed.

‘Why do you say such things?’ May asked.

‘Because I think them,’ Ellen replied. ‘You used to think them too, remember?’

The fire seemed to lose some of its heat as her smile faded and her eyes crept under May’s skin. Revellers hooted and sang somewhere in the distance. Nobody knew they were there, and most of them thought the building was cursed anyway, so they stayed away, except to throw stones through the remaining windows.
According to a descendent, the building’s name ‘became attached to it because of its many windows, which invited the stones of vandals’. However, in the words of historian Patricia Brown, ‘(the folly’s) great extravagance and later history do call to mind one of the dictionary meanings of ‘folly’: a costly enterprise leading to an absurd or financially ruinous outcome’\(^{71}\). My inclusion of unhappy ghosts in ‘the folly’, designed to create an uncanny and somewhat chilling atmosphere, took their form from the suggestion that Charles Manning had family difficulties and an unhappy marriage, characterised by loud domestic disputes\(^ {72}\).

*Somewhere below there was a heavy, repetitive thud; a fist pounding on a table. It was followed by a roar and a crash, and then footsteps on the stairs. A woman’s voice, scornful and foreign, drifted in smoky fragments to the observatory, and then there was silence. Terror crept over May and coiled itself around her.*

Thus, Fremantle’s appeal as a location for a work of gothic fiction lay for me in its aforementioned isolation, in its harsh glare and persistent lack of rain, and, particularly, in the cruel institutionalisation of the mentally ill. Having cast the asylum and ‘Mannings Folly’ as Fremantle’s gothic, gloomy castles, I began to investigate the links between the gothic literary tradition and the Victorian approach to madness, which, not surprisingly, feature commonly in analyses of female authorship.

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\(^{72}\) Ibid., 178
I have explained that I aimed to invoke nineteenth-century Fremantle’s unsettling aesthetics in order to create an uncanny atmosphere in which to explore the complexities of a divided self. I have also described how the settlement’s history lends itself to the gothic genre, dominated as it was by the prison and the ‘living tomb’ of the asylum and isolated in a vast, untameable landscape.

The first ‘Goths’ were Germanic tribes, ‘who in the third, fourth, and fifth centuries, invaded both the Eastern and Western empires, and founded kingdoms in Italy, France, and Spain’, gaining a reputation for ignorance, vandalism, lack of taste and barbarism73. The word today is more likely to refer to a subculture of people who celebrate aesthetic and intellectual darkness, drawn together by music ‘deriving originally from punk, and characterised by the dramatically stark appearance of its performers and followers, reminiscent of the protagonists of (especially cinematic) Gothic fantasy, and by mystical or apocalyptic lyrics’74.

Gothic literature is not far removed from this celebration of the dark or mythical aspects of humanity. If the gothic writer is considered ‘an explorer of man’s “darker” nature and the dilemmas of character’75, then certainly “Bad Habits” – as an exploration of the dilemmas of a divided self, of a woman struggling with the meaning of virtue –

73 Oxford English Dictionary Online
74 Ibid.
75 Sherman, Ann Radcliffe and the Gothic Romance , 20
should be called a work of gothic fiction. However, it deviates from the gothic tradition in some respects, particularly in that it does not conform to the requirement that ‘everything just happens to the passive innocent girl,’ who is fighting off the threat of seduction, rape or marriage\textsuperscript{76}. Instead, while an externally imposed notion of femininity is a contributing factor in her self-denial, the heroine in “Bad Habits” plays an active role in repressing her perceived darker impulses and fracturing her identity into two parts.

Also useful to this thesis is the definition of a gothic story as one in which ‘nothingness, vulnerability and penetration define the heroine’s major anxiety\textsuperscript{77}. Alone and small in a settlement caught between a vast desert and a heaving ocean, May certainly feels dwarfed and powerless to ward off her fear of the nothingness that surrounds her. When she arrives in Fremantle, May is entranced by the gleaming winding river, but unsettled by the isolation of the town.

\textit{May liked the spaces between the buildings, where the trees and the sky were left to their own devices and anything could happen, but as she sat there, watching the town wake up household by household, she felt a dark, shifting panic at the thought of the space behind her, pulling away into incomprehensible vastness.}

However, perhaps more importantly, it is the notion of repression that lies at the heart of the uncanny happenings in “Bad Habits”. As the resurgence of that which has been estranged through repression\textsuperscript{78}, the uncanny is, in “Bad Habits”, closely linked to an

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 18-19
\item \textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 3
\item \textsuperscript{78} McLintock, \textit{Sigmund Freud: The Uncanny}, 148
\end{itemize}
interrogation of the ideal Victorian woman, who, I would argue, is defined and exalted largely in terms of her ability to repress. In order to be feminine, women worked very hard to repress that which was deemed unladylike, such as sexuality, appetite, aggression, intellect and ambition, and resigned themselves to the social mores that reserved such things for the masculine identity.

In *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces*, Amanda Anderson explores the history of social science and its impact on Victorian notions of character development, with particular reference to the discourse on virtue, self-agency and fallenness between 1840 and 1860. While this predates the narrative of “Bad Habits”, it helps to establish the social context in which it is set and within which such female identity crises as that exaggerated in the work may have taken place.

In her own words, Anderson analyses the ‘pervasive rhetoric of fallenness in mid-Victorian culture, one that constitutes sexually compromised women as lacking the autonomy and coherence of the normative masculine subject’, and evaluates it using John Stuart Mill’s discussions of intrinsic versus extrinsic factors in character development. She surmises that prostitution was a ‘vexing problem for philosophy’ because it seemed to highlight an inconsistency within the accepted notions of gender and agency and made unclear the implications for redemption. ‘The virtuous domestic woman was certainly expected to be self consistent and, to a certain extent, self-regulating. Crucially, however, she was often not accorded the same level of rational

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80 Ibid., 23
81 Ibid., 1
control and deliberative consciousness that is so prominent in the construction of 
masculine virtue, or character in Mill’s sense.\textsuperscript{83}

Having thus rendered women characterless, theorists also dismissed the idea of 
female sexual desire and agency, blaming aggressive male sexuality for female ‘lapses’ 
so as to spare the notion of innate feminine virtue ‘the stain of licentious desire’\textsuperscript{84}. 
Without a well regulated, sufficiently repressed self, a woman was highly susceptible to 
the clutches of aggressive sexuality, and if she fell, blameless or otherwise, she slid down 
the one-way spiral of the fallen woman, and this illustrates the fundamental injustice of 
the notion of the fallen woman. If a woman was inherently characterless, how could she 
be expected to regulate her behaviour? And if the seducing man was at fault, why was it 
the woman who ‘fell’?

At the mercy of an incoherent yet undisputed link between fallenness and lack of 
agency, and deemed too characterless to be the keepers of their virtue, Victorian women 
trod a very fine line between femininity and irredeemable exile. Polarised into ‘the 
angel/whore split so popular among the Victorians’\textsuperscript{85}, the female identity was not allowed 
any grey areas when it came to sexuality, and women faced profound and confusing 
cultural forces when they attempted to emerge from the domestic shadows into the 
exclusively male public domain. May and Ellen challenge this polarity, even as they to 
some extent represent it.

While ‘fallenness’ was unique to women, the expectations placed on men to 
conform to Victorian masculine ideals were exposed as equally damaging when, during

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 65
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 42
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 43
and after World War I, society was confronted with male symptoms of hysteria, hitherto thought to be a female condition. Victorian patriarchal society expected men to live up to a restrictive notion of masculine superiority, which meant demonstrating rigid self-control and stoicism in the face of fear. War propaganda exaggerated these expectations, resulting in soldiers repressing the horrors of their war experiences in order to spare themselves an identity crisis over their masculinity\(^{86}\).

‘Both men and officers had internalised these expectations as thoroughly as any Victorian woman had internalised her lesson about feminine nature. When all signs of physical fear were judged as weakness and where alternatives to combat – pacifism, conscientious objection, desertion, even suicide – were viewed as unmanly, men were silenced and immobilised and forced, like women, to experience their conflicts through the body. Placed in intolerable circumstances of stress, and expected to react with unnatural “courage”, thousands of soldiers instead reacted with the symptoms of hysteria\(^{87}\).

So Victorian men too suffered the effects of patriarchal repression, but it was not until the post-war recognition of male neuroses that Victorian gender roles were questioned. Shellshock, not feminism, is to be credited for ‘a reconsideration of all the basic concepts of English psychiatric practice’\(^ {88}\). Before any such challenges to gender theory arose, doctors, lawyers and judges generally saw depression, diminished control

\(^85\) Atwood, *Curious Pursuits*, 171
\(^87\) Ibid.
\(^88\) Ibid., 167
and poverty as part of women’s nature instead of as social problems. Unmarried women were considered redundant, superfluous and odd beings with nothing to offer society\textsuperscript{89}.

It is this pre-war Victorian preoccupation with madness as a female condition instead of a social symptom that ties patriarchy and the Fremantle lunatic asylum into my experimentation with the uncanny mode. Adding to the gothic horrors perpetrated on asylum inmates of both genders in nineteenth-century Fremantle, the systematic repression of mysterious or subversive female impulses are at the heart of this exploration of female sexuality and the divided self.

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., 61
FEMALE INSANITY

& THE GOTHIC LITERARY TRADITION

Female insanity is a common literary theme, manifesting in many archetypal characters, from Shakespeare’s Ophelia to Charlotte Bronte’s Bertha Mason. The latter, the hidden mad wife of Rochester in Jane Eyre, is described as a ‘paradigmatic figure’ for contemporary feminist critics\(^90\), a ‘monster of sexual appetite’ who embodies the link between madness and female sexuality\(^91\). She is the ‘dark double who stands for the heroine’s anger and desire, as well as for all the repressed creative anxiety of the nineteenth-century woman writer\(^92\).

In examining female writers’ use of the archetypal madwoman and its related themes, imprisonment and doubles, this chapter seeks to draw a connection between the subconscious metaphors employed in the gothic and the patriarchal repression of female identity and creativity.

Gilbert and Gubar suggest that such themes are prevalent in a female literary tradition spanning numerous genres, authors and decades, beginning in the nineteenth century\(^93\). ‘Images of enclosure and escape, fantasies in which maddened doubles functioned as asocial surrogates for docile selves, metaphors of physical discomfort manifested in frozen landscapes and fiery interiors – such patterns recurred throughout

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\(^{90}\) Showalter, The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980 , 68
\(^{91}\) Ibid., 67
\(^{92}\) Ibid., 68
\(^{93}\) Gilbert and Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination , xi
this tradition'. That these women wrote in isolation from one another suggests that these perhaps subconscious outpourings were symptomatic of the restrictive social order in which they lived.

Gilbert and Gubar suggest that Charlotte Brontë’s fiction reveals female victimisation as the common thread linking this use of doubles and the imagery of enclosure. ‘Confined within uncomfortable selves as well as within uncomfortable spaces, her heroines can not escape the displaced or disguised representatives of their own feared impulses. Therefore they are destined to endure the repetition of what Freud called “the return of the repressed”’.

In addition, they argue that works in the female literary tradition are frequently rearrangements of the elements used in Brontë’s Jane Eyre: ‘Examining the psychosocial implications of a “haunted” ancestral mansion, such a tale explores the tension between parlor and attic, the psychic split between the lady who submits to male dicta and the lunatic who rebels’.

Hence, it would seem, the female gothic literary tradition, which is characterised by the frequent use of helpless maidens dwarfed by towering landscapes, fleeing labyrinthine confinement, haunted by ‘lunatic’ alter egos and fighting to defend that most treasured of Victorian women’s possessions, their virtue.

Much of this tradition of confinement and duality emerged from a predominantly Christian culture that understood creativity only in male terms. That the ‘metaphoric
literary paternity’ so dismissive of the efforts of women authors\textsuperscript{99} also worshipped an omnipotent male god, credited with single-handedly creating the earth and all its living creatures, is no coincidence. Born into a culture ‘that has not only defined her gender but shaped her mind’\textsuperscript{100} and with this ‘proudly masculine cosmic Author’ as the only available role model for authorship\textsuperscript{101}, women absorbed lesson after lesson in which their gender was defined as subservient, secondary and inferior.

In the Bible story of creation and original sin, detailed in the book of Genesis, we read that not only was Eve easily tempted by the snake to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge, God’s forbidden fruit\textsuperscript{102}, but that she led Adam astray too. God’s punishment reflects the distribution of guilt between them. While Adam was to battle weeds and difficult soil for the rest of his days\textsuperscript{103}, Eve would suffer more troublesome pregnancies and childbirth than was originally planned. ‘In spite of this,’ God told her, ‘you will still have desire for your husband, yet you will be subject to him’\textsuperscript{104}.

If the Bible proved inadequate ammunition for ensuring female subordination, there was always the trump card of ‘feminine virtue’, the only thing standing between a woman’s freedom and her irredeemable exile. Adam, with God’s authority, ‘named his wife Eve’\textsuperscript{105}, and in the same way male authors like the bilious Jonathon Swift, with

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., 13
\textsuperscript{100} Gilbert and Gubar, \textit{The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination}, 79
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 7
\textsuperscript{102} \textit{Holy Bible: Good News Edition, with Deuterocanonicals/Apocrypha}, trans. United Bible Societies, 5 ed. (Cape Town: Bible Society of South Africa, 1985), 6 (Genesis 3:6)
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 6-7 (Genesis 3:17-19)
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 6 (Genesis 3:16)
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 7 (Genesis 4:20)
\end{flushleft}
religion and mythology on their side, created the archetypal madwoman or witch; the abhorrent, outspoken, sexualised and demonic shadow of the exalted feminine. Thus confused about her own role in creation, the female author had to overcome significantly entrenched obstacles in order to pick up the pen, and if she managed to do that, she was left with limited options if she wanted her work published. She could either publish anonymously or with a male pseudonym, or she could confess her limitations and stick to ‘inferior’ womanly subject matter. ‘Inevitably, as we shall see, the literature produced by women confronted with such anxiety-inducing choices has been strongly marked not only by an obsessive interest in these limited options, but also by obsessive imagery of confinement that reveals the ways in which female artists felt trapped and sickened by both suffocating alternatives and by the culture that created them.

This perhaps explains why female authors in the Victorian period felt safest writing gothic novels. By writing such works, in which ‘the intrigues, excitations, and danger which the heroine suffers are through no fault of her own – everything just happens to the passive, innocent girl’, they displayed a suitable reverence for and fear of the male world.

Leona Sherman, in her analysis of eighteenth-century author Ann Radcliffe suggests that the tendency of female authors to place their heroines in fearsome gothic landscapes reveals an understandable ‘dissatisfaction, defenselessness, and alienation in a

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106 Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*
107 Ibid., 64
108 Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*
world ordered by the male-projected ideal of femininity\textsuperscript{110}. ‘Eighteenth century literary heroines had to resist objectionable marriages, seduction, rape and jealousy in a world dominated by these things, and in which they had little power or few means to defend themselves, and were ruined if they failed’\textsuperscript{111}.

Ruination in Fremantle could mean a diagnosis of moral insanity and a period of confinement in the lunatic asylum, an experience bound to leave its scars on a woman’s sense of her self and her place in the world. For women who baffled the patriarchy with their discontent, who displayed too much interest in men or who did not submit to the prevailing Anglican dogma of wifely obedience\textsuperscript{112}, confinement within patriarchal expectations could be more than metaphorical.

The diagnosis of ‘moral insanity’ finds its origins in Victorian psychiatry. Conceived in 1835 by James Cowl Prichard, its definition was broad enough to ‘take in almost any kind of behaviour regarded as abnormal or disruptive by community standards’\textsuperscript{113}.

English psychiatry viewed female sexuality with suspicion, and in Fremantle, as in England, the science demonstrated its patriarchal convictions through sustained efforts to ‘fix’ women who deviated from submissive femininity\textsuperscript{114}. Sexuality was often blamed for the baffling symptoms women presented with. ‘Nineteenth-century medical treatments designed to control the reproductive system strongly suggest male

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 18
\textsuperscript{111} Sherman, \textit{Ann Radcliffe and the Gothic Romance}
\textsuperscript{112} Brown, \textit{The Merchant Princes of Fremantle: The Rise and Decline of a Colonial Elite: 1870-1900 } , 164
\textsuperscript{113} Showalter, \textit{The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980 } , 29
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 81
psychiatrists’ fears of female sexuality. Indeed, uncontrolled sexuality seemed the major, almost defining symptom of insanity in women 115.

Psychiatrists ‘wrote often of nymphomania’116 and tried all manner of barbaric treatments to reign in baffling or ‘unladylike’ female symptoms. ‘The most extreme and nightmarish effort to manage women’s minds by regulating their bodies was Dr Isaac Baker Brown’s surgical practice of clitoridectomy as a cure for female insanity’117. Convinced that masturbation lay behind female insanity and that surgical removal of the clitoris would help women to ‘govern themselves’, thus preventing their descent through madness into death, Dr Brown performed his surgery in his private clinic, going as far as to remove some women’s labia, between 1859 and 1866118.

One clue of this inevitable ‘descent’, according to Dr Brown, was that ‘such girls often wanted to work, to escape from home and become nurses or sisters of charity’119. After undergoing ‘the surgical enforcement of an ideology that restricts female sexuality to reproduction’, his victims ‘gave up their independent desires and protests, and became docile child-bearers’120.

There is nothing to suggest such mutilations took place in the Fremantle asylum. Nonetheless, women in the colony, especially if they were of the lower classes, were better off hiding their disappointment with life or appearing suitably selfless if they valued any semblance of freedom. If they revealed their ‘symptoms’ of irreverence or

115 Ibid., 74
116 Ibid.
117 Ibid., 75
118 Ibid., 76
119 Ibid.
120 Ibid., 77
appeared to want more from life than marriage, children and servitude, women faced a very real threat of incarceration.

Authorities at the Fremantle asylum are said to have used the diagnosis of ‘moral insanity’ loosely, applying it to women suffering alcoholism, post-natal depression or menopause. ‘Lonely life or love affairs were two causes that could be considered moral insanity or living in sin, as in the case of a woman, certified insane, who preferred to live with a man rather than marry him’.

The example of Sarah Burns played a role in the conception of “Bad Habits” as her case demonstrates the reach of this loose definition of certifiable madness. Sarah Burns was admitted to the temporary asylum – used while the one on Finnerty Street was being built – because she refused to work as a servant. ‘As a migrant girl, she had a moral obligation to earn her keep. Her refusal to do so and a preference for the social company of young men saw Sarah admitted to the asylum in 1858 diagnosed as ‘moral insanity with a tendency to promiscuity’.

In hindsight, this dubious diagnosis appears to be little more than a means of controlling young women who resisted the ‘the straitjacket of a weird but mandatory feminine gentility’. Powerless to resist their incarceration and, as a result of the Victorian technique of ‘moral management’, persuaded to be more suitably preoccupied with their virtue, such women actually lived those themes of terror and captivity so common to the gothic tradition. Those who were reluctant to conform to their female

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121 Margaret McPherson, "A Class of Utterly Useless Men," in Constructing a colony: The convict legacy (McPherson, Margaret, 2000), 7
122 Ibid.
123 Ibid.
124 Showalter, The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980, 8
roles, or perhaps too willing to succumb to those who would seduce them, would have had to maintain a convincing mask of passive obedience to avoid becoming true gothic heroines, persecuted and locked away with the deranged.

As such, while it was perhaps a necessary evil to protect free citizens from the criminally insane, the lunatic asylum was deeply implicated in the repression of women’s more human impulses, coercing them to project and embody the stereotype of an outrageously narrow, vacuous and self-sacrificing femininity.

‘In a society that not only perceived women as childlike, irrational and sexually unstable but also rendered them legally powerless and economically marginal, it is not surprising that they should have formed the greater part of the residual categories of deviance from which doctors drew a lucrative practice and asylums much of their population.’

It is little wonder then that ‘the insane asylum is the contemporary locale of the female Gothic novel,’ or that Fremantle’s asylum tainted my impression of the early port city to the extent that my historical fiction emerged as decidedly gothic.

This chapter has established a link between a female literary tradition littered with archetypal madwomen, imprisonment and doubles, and the Victorian tendency to diagnose as mad those women who veered off the narrow path of femininity. It explores this notion of subordinate femininity, created and perpetuated by a male literary tradition bent on shaping the female identity according to masculine expectations. Supported by Victorian society’s faith in an omnipotent male God, women thus ‘created’ by male authors were either sexually passive angels of the house, receptive to patriarchal demands,

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125 Ibid., 73
or mad devilish whores, using supernatural powers to attempt to undermine honourable
masculine endeavours. This division did not leave much room for female experimentation
and women walked a tightrope of virtue, conveying their subsequent anxiety through
subversive gothic tales of imprisonment and double identities.

It is this Victorian polarisation of female characteristics - a symptom of deeply
entrenched patriarchy - that “Bad Habits” interrogates.

126 Ibid., 210
“Bad Habits”, through its use of the double, delves into the relationship between a socially acceptable mask and the true character it hides. The heroine, May, is a young woman whose impulses have been so repressed by her social mask that her identity has become defined by an extreme duality. Her two ‘selves’ have reached a point of irreconcilable alienation from one another, to the extent that when sufficient pressure is applied to May in the lunatic asylum, her duality transcends internal polarities and becomes an actual fracturing into two separate selves, each with its own body.

To achieve this irreconcilable duality, I needed to create a character - Ellen - who would be suitably antagonistic to social virtue. Judging by Victorian psychiatry’s extreme reaction to female sexuality and signs of female autonomy, a reaction echoed in much male-authored literature, these were perhaps the most demonised threats to such virtue. Thus autonomy and sexual freedom were obvious choices for the defining characteristics of my protagonist’s double.

The story begins as its heroine sails for Fremantle, a young woman with no financial support other than from her work as an actress. May Ellen Moss’s first view of Fremantle highlights the settlement’s vulnerability and makes its isolation somewhat unsettling, hinting at her own imminent sense of alienation and fear.

*Falling asleep was an act of surrender as the boat rocked and heaved on the waves, sailing for the small town of Fremantle at the mouth of the Swan River.*

*May dreamed of shadowy forms on a stage that moved like ocean swells.*
On the journey’s final morning, she watched from the deck as the boat pulled up against the landing jetty, a bony arm of wood and stone reaching out into the water. The huddle of buildings looked so alone, clinging quietly to life on a coastline that stretched on forever.

This fledgling colonial port was not known for its theatre in the late nineteenth century. In fact, there was ‘little by way of professional entertainment in Fremantle by the turn of the century’127. However, young members of the mercantile élite Michael Samson and William Marmion did start a dramatic company in 1869, whose members and audiences belonged to the fashionable élite128. Michael Samson makes a cameo appearance in “Bad Habits” when he is collared by the abominable Beebe on the boat. Beebe is the director who has brought May and the rest of his troupe to the fledgling settlement, and he is at his most ingratiating with Michael Samson, seeing him as a vital contact in making ‘the tour’ happen.

May portrays a ‘fallen’ woman on stage, which both reflects colonial society’s preoccupation with female virtue and again hints at what is to come. When she steps out on stage, May feels the effects of exposing herself to the silent attention of the audience, and to the critical gaze of her disembodied double, thereby becoming aware of her essential duality. Thus, in effect observing herself, she personifies John Berger’s assertion that a woman ‘is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself’

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128 Ibid.
as ‘from earliest childhood, she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually’\textsuperscript{129}.

A woman’s identity, according to Berger, is defined by duality because instead of being free to define herself on her own terms, she is taught that the success of her life depends on how she is seen by men\textsuperscript{130}. Or, as Elaine Showalter puts it, ‘woman’s psyche is split in two by her constructed awareness of herself as a visual object and her resulting double role as actor and spectator’\textsuperscript{131}.

It is when she is performing, being looked at, that May senses her alter ego’s disapproval of her choice to be a ‘visual object’ subjected to society’s gaze, and thus she begins to be defined by her duality.

\textit{Back in the wings, freshly powdered and adorned, she watched as Beebe fumbled through a convoluted tirade. She stared at the bead of sweat that quivered on the end of his nose, imagining it was her mind holding it there, and that it was her silent command that allowed it to fall into the dank eternity of his waistcoat.}

\textit{When she stepped out to join him, to fawn over and adore him, she left in the darkness a shadow of herself, a shadow self she called Ellen, who was otherwise always with her, whispering in her ear or laughing her distant laugh; a tissue-thin presence who watched her, waiting with infinite patience for her to come out of the light.}

\textsuperscript{129} Berger, \textit{Ways of Seeing}, 46
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{131} Showalter, \textit{The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980}, 212
In stark contrast to May’s experience as a performer, Ellen believes in the private ownership of her experience and thus rejects the notion that she is watched and measured - and should measure herself - against a certain definition of femininity. This estranged ego aspect represents a choice to be free, to behave shamelessly and to give in to her senses, oblivious to the eyes and judgements of others. Thus she represents resistance to the patriarchal order of colonial society, the order out of which Berger’s assertions arise, and hers is just the sort of resistance women were encouraged – or forced – to repress.

Feminine virtue was highly prized, and thus an effective tool of manipulation. It was extremely restrictive and those women who sought to be esteemed for their virtue were expected to demonstrate the ‘traits of self sacrifice and service so convenient for the comfort of a patriarchal society’\(^{132}\). While May has absorbed this social code and adjusted her behaviour accordingly, the part of her governed by Ellen rejects such a limiting view of herself, preferring to experience life without the damaging forces of a steadily entrenched repression.

Ellen, then, exemplifies authenticity and the freedom of her sensory experience, while May, the surveyed ‘performer’, is resigned to artifice in the interests of securing attentive approval under society’s gaze. However, thus exposed, she must maintain an appropriate degree of restraint, of resistance to temptation, of control over her senses, especially considering the fact that ‘Victorian culture generally associated actresses with prostitutes, perceiving both as ‘public’ and ‘false’ women’\(^{133}\). It is this wrestle between authenticity and artifice that causes her defining duality to become a problem, although in

\(^{132}\) Ibid., 122
\(^{133}\) Anderson, *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces: The Rhetoric of Fallenness in Victorian Culture*, 58
the early stages of the narration the conflict between her two ‘selves’ occurs within one body and is merely a hint at her imminent physical division.

The catalyst for the actual split of May into two selves is her confusion over her sexuality. Temptation arises in the form of Jonathon Jones, a Fremantle photographer who stirs forbidden desires in her, giving rise to feelings she has learned to repress and, fearfully, to attribute to her darker ‘other’ self. She is able to behave in a suitably self-conscious and virtuous way at first, but she underestimates the power of her not-yet-detached double, Ellen, whose refusal to acknowledge her precarious status as a woman surveyed makes her dangerous and renders May vulnerable to the long arm of psychiatry.

Jones unwittingly lures Ellen out of hiding for just the briefest moment, but it is long enough for him to capture her on film, thereby creating an image that proves her existence and thus further deepens the division between the two selves.

‘You’re quite beautiful, I suppose you know,’ he said, watching a blush steal up her neck.

*He did not know it was Ellen who blinked in the dim room then, brushing off the trappings of May’s well-bred restraint. He did not know it was Ellen whose eyes grew soft, whose neck grew a little longer, and who dropped her chin, subtly, deliberately, drawing him in. He could not have known, even though it was like watching her emerge from someone else’s portrait.*
'I suppose I do,' she said, with the smile he had been waiting for. He savoured more than usual the stretched moment of the open shutter, but when it was over, when he revealed himself again as the man beneath the silk drape, Ellen had gone, had slipped back into the forbidden reaches of May.

Initially wary of being photographed anyway, May is horrified to see her portrait, which captures her at the mercy of her repressed desires. All she can see in the image is her alter ego, occupying her body and betraying her much feared deviance. However, even as May is mortified, so Ellen is empowered by the portrait, by the permanence it lends her otherwise fleeting existence, and thus she overcomes May’s restraint and seduces Jonathon Jones.

May’s distress over the photograph and her shame at allowing ‘Ellen’ to succumb to temptation reinforce her determination to repress her sexuality, which she has been conditioned to associate with feelings of guilt. Repression, projection and guilt are considered inseparable from the double motif, according to Otto Rank. ‘The most prominent symptom of the forms which the double takes is a powerful consciousness of guilt which forces the hero no longer to accept the responsibility for certain actions of his ego, but to place upon it another ego, a double, who is either personified by the devil himself or is created by making a diabolical pact’134.

In May’s case, her guilt is the result of her having internalised the Victorian rhetoric of fallenness and virtue, which defined women as sexually passive and free from

134 Rank, *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study*, 76
those licentious desires supposed to be more natural to men\textsuperscript{135}. Thus, finding herself outside the prevailing definition of ‘woman’, May is consumed with shame and, when hauled into the gothic lunatic asylum to be cured of her ‘moral insanity’, is easily persuaded to take part in just such a ‘diabolical pact’.

Committed for her willful pursuit of male affection rather than for any real symptoms of psychiatric disturbance, May undergoes a form of therapy loosely based on the ‘moral management’ approach adopted in Victorian asylums, integral to which was the imposition of such ladylike values as ‘silence, decorum, taste, service, piety and gratitude’\textsuperscript{136}.

The cleavage between May and Ellen widens as May contemplates exorcising the wilful ‘unladylike’ aspects of her nature. Desperate to be released from solitary confinement and eager to attain the privileged status of femininity, May surrenders the freer, more natural parts of her character in exchange for social acceptance. Allowing herself to be reprogrammed, she relegates all her repressed ‘unfeminine’ characteristics to her double, who from then on must wear the burden of her ‘unwomanly’ desires.

Whether May is to be held accountable for this ‘diabolical pact’ or can be excused as a passive victim of overwhelming social mores raises the question of the determinability of character. If one suggests she was not to blame, then indeed she does become the typical gothic heroine, ‘that passive female victim to whom everything gets done and whose only activity is running away’\textsuperscript{137}. If, on the other hand she is culpable, she becomes a stronger character, capable of determining her own fate, and her story can

\textsuperscript{135} Anderson, \textit{Tainted Souls and Painted Faces: The Rhetoric of Fallenness in Victorian Culture}, 43
\textsuperscript{136} Showalter, \textit{The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980}, 79
\textsuperscript{137} Atwood, \textit{Curious Pursuits}, 30
be seen as something of a tragedy, in the Aristotelian sense that her misfortune results
from her own ‘error of judgement’ or ‘fatal flaw’. A passive victim of circumstance
can make no such claim.

It is in the gothic lunatic asylum that the cleavage, until this point internal,
becomes a reality. With her eye on the prize of social acceptance, May sheds all the
‘unnatural’ aspects of her shameful self, little suspecting the consequences of her
willingness to repress in order to conform. Unbeknown to her, the asylum works its dark
magic, using the power of her extreme repression to give life to her ‘other’ self. Her ‘bad
habits’ thus take the form of a living, breathing double, who derives her appearance from
the portrait that proved her existence.

Ellen felt that the doctor’s scent alone made him worthy, but May pushed her
down, pushed her away, and ignored her protests. She imagined Ellen falling to
the floor like an old skin, or rising out of her like the finest mist; but as she felt
her new purity wending its way through her body like ink fed into her blood, she
did not see Ellen quivering in the corner, did not see the shock of betrayal in her
eyes. Nor did she see Ellen’s growing elation as she discovered the freedom of
her new body, which was weightless enough for her to slip through the high bars
of the window, unseen, and disappear quietly over the towering stone walls.

As in Jane Eyre, it seems that before the protagonist ‘can reach her happy ending,
the madwoman must be purged from the plot and passion must be purged from Jane

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herself\textsuperscript{139}. However, this is less May’s happy ending than the onset of her unhappy, uncanny ‘persecution’. The passion she has purged, no longer merely repressed, resurges as her double, whose purpose it is to make her regret her pact with society.

Unencumbered by the moral restraint of May, Ellen embarks on a life of her own in Fremantle. However, her excitement over having free reign over her own body soon gives way to resentment as she finds herself incapable of using it. In a state of limbo without May and feeling increasingly alienated by a society that demonises the female sexuality she personifies, she waits for May’s release in order that she might feel more complete. At last Ellen finds May wandering the streets of Fremantle, alone and similarly alienated, but confident of the social acceptance that will follow her commitment to virtue.

\begin{quote}
She found May, standing dwarfed by the town hall, alone but holding in her hand the leash of a small black dog. She and May stood mirroring each other in a pocket of silence sucked out of the voices and creaking carriage wheels trundling past.

‘So, there you are,’ Ellen said, smiling a contained smile. She didn’t want May to see her relief or, worse, her need. She need not have worried. All May saw was her blue dress and those strange eyes that betrayed all her secrets.
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
Rinehart & Winston Inc, 1971), 174
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\textsuperscript{139} Showalter, The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980, 69
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May shivered, suddenly cold, as though some menace had closed over her to block out the sun. She had imagined the wispy form of Ellen lifting out of her and dissolving into the air, or drifting away with low clouds over the sea, but never that she would be waiting for her on the outside, her living, breathing double, free to shame her in any way she chose.

Ellen relishes her freedom from May’s restraint and is vaguely contemptuous of her, even as she needs her presence to feel grounded in reality. May, on the other hand, is disgusted by the ‘unfeminine’ freedom and sensuality personified by Ellen, even as she envies her in a profound and consuming way. Their need for one another demonstrates the importance of a balance between nature and reason and the insufficiency of one without the other. To expand the doubles’ individual experiences of duality would unduly complicate matters, but it is worth noting that May’s struggle between loathing Ellen and experiencing regret at having excised her in fact lies at the heart of her ongoing anxiety over her ‘haunting’.

Ellen wandered down to the water, arranging her hair into that hasty, loose style the Doctor had called an invitation. May wore her hair back in a tight coil, restraining those same wisps that Ellen allowed to fall forward over her face for longer than was decent. The careless fall struck May as blatantly suggestive, and it opened up a dark, reluctant space inside her, a sucking void of envy and regret.
Alienated from society, May and Ellen live their relationship from the relative comfort of their ‘squat’ in ‘Manning’s Folly’. In the derelict observatory, as the fire burns and waves lap on the sand far below, May demands an explanation for Ellen’s existence while Ellen talks of her contempt for the society that caused the division between them.

The stalking, watchful ravens and the ghosts who share the folly with May and Ellen work with the building’s shadows and solitude to heighten the doubles’ fearful alienation from the comforts of society, but they also provide freedom from its gaze and thus opportunities for reflection. It is an eerie - yet safe - haven in which May and Ellen are able to adjust to their new situation and contemplate the past before moving into the future. It is from this safe vantage point that May and Ellen reveal their different approaches to accepting their past. Ellen’s approach reflects her confrontational, uninhibited and subversive nature while May’s initial avoidance demonstrates her resignation to the might of social mores.

*May could think of nothing to say and the silence between them stretched thin,*
*until the water began to spit and splutter into the flames. Ellen took it off the heat and made tea, then picked up her cup and climbed the ladder. May followed and the two of them stood in the cool air, looking out to where the asylum was just visible, a stern reminder of the price of rebellion. Pup whined and scratched plaintively on the floor of the squat below as Ellen stared at the magnificent building, in her mind taking it apart stone by stone, starting with the gruesome wall. May shivered and turned away, looking out towards the ocean and its promise of space.*
The folly is also where May begins to accept her experience of confinement and revisit her memories, thereby learning to confront the power the asylum has over her. As she stands waiting for the rain that holds back, refusing to bring relief to the town, the ghosts in the building are almost a comfort to her as she grapples with her demons. It is during this first stage of acceptance that the reader is transported back in time, into May’s memories of the walled-in yard of the asylum, to meet the other women there and to understand May’s initial survival strategy of retreat.

They were all standing around or sitting in the heat, bickering tiredly over the scarce shade, longing for water, not just to drink but to sink their bodies into; cold, clean, plentiful water. Judith was strapped to the bench, as usual, in the blazing sun, no hand to shield her cracked lips and dry baking eyes. She moaned in the hot, exhausting stillness.

May contemplated the wall, but it was impossibly high and she knew the only escape available to her was inward. She revisited the lush and shady place of her dreams, with dripping ferns and tall trees and vast, cool lakes, where she imagined a fallen tree; a magnificent, grey giant, sinking slowly into the ground, its branches draped like arms over its head to block out the sunlight. She imagined its final groan and the terrible thud of its fall; imagined running her hands over its roots, pulled up and probing the air, though incapable of drawing life. Ferns would be growing nearby, their small shoots pushing up through the
decaying wood. Sometimes the tree would sigh, as though merely sleeping. It was a comforting kind of death, a slow, peaceful seeping of life into soil. In her mind, May sat on the trunk and rustled the fern shoots with her naked feet. She liked being bootless, liked to squelch her toes through the grassy mud.

The coping mechanism of reflection rather than avoidance is something she learns in the folly, which suggests there is hope for her redemption despite everything she has thrown away. It is a mechanism she finds useful when she and Ellen walk past the asylum and she feels its dark, gravitational pull.

Ellen stopped to look at the limestone body of the asylum which loomed into view as they climbed the hill. May wanted to walk on, feeling that familiar shudder that made her want to break into a run, but this time she forced herself to look at the grand building. She remembered how at first it had seemed such a beautiful thing, proud and romantic with its heavy winding wall; until she learned what it was; until she was dragged inside its airless corridors.

Memories clung to her like something damp and dirty. Smells and sounds rushed back, threatening to overwhelm her, but she closed her eyes, steeled herself against them, allowing a complete memory to slip in with the fragments. She was hanging countless prison sheets out to dry in the blustery sea breeze; her daily immersion in cotton and the fresh, noxious smell of starch. The sheets flapped and swelled in against her, emboldened as the wind grew fierce. They began to twist
and wrap around her legs, pushing up cold against her face, so that she couldn’t breathe. Panic gathered in a heady pulse as she flailed around, trapping herself further in the demonic, suffocating whiteness, until at last she fell to the ground and managed to extricate herself, gasping for air.

She breathed deeply on the hill, still watching the walls, reliving the sensation of release, seeing again those sheets jerking on the line, trying to draw her back in but shrinking instead behind her. The asylum too tried to suck her back, down into its bowels, but she resisted and found herself breathing more easily, still free, on the safe side of the wall.

There on the hilltop, as May slowly wins her fight against the asylum’s hold over her, Ellen suggests they return to the stage, thus introducing another obstacle for May to overcome. Without the rebellious strength that defines Ellen and now committed to a life spent in humble, virtuous servitude, May is uncomfortably aware of the dubious status of a woman of the stage.

Her reluctance to return is not an irrational one. In the Victorian discourse, acting and prostitution were closely linked by their association with false representation. The theatre was considered a degraded cultural form, its contaminating morals no better than those of the brothel, and while both men and women were warned against exposing themselves to its corrupting influence, women were considered more easily derailed by its loose morals. Deemed ‘both effect and cause of cultural contaminations’ by a

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140 Anderson, Tainted Souls and Painted Faces: The Rhetoric of Fallenness in Victorian Culture, 60
Victorian rhetoric preoccupied with virtue, women were considered malleable in ways that men were not\textsuperscript{142}.

Society’s anxiety surrounding actresses and prostitutes stemmed from the insistence of such women on living public and supposedly artificial lives, provoking much debate about the determinability of character and the role of such women in bringing about their fallen status. The notion that women were more malleable than men perhaps stemmed from an unwillingness to accept that they were anything less than pure, sexually speaking. Some theorists insisted that women did not experience temptation of the sort experienced by men, but ‘fell’ simply as a result of being seduced\textsuperscript{143}. The validity of female sexuality was thus diminished and the responsibility for women’s fallenness was placed on the shoulders of the men who seduced them. However, paradoxically, instead of excusing fallen women and presenting them with a path to redemption, this doctrine only further entrenched a patriarchal disavowal of female agency\textsuperscript{144}.

Although supposedly a victim of circumstances, the fallen woman was credited with the unenviable power to contaminate her family and anyone immoral enough to associate with her. The fact that she was thus both cause and effect of contagion, both victim of and a threat to the male-dominated cultural order, challenged the prevailing theories of gender-allocated agency\textsuperscript{145}, and made the fallen woman a perplexing problem for the ideology that created her. One is again reminded of the passive, gothic heroine, fleeing to save her virtue.

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., 58
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., 59
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., 43
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., 44
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., 16-17
The complexity of the relationship between May and Ellen reflects the tangled web and flawed logic at the heart of this rhetoric. It interrogates the determination of the patriarchy to impose a doctrine on women that required them to repress their true selves and aspire instead to the allegedly natural qualities of the exalted feminine. Ellen as the sensual, free woman who rebels against this doctrine, is, in fact, the more authentic being while May, in her efforts to repress her true nature and be a ‘natural’ selfless woman, instead sails deeper into the destructive waters of artifice.

_Ellen’s hair writhed out of its coil and grew damp in the sea air and May blushed at the smile that crept across her face. It was a bliss that belonged somewhere else, somewhere private, behind closed doors. Flashes of such moments floated up from time to time, unbidden, from May’s past; moments of warmth and fingers and goose-flesh, and kisses and close-up skin, but she knew how to push them away and send them on to Ellen, who seemed immersed in them already, there in front of the tomatoes. Her eyes glazed over and her hand moved to her neck, where it massaged taut muscles. One corner of her mouth lifted in a silent smile._

In her efforts to be good, and thus embraced by society, May dresses herself in suitably modest attire, having learnt in the asylum to measure her sanity and acceptability against certain standards of ‘appropriate feminine grooming’\(^\text{146}\). Ellen, by contrast, rejects the demands on a woman surveyed and considers herself the authority on what is appropriate.

\(^{146}\) Showalter, _The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980_, 84
Ellen was knee deep in the water, holding up and to one side the stage costume that looked so lavish from a distance and when the light was right, as it was then; a glare, reflected off the fine-skinned ripples and smoothing out the cheap blemishes in the fabric. Eyes closed, Ellen abandoned herself to her other senses, feeling the gentle breeze, the cool water, the salt drying on her skin.

May wouldn’t have dreamed of exposing her bare legs like that, regardless of how powerful the temptation or how heavy the promise of escape.

As May and Ellen explore Fremantle together, wrestling for dominance, we go deeper into their relationship and experience uncertainty as to which of the two is the ultimate guiding force or conscience. It is also at this point not quite clear whether Ellen exists only as a figment of May’s imagination, or perhaps is some kind of psychotic or paranoid experience. For some time, it is perhaps possible to imagine that May has simply become delusional, giving more credence to her inner duality in order that ‘the detached personification of (her) instincts and desires once felt to be unacceptable can now be realised without responsibility’.

Thus the reader is held in a state of suspended ‘intellectual certainty’ as to the ‘animation’ of Ellen. While Freud is somewhat dismissive of the role of intellectual uncertainty in creating the uncanny - concluding that it ‘in no way helps us to understand

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147 Rank, *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study*, 74
this uncanny effect”\textsuperscript{149} - other theorists value obscurity as a means of prolonging a sense of the uncanny. For example, consider the words of Edmund Burke: ‘When we know the full extent of any danger, when we can accustom our eyes to it, a great deal of the apprehension vanishes\textsuperscript{150}.

However significant its contribution, uncertainty dissipates when Ellen pays the photographer another visit, this time by herself. Driven not only by desire for Jonathon Jones, but to impress upon May the lasting consequences of her pact with society, Ellen has gambled on May arriving at Jones’ door even as she lies in his bed. At this moment it becomes clear that the ‘diabolical pact’ was irrevocable and Ellen’s existence is indeed very real.

When May later poses for another portrait, she attempts to prove that her excision of Ellen has cost her nothing. As Jones again arranges her head for the pose, she reaches deep for the desire he once stirred in her, but she finds it is no longer there. Herein lies her tragedy. No passive heroine, May, through her own error of judgement or weakness of will, has severed forever her essential reproductive drive, and its loss is irrevocable.

\begin{quote}
May gritted her teeth as Ellen laughed and swept one arm out in front of her, as though she needed help finding the way. She sat down so Jones could fix the head rest in place. His warm hands worked with her head, pressing her chin gently downward and pulling her loose hair forward over one shoulder. He suggested she smile, just a little, trying to draw out the face he remembered, the inviting one; the one he didn’t realise belonged now solely to Ellen.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., 139
May forced herself to look at Jones, who was standing so close she could smell him. His hands and shirtsleeves brushed against her neck and she remembered the feeling that stole through her body the last time they enacted this scene. This time, she decided, because Ellen was watching, she wouldn’t shy away from it. And yet, though she waited for it, though she let Jones ease her shoulders down to elongate her neck and though she studied the line of his jaw curving slightly up to meet his ear, she felt nothing at all; nothing but a vague sense of loss.

We leave the possibility of a relationship between Jones and May or Ellen in a state of the unknown, though we must suspect that there is too much ‘self-involvement’ going on between May and Ellen for such a relationship to be anything but doomed. In fact, May and Ellen are so involved in each other ‘that no harmonious relationship with the love interest is possible’¹⁵¹, thus following what Rank suggests is something of a trend in the use of the double motif.

Somehow, in spite of their ongoing conflict, May and Ellen learn to work together, and as they do so, the sky relinquishes the rain, so ending the metaphoric suspension of time. It is also with the coming of this rain that we sense some hope for May.

She went out into the rain to rinse off the spray. As she stood there, letting the water soak her, letting it pelt the top of her head like a million tiny paws and tease the gooseflesh across her skin, she felt an enormous burden lifting from her

¹⁵⁰ Sage, The Gothick Novel, 34
shoulders. Water streamed down her face and into her mouth, pure and clean, and she knew she was laughing like a mad woman, but there was no-one to see her now, and no-one to judge.

In the final chapter of “Bad Habits”, we find May ready to step out into the light again, strengthened by the knowledge that she will be speaking words written by Ellen instead of by the tyrannical Beebe. Ellen is her own creation, in a sense, and it is fitting that she should be the one to determine her ‘character’ and her ‘story’ on the stage. When May expresses her fear of the judgement of society, having already experienced some of what befalls the fallen women, Ellen gives her the encouragement she needs in order to overcome that fear and step back out on stage.

May stood in the wings, breathing away the familiar nerves that crawled under her skin and stiffened her muscles. Her heart quickened at the silence of the hall. As usual she was surprised at the sudden undivided attention of so many people, but the memory of Ellen’s words calmed her. As she stood there behind the wing drape, ready to expose herself again, she heard fragments of Ellen’s speech, delivered that morning on the blustery balcony.

‘It doesn’t matter who they are or what it is they want from you, May,’ she had said. ‘It doesn’t matter if they take a sliver of you when they go, because you are infinite. They can drink and drink from you, and you will never be empty.’

151 Rank, The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study, 48
Their relationship has become mutually beneficial, as May enables Ellen to experience the fulfilment of seeing her words come to life in performance, and so, essentially, we see the two incomplete selves working together, perhaps more successfully than they did when they were confined within one body.

However, they have also been shown to be ineffective without one another, and their satisfactory reconciliation through theatre is not intended to diminish the message that in striving so hard for acceptance and in failing to question the standards against which she measures herself, May has lost an essential part of her human experience. She has forever sacrificed the freedom of considering herself unwatched and freely relishing her sensory experience of the world, which I would argue is a uniquely female experience of innocence lost. Thus “Bad Habits” illuminates the inherently damaging flaws in traditional patriarchal definitions of women.

An exaggeration of the identity crises that women experience, as illustrated by their literary tradition, the division of May into two selves serves to expose the flawed rationale of the doctrine of female repression and subservience. Dismissive of female creativity and sexuality, the creators of a subordinate ideal feminine preferred to consider sexuality a male domain, choosing masculine seduction as determinant of female destiny over the more troubling idea that she might experience her own temptations and desires.

“Bad Habits” also draws a connection between the stage and the divided self, using the theatre as a metaphor for Berger’s suggestion that female identity is defined by masculine spectatorship. Its role as an arena for society’s anxieties over character and contamination makes the theatre an interesting location in which to examine the
fraudulence of the traditional patriarchal feminine. “Bad Habits” posits rebellion as a more authentic way to approach this ideal than the damaging alternative of resignation to it.
Reviving nineteenth-century Fremantle as a means of exploring the link between patriarchal ideology and the uncanny gothic mode, I thought a photographer would be an interesting channel through which to observe citizens of the port city. Homesick for his family in England but trapped by an ocean that gives him night terrors, Jones is critical of the hierarchical system in which Fremantle merchants ‘with wife, comfortable home and large numbers of children presented themselves to the world as archetypes of the patriarchy’, 152.

This mercantile élite - many of whom were able to ascend through the ranks from middle or lower class backgrounds as a result of having left England’s impenetrable networks behind - gained access to gentry status not through birth, but rather by making themselves rich 153. In the merchant prince tradition, they believed their status brought social responsibility 154, but they were far from egalitarian in their outlook 155.

Jonathon Jones, lonely and filled with regrets, fights his despair by occupying his thoughts with his ‘life’s work’. His position as a portrait photographer gives him somewhat privileged access to the new élite, to their images and to the secrets he sees behind them. His fascination with the movement and truth missing from the portraits he sells inspire him to collect images secretly taken between the poses, moments his sitters

153 Ibid., 158-9
154 Ibid., 8
155 Ibid., 158
do not expect to surrender to his lens. These albums become his passion, his time capsule, his furtive way of leaving his mark.

*With his door closed against the whitewashed limestone glare, he sat with his feet on his desk and catalogued the items he would bury with his albums. He drafted an explanation for each object and a rationale for his portraits, contemplating how to succinctly express what he hoped to achieve. So far he explained it as sending authenticity downstream, to float along uninterrupted and be discovered by future generations, who would be enlightened in some small way, in spite of the best efforts of the establishment and its people to maintain their proud and distorted version of history.*

And yet, when he becomes involved with May and Ellen, he begins to question the wisdom of burying these albums for future generations, and it is while contemplating the possibility of showing them his work that he first critically analyses his motives.

*Jones worked on his portrait of May, feeling restless in his skin, his mind trapped in the jaws of doubt; perhaps the work was not very original, not very exciting at all, and possibly even slightly ridiculous. In his mind’s eye he visited every photographer in town, sneaking his way into every back room and very calmly studying their work, like a professional. He would be stoic when he discovered album after album just like his own, stoic and manly in his disappointment, but even so he emerged from the fantasy with a delicate sweat on his upper lip.*
Tendrils of resentment coiled around his heart. The girls without even saying a word had robbed him of his legacy, reduced it to a cheap bit of opportunism. But then he caught himself using that word, legacy; the filthiest of all arrogant and wasteful pursuits, the goal of only the old and defeated, who had given up on achieving glory in their own tenure.

As a character, Jones is a suggestion that perhaps not all men supported the philosophy and values of the patriarchy, as demonstrated by his almost blissful ignorance of the rhetoric of virtue. He is captivated by the free and sensual nature of Ellen, by her unrestrained desire for him and by the truth of her experience. This makes more troubling his discovery that she has hidden her ‘twin’ status from him and returned to him on the sly.

Jones feels somewhat duped by Ellen, and yet he is clearly quite enamoured of her, which brings May to the realisation that she too has been duped. By adopting the restrictive moral code of feminine virtue, she may have earned superficial social approval, but she has forever ruled out the possibility of finding true love with a man like Jones, a man who thinks for himself and rejects the strictures of patriarchy. Instead, May has won the approval of men like Beebe and Liam, surly and unpleasant exaggerations of the worst of patriarchy, and the doctor, executor of the unsustainable and hypocrisy-laden rhetoric of virtue. Jones has chosen the unvirtuous Ellen, and May’s sacrifice has been in vain, and thus when May fails to recapture her desire for Jones, Ellen has truly succeeded in her mission of driving home the gravity of May’s ‘diabolical pact’.
Jones too benefits from the relationship. While it is unlikely to be a lasting union, it is through May and Ellen that he is able to acknowledge his own preoccupation with legacy and for the first time see beyond his homesickness.

_He realised as he looked at them that it had been days since he had thought of the old world, days since he had cursed his entrapment in his new incongruous home, and all because he had spent them at the mercy of these new and pendulous emotions, set in swinging motion by those two bowed heads. His resentment crumbled as gratitude swept in._

And so perhaps he has learnt to forgive the élite their foolish pretensions; after all, the records show these early entrepeneurs did have their fair share of problems. Consider, for example, Charles Manning, builder of ‘the folly’. Although deceased by the time of the “Bad Habits” narrative, as Grand Master of the Fremantle Lodge of the Freemasons¹⁵⁶, owner of a pearl-fishing fleet¹⁵⁷, one-time rate-collector and generally prosperous merchant owner of the vast estate of ‘Davilak’¹⁵⁸, Manning was just the sort of man whose patriarchal preoccupation with legacy Jones despised.

And yet, the records suggest his family life was in ruins and his life was far from enviable¹⁵⁹.

‘Charles Manning was a colourful though tragic victim of alcohol. He was short and stout and often a figure of fun when he was drunk and fell over, or fell off his horse

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¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 133
¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 53
¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 160
on ceremonial occasions. When he died in 1869, the cause of death was recorded starkly as ‘drink’ in the St John’s Parish Register. And he was not alone among the élite, many of whom fell prey to addictive vices that plagued all classes of settlers. ‘Indian cannabis cigarettes’ were prescribed for asthma relief and many lives were damaged by alcohol abuse. Addictive drugs - based on cocaine, laudanum, morphine and alcohol - were commonly used for pain relief, sleeplessness and childhood teething and, in fact, drug addictions are said to have led to suicides and violent deaths among these members of the upper classes.

Alienation from this aspect of society is not a bad thing for May and Ellen, who watch with interest as the locals entertain their vices.

*May and Ellen sat side by side in a sheltered doorway. The shop behind them was closed and padlocked and they sat in almost total darkness, gradually becoming more visible to each other, and perhaps to those they watched being drawn past them into the warmth of the hotel bars.*

*But those who burst through the doors into the fresh night air hours later did not see them. Intoxicated, they did not see much at all, stumbling and singing and draping their arms over each other. They were not at all the same people who*
went in, seeming instead to have exchanged their inhibitions for an eerily childlike freedom.

Jones represents the sort of thinking perhaps partly responsible for the erosion the patriarchy was undergoing. Women were treated with a higher degree of respect in Fremantle than they were in Britain\textsuperscript{165}. For one thing, there were fewer of them than men, by a difference of 4000, and as such, they perhaps had some power to choose whether or whom they might marry\textsuperscript{166}. Many women married later in life, giving them more chances to pursue their own lives, free from the doctrine of wifely obedience\textsuperscript{167} and the rigours of relentless childbearing\textsuperscript{168}. In addition, with old networks gone and domestic servants hard to come by, women were forced to be stronger and more self-reliant\textsuperscript{169}. As a further indication of such changes, a lengthy campaign led by the Women’s Christian Temperance Union ensured that women in Western Australia were given the right to vote in 1899\textsuperscript{170}.

Thus Jones himself is an interesting link between patriarchal ideology and the uncanny. Able to see through façades, and capture what few others acknowledge, he has the somewhat magical power to first lure Ellen out of May and then provide her with tangible proof of her existence. Revealing that which May has long sought to repress, he plays a part in enabling its uncanny resurgence\textsuperscript{171}.

\textsuperscript{165} Ibid., 164
\textsuperscript{166} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{167} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{168} Ibid., 176
\textsuperscript{169} Ibid., 164
\textsuperscript{170} Ibid., 116-8
\textsuperscript{171} If we interpret the fact that Ellen embodies an image of May that Jones created, then it appears he is responsible for her creation. However, I have asserted that May and her ‘diabolical pact’ are responsible for
the existence of Ellen, and it is really the ‘dark power’ of the lens, rather than Jones’s own creative powers, that I intended to catalyse Ellen’s ‘birth’. Such an interpretation could be read as suggesting that both men and women are equally capable of creation and should continue to be regarded as such.
CONCLUSION

While the aesthetics of an isolated nineteenth-century Fremantle first drew me in and the British establishment’s primitive treatment of the mentally ill stirred my Gothic imagination to life, it is the Victorian polarisation of women, symptomatic of a patriarchal ideology, which I sought to subvert with the creation of “Bad Habits”.

Using the uncanny double to interrogate this ideology - and female conformity to it - I aimed to illustrate the demonisation and dismissal of female sexuality, voice and agency at the heart of the patriarchal tradition, which, when taken to extremes, can be detrimental to a woman’s sense of identity. The division of my protagonist into two selves, both of which challenge the notion of the ‘natural’ feminine, highlights the flawed logic of patriarchal characterisation of women and illustrates the role this characterisation played in the creation of the female gothic literary tradition.

Intrigued by ‘man’s “darker” nature’\textsuperscript{172}, I chose to experiment with the uncanny double motif before I understood its significance to the collective history of women writers, and I think that is very telling, given that the fantasy genre, so laden with symbolism and reflexive critique, is very much an interpretation or analysis of the society in which its authors live.

Mainstream Western popular culture, which reduces to their most basic - most digested or simplistic - the attitudes of the society it reflects, suggests that a patriarchal perspective continues to shape the minds of men and women. Female sexuality may not be demonised to the extent that it was in the late nineteenth century, but it remains the
property of this pervasive ideology, and while today it is flaunted instead of repressed, women are still not its keepers. The women that gaze out at the world from billboards, magazines and televisions are not gazing at each other. With some exceptions, perhaps, they are not attempting to seduce the women who absorb the lessons they have to tell. Instead, they are illustrations of Berger’s women surveyed, wearing ‘the expression of a woman responding with calculated charm to the man whom she imagines looking at her’\textsuperscript{173}, and thus, whether paragons of sexuality or paragons of virtue, the ideal feminine, with her idealised sexuality, remains the possession and creation of a patriarchal ideology.

To what extent do women, as well as men, perpetuate this ideology? How do women repossess their sexuality? How do they shape their identities free from the male gaze, and should they want to? The answers are not straightforward, but the twenty-first-century writing of “Bad Habits” does mean that they continue to be valid questions. A work of ‘historical fantasy’, “Bad Habits” suggests - in the reflexive, gothic tradition - that the patriarchal ideology of repression and subordination of women is not merely a relic of times past, but continues to pervert female sexuality and contribute to a uniquely female experience of the divided self.

\textsuperscript{172} Sherman, \textit{Ann Radcliffe and the Gothic Romance}, 20
\textsuperscript{173} Berger, \textit{Ways of Seeing}, p55
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