ABSTRACT

STARLINA DIANA ROSE. The Romance of Gothic Nationalism: An Exploration of Class and Gender Through Dialect and Realism in Miss Byron’s 1808 Novel *The Englishwoman.*

(Under the direction of Professor John Morillo.)

Miss Byron’s 1808 novel *The Englishwoman* is a remarkable sample of mediocre Gothic Romance from the era in which the genre was born. While Horace Walpole, Regina Maria Roche, and Ann Radcliffe both set and fulfilled genre conventions, and thus their works have remained exemplars of Gothic Romance throughout subsequent literary movements, Miss Byron’s work has been left behind as unremarkable and uninspiring. Yet, from the fringes of convention, inside *The Englishwoman*, Miss Byron subverts the pre-established Gothic Romance conventions by delivering a sketch of the very human unhappiness and tragic outcomes of the victims of Gothic plots. Throughout the first volume, Miss Byron creates gender and class distinctions through the characters’ reactions to the Gothic and through their distinct dialects. Rather than as a form of Realism, Miss Byron uses dialect in the manner Norman Blake describes as a characterization of “comedy and the grotesque” to stereotype traditional class and gender roles (Blake 144). Similarly, L. Andrew Cooper’s argument “that critics [of the Gothic] took the task of defending society upon themselves, using their condemnations in an effort to shield the social order from the most dangerous Gothic texts” doesn’t account for authors like Miss Byron whose titular “Englishwoman” is herself schooled within the text about the horrors of the Gothic and on how to avoid them (Cooper 18). In a rhetorical combination of proto-sensationalism and classist Realism, Miss Byron brings the Gothic horrors into the safe English countryside. Through class-based dialect representation, the
gendered villainizing of continental and Scottish Catholicism, her novel inextricably ties her characters’ defense against Gothic horrors to British identity.