Gothic Literature Study Guide

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Contents

Introduction

Gothic literature, a movement that focused on ruin, decay, death, terror, and chaos, and privileged irrationality and passion over rationality and reason, grew in response to the historical, sociological, psychological, and political contexts of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Although Horace Walpole is credited with producing the first Gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto*, in 1764, his work was built on a foundation of several elements. First, Walpole tapped a growing fascination with all things medieval; and medieval romance provided a generic framework for his novel. In addition, Edmund Burke's 1757 treatise, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, offered a philosophical foundation. Finally, the Graveyard School of poetry, so called because of the attention poets gave to ruins, graveyards, death, and human mortality, flourished in the mid-eighteenth century and provided a thematic and literary context for the Gothic.

Walpole's novel was wildly popular, and his novel introduced most of the stock conventions of the genre: an intricate plot; stock characters; subterranean labyrinths; ruined castles; and supernatural occurrences. *The Castle of Otranto* was soon followed by William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786); Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797); Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796); Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* (1797); Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818); and Charles Robert Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820).

While it may be comparatively easy to date the beginning of the Gothic movement, it is much harder to identify its close, if indeed the movement did come to a close at all. There are those such as David Punter in *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day* and Fred Botting in *Gothic* who follow the transitions and transformations of the Gothic through the twentieth century. Certainly, any close examination of the works of Edgar Allan Poe, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, or Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* in the nineteenth century demonstrates both the transformation and the influence of the Gothic. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the ongoing fascination with horror, terror, the supernatural, vampires, werewolves, and other things that go bump in the night evidences the power the Gothic continues to exert.

In its attention to the dark side of human nature and the chaos of irrationality, the Gothic provides for contemporary readers some insight into the social and intellectual climate of the time in which the literature was produced. A time of revolution and reason, madness and sanity, the 1750s through the 1850s provided the stuff that both dreams and nightmares were made of.

Themes

Terror and Horror

Terror and horror are the project of the Gothic novelist. Drawing on the work of Edmund Burke, Ann Radcliffe distinguished between the two terms, suggesting that terror grows out of suspense while horror produces disgust. In other words, a character experiences terror in the anticipation of some dreaded event; she experiences horror when the event really happens. Thus, in Radcliffe's novels, there is an emphasis on terror and the terrible, which she creates through her long descriptions of sublime landscapes and her intimations of the supernatural. Moreover, the agonizing suspense to which she subjects her characters produces terror in both the character and the reader. However, the eventual explanation of all things supernatural relieves her reader from the experience of horror. Lewis, on the other hand, chooses horror for his novels. His prose focuses on the details of the horrible, including torture and putrefaction. In Lewis's work, he describes in disturbing detail the physically revolting and morally decadent.

Appearance and Reality

Gothic literature often explores the muddy ground between appearance and reality. For example, in Radcliffe's works, events often appear to have supernatural causes. However, by the end of the book, Radcliffe offers realistic explanations. Thus, in the case of Radcliffe, it is possible for the reader to distinguish by the close of the novel what is real and what is apparent. On the other hand, writers such as Lewis do not always differentiate between appearance and reality. This ambiguity leads to a dreamlike (or nightmarish) atmosphere in the novel. Readers recognize the state: for all intents and purposes, a dream appears to be real until awakening. It is in the foggy fugue state, however, where the dreamer is unsure of what is the dream and what is the reality. In addition, other writers play with appearance and reality through the use of different narrative structures and voices. Poe famously develops the unreliable narrator who appears initially to be sane but who, through the course of the novel or story, is revealed to be absolutely insane. The struggle to differentiate the reality from the appearance rests at the heart of much Gothic literature.

Confinement

Nearly every Gothic novel of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries contains some element of confinement. Indeed, many critics have commented on the sense of claustrophobia found in Gothic fiction. Often this occurs with the entrapment of the heroine in some ancient castle. When she finally escapes her room or cell, she finds herself within a subterranean passageway with no apparent way out. It is the lack of escape that causes the terrifying claustrophobia. Isabella's flight through Otranto is an example. Likewise, in *The Monk*, Agnes is chained to a wall to be tortured. The struggle

against the confinement elicits both horror and terror in the reader. Perhaps the master of confinement, however, is Poe. In "The Fall of the House of Usher," Madeline Usher is confined prematurely to her coffin and buried alive. Such scenes hold considerable horror. Poe's *The Cask of Amontillado* is another tale of claustrophobic containment, as the narrator, Montresor, walls Fortunato in a crypt, where he has lured him to taste fine sherry. Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* also uses this theme, but in this case it is the heart of the murdered victim that is confined but refuses to remain hidden. Whether it be prison cells, monastic cells, shackles, locked rooms, or dark tunnels, the space of the Gothic novel is claustrophobic and confining, tapping into a primal human fear.

Justice and Injustice

While the world of justice and injustice might seem to be absent from the world of the Gothic, on closer examination, it seems clear that guilt and reparation of sins stands firmly at the center of many stories. In Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, the death of Conrad, the heir to his father's estate, apparently takes place as a way of righting a wrong. That is, Conrad's ancestor comes back from his grave to assure that Otranto goes to the rightful heir. This is the case of the sins of the father being visited on the children; at no time does it seem that Conrad knows that his title is faulty. Likewise, Madeline and Roderick Usher pay for the sins of their family with their own decay and death. Their house collapses in on them, ending the line. Thus, the "fall of the house of Usher" has two meanings: the house itself literally falls down and the lineage of Usher also falls as a result of the sins of earlier generations. *Melmoth the Wanderer* also explores this theme. In the Gothic world, justice must ultimately triumph, even if the justice that is meted out is severe. Ambrosio, for example, in *The Monk*, deserves to be punished; however, his punishment is horrible. Because the Gothic is a literature of excess, it is little wonder that the justices and injustices are also excessive. Thus, the gloom that hangs over the heads of many characters is the knowledge that in their own day they will have to pay for the wrongs their ancestors have done.

Style

Setting

In Gothic literature, the setting may be the single most important device. Gothic writers generally set their novels in wild landscapes; in large, often ruined, castles; and/or in subterranean labyrinths. In Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, the castle itself plays a major role in the novel. As Robert Kiely writes in *The Romantic Novel in England*, "If anything gives this novel unity and animation, it is the castle. The place itself seems sufficiently charged with emotion to require little assistance from the characters. In fact, external conditions play a larger part in determining the behavior of the characters than do their own internal motivations." Thus, the setting itself provides as much suspense as does the plot or the characters.

In addition, Gothic writers as a rule set their novels in the distant, medieval past, in what they thought of as the "gothic period." However, their descriptions have little to do with the medieval period as it was; rather, the settings in Gothic novels reveal much more about what eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers believed about the Middle Ages than about the medieval past. For Gothic writers, the medieval past was a time of superstition and Catholicism, made exotic and eerie by monks, nuns, ghosts, and crumbling castles. Although most of the novels are set in some European landscape, others, most notably Beckford's *Vathek*, have foreign locations, such as the Middle East. Again, removing the setting of the novel from contemporary locations and time periods allowed Gothic writers to infuse their works with the fear of the unknown, mysterious occurrences, and strange, unusual customs.

Diction

Diction is the choice of words and the order of words a writer chooses for his or her literary creation. Diction may be on the continuum from very informal, or low diction, to very formal, or high diction. In Gothic novels, writers opted to use somewhat archaic and formal language, particularly in dialogue. Although the word choices are not accurate representations of the speech patterns of medieval people, the diction of a Gothic novel is reminiscent of a medieval romance. Further, the diction removes the novel from the present-day reality. Walpole, for example, writes the following for his heroine Isabella in *The Castle of Otranto*: "Sir, whoever you are, take pity on a wretched princess standing on the brink of destruction: assist me to escape from this fatal castle, or in a few moments I may be made miserable for ever."

Narrative

Narrative is an accounting of an event or sequence of events, real or invented. In literary criticism, the expression "narrative technique" usually refers to the way the author structures and presents his or her story. Gothic literature can be characterized by

the complex and complicated narrative structures writers give their work. There are usually plots within plots, and there are episodes that seem to have little connection to the episodes immediately before and after. The episodic nature of the narrative perhaps can be attributed to the Gothic writers' attention to medieval romance. William Malory's early fifteenth century *Morte D'Arthur*, a compilation of medieval Arthurian romances circulating in Malory's day, for example, comprises episodes of knights, damsels, challenges, and castles. Likewise, Gothic writers often provide little transition or explanation for the arrangement of their episodes. The overall effect, both in medieval romance and Gothic novels, is to render the narrative strange and fragmented.

Gothic writers also often present an exceedingly complicated narrative, woven around some theme or idea. For example, in Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer*, there are stories within stories. Kiely describes the narrative of this book in his *The Romantic Novel in England*: "The structure of *Melmoth the Wanderer*, a series of narrations within narrations□often compared with a nest of Chinese boxes□defies conventional chronological sequence and replaces it with obsessive variations on the single theme of human misery." The overall effect of such construction is to distort the chronological and spatial development of the story and to give the overall work a dreamlike quality.

Mood

The mood of a literary work reveals the emotional content of a work. Mood arises in a work through the interaction of diction, setting, and narrative structure. In the case of Gothic novels, the mood is one of fear, anxiety, terror, and horror. Both the characters and the readers of Gothic novels experience these emotions to the fullest extent possible for human beings. The dark, dreary, and morbid settings as well as the sublime mountainous landscapes serve to invoke terror, while the suspense created by mistaken identities and long chase sequences through cellar passageways produce both fear and anxiety. Many critics speak of the claustrophobia of Gothic novels, created by coffins, prisons, dark halls, passages, and interior spaces. At its best, Gothic literature evokes the same kind of emotional response from its readers as do nightmares and night terrors. Just as the dreamers often find themselves fleeing from shadowy monsters or evildoers, characters in Gothic novels likewise flee from those who would do them harm. Readers of Gothic novels are able to experience these strong emotions vicariously, through the trials of the main characters. They are able to be deliciously, if safely, frightened out of their wits by the narrative twists and turns. That this is able to happen can largely be attributed to the prevailing mood Gothic writers develop.

Historical Context

The Enlightenment

Many historians and scholars attribute the rise of the Gothic as a response to the prevailing mode of rational thought and reason. Indeed, eighteenthcentury thought was dominated by an intellectual movement called the enlightenment by later historians. Enlightenment philosophers and writers privileged reason and human understanding above emotions and feelings. Furthermore, the rise of experimental science during this period offered an empirical model for how one could arrive at truth.

A secular movement, the Enlightenment strove to demonstrate that knowledge could only be derived from science and natural philosophy, not from religion. Indeed, religion and spirituality, particularly Catholicism, were relegated to the realm of the "irrational." Enlightenment philosophers steadfastly believed that only through attention to rationality, reason, and balance could humankind improve. The thinkers of the Enlightenment looked for their models to the classical period of Greece and Rome, rejecting what they saw as the "barbarism" of the medieval period.

As the eighteenth century waned, however, growing numbers of thinkers and writers began to rebel against the rationality of the Enlightenment and to produce works that privileged the irrational, emotional responses and feelings, and the uncanny. They argued that truth could not be derived from pure thought but rather could be approached through the senses. In particular, Gothic literature, art, and architecture revolted against the strict rationality of the Enlightenment. Gothic writers looked to the Middle Ages for their models. While some scholars see the rise of the Gothic as a response to the Enlightenment, there are others who argue that the Gothic is an essential part of the Enlightenment, with the Gothic providing the mirror image of the Enlightenment. In either regard, the two movements are inextricably linked in the study of the eighteenth century.

The Age of Revolutions

A second major influence on the rise of the Gothic was the military and political situation in North America and Europe. The late eighteenth century was a time of revolt and violence. In North America, the thirteen English colonies banded together and fought for independence from England. The first bloodshed of the war was at the battles of Concord and Lexington in April of 1775. In July 1776, the delegates of the First Continental Congress meeting in Philadelphia declared independence, naming their country the United States of America. This was the first colonial war in England's history and the first time a new country had come into being by a declaration of independence. The war ground on for some seven more years before the surrender of British General Cornwallis at Yorktown. This victory was largely made possible by assistance from the French, whose naval power prevented English ships from coming to the aid of their

army. Although the founding fathers clearly were Enlightenment thinkers who depended on reason and rationality to justify their bid for independence, they were nonetheless radical thinkers who opened the door to a democratically governed as opposed to royally governed understanding of statehood.

If the outcome of the American Revolution came as a shock to Europeans, it was nonetheless a ripple compared to the tidal wave of the French Revolution, which began in 1789, just six years after the 1783 treaty that settled the American War. The French Revolution shook the foundations of European statehood and introduced long years of terror and cultural anxiety. Many critics see the foundation of the Gothic movement in the French Revolution. Ronald Paulson, for example, in his article "Gothic Fiction and the French Revolution," argues that "The Gothic did in fact serve as a metaphor with which some contemporaries in England tried to come to terms with what was happening across the Channel in the 1790s." Whereas many pre-Romantic and Romantic writers supported the French Revolution early on, as the violence and bloodshed degenerated into what has become known as "The Reign of Terror," English writers and citizens became increasingly worried over the chaos and uncertainty taking place just across the Channel. The terror of the Gothic novel, along with its images of chase and capture and its threat of evil overcoming good, reflects how deeply anxious both writers and the reading public had become.

Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful

A final influence on the growth of the Gothic sprang from a philosophical treatise on aesthetics called *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, written and published by Edmund Burke in 1757. Burke's ideas had far-reaching implications. In this treatise, drawing on the classical philosopher Longinus, Burke distinguishes between beauty as a product of proportion and dimension and the sublime as a product of wild, irregular, and uncontrollable nature. For example, a perfectly groomed and welldesigned garden could be beautiful, invoking pleasure in the eye of the beholder. On the other hand, a view of the Swiss Alps with its craggy cliffs and huge dimensions would be sublime, invoking a kind of terror or fear in the viewer. The sublime carries with it both elements of attraction and terror. According to David Punter in *The Literature of Terror*, as a result of Burke's treatise, "the excitation of fear becomes one of the most significant enterprises a writer can undertake; thus also fear is recognized as the primary means by which the dictates of reason can be bypassed." Punter continues with a discussion of Burke's contribution to Gothic literature:

Many of the details of Burke's analysis have relevance
to the Gothic writers□in particular his emphasis
on obscurity, vastness, magnificence as
constitutive elements of the sublime□but his most
important contribution was to confer on terror a major
and worthwhile literary role.

By the 1790s, Burke's ideas had become so widespread that Ann Radcliffe was able to write an essay distinguishing the differences between horror and terror. It is impossible to say whether Burke created his times, or the times created Burke. In any event, his writing proves to have continued significance in the field of horror writing up to the present day.

Movement Variations

Architecture and Art

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the impulse toward the Gothic affected not only literature but also architecture. William Kent (1686-1748) was perhaps the best-known landscape designer and architect of the time, and he helped rich landowners design and build elaborate buildings and landscaping. These designs included mock towers, castles, and abbeys constructed to look as if they had been built in the Middle Ages and had since fallen into ruin. David Stevens, in *The Gothic Tradition*, reports that Kent "even went so far as suggest 'planting' dead trees to present an appropriately ghoulish effect."

Likewise, a number of artists of this time, including Spanish artist Francisco de Goya and English poet and engraver William Blake, produced works that visually represent the Gothic. In particular, Goya's "The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters," drawn in 1799, has been called by Richard Davenport-Hines in *Gothic: Four Hundred Years of Excess, Horror, Evil, and Ruin* "perhaps the most important single image for the historian of the gothic."

American Variations

In addition to the eighteenth-century Gothic writer Brown and nineteenth-century writer Poe, American writers have embraced the Gothic in a variety of forms. Hawthorne's "family romances" that include *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of Seven Gables* demonstrate that writer's fascination with the supernatural as well as the sins of the father. Herman Melville's great masterpiece *Moby Dick*, with its monstrous, uncanny whale also qualifies as an American transformation of the Gothic. Clearly, the works of writers like Ambrose Bierce and H. P. Lovecraft also demonstrate the continued influence of the Gothic with their strange and grotesque subjects. In yet another variation of the movement, a group of twentieth-century Southern writers came to be part of a movement called the Southern Gothic. Including William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor, among others, the writers of the Southern Gothic used themes of decay, death, and dissolution as well as the grotesque. Most recently, writers like Stephen King, Anne Rice, and Peter Straub have tapped the Gothic as a source for their writing. Vampires, monsters, and ghoulish creatures figure prominently in the works of these writers.

The Gothic and Film

Perhaps the most notable variation on the Gothic movement, however, is not a literary movement at all but rather the introduction of film during the twentieth century. From the first silent movies, audiences have demonstrated their delight at being terrified. In the 1920s and 1930s, many movies were made about Frankenstein, Dracula, and

werewolves. Later films drew on the work of Poe. Actors such as Bela Lugosi, Lon Chaney, and Vincent Price made their careers on their roles in horror films. Furthermore, films like *The Shining*, released in 1980, starring Jack Nicholson and directed by Stanley Kubrick, featured many of the characteristic elements of the Gothic novel. Based on a novel of the same name by Stephen King, *The Shining* features a huge, vacant, old hotel that turns out to be haunted. There are supernatural events and chases through the corridors of the hotel. Madness and chaos reign. Nicholson's portrayal of the lead character, a down-on-his-luck writer, is both excessive and terrifying, as are the best of the Gothic novels. Many critics of the Gothic, including Punter, Davenport-Hines, and Botting, trace the twentieth-century horror film all the way back to *The Castle of Otranto*.

Representative Authors

William Beckford (1760-1844)

William Beckford, known as both the richest and most eccentric man of his time, was born September 29, 1760, in London, England. By all accounts, Beckford was brilliant, musically gifted, and highly artistic. He was also scandalous and hedonistic. He had no desire to follow in his father's political or business footprints, much to his father's dismay. Rather, young Beckford preferred to travel, write, spend money, and collect art. Because of improper relationships with his cousin's wife, Louisa, and a young man named William "Kitty" Courtenay, Beckford was sent by his mother to the Continent to give the scandal time to die down. Indeed, young Beckford's life followed this pattern repeatedly. He would remain in England until the scandals mounted and then would retreat to the Continent for a cooling-off period. He married in 1783 in a movement to save whatever was left of his reputation; however, his wife died in childbirth in 1785. During this time, Beckford built and rebuilt Fonthill Abbey, considered either the most amazing building or the greatest folly in England at the close of the eighteenth century. Like Horace Walpole, only much, much wealthier, Beckford indulged his passion for the Gothic and for collecting art with his domicile. Another important trait of Beckford's was his fascination with Oriental mysticism. At an early age, he read and reread *The Arabian Nights*. This passion led directly to his composition of *Vathek* in 1786. Beckford died on May 2, 1844, at Lansdowne Crescent, after battling fever and influenza.

Charles Brockden Brown (1771-1810)

The first American novelist, Charles Brockden Brown, was born into a Quaker family in Philadelphia on January 17, 1771. Although he began his education with the intent to become a lawyer, the law soon lost its appeal for him. Apparently, the task of the lawyer to defend a client whether the client was innocent or guilty bothered Brown's sense of morality. This sense of morality often led Brown to take socially radical stances. In this, he seems deeply connected to and influenced by William Godwin. For example, Brown's novel *Alcuin* (1798) explores the ambiguities of marriage and the rights of women. It is for *Wieland* (1798), however, that Brown earned his reputation as a Gothic writer. Considered Brown's best novel, *Wieland* explores the roles of religion and rationality. Clearly, Brown's insistence on a moral stance separates him from some of the earlier Gothic writers such as Beckford and Lewis. Nevertheless, Brown's intense fascination with the inner workings of a character's mind deeply influenced later writers such as Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Brown died in Philadelphia on February 19, 1810, from what was believed to be tuberculosis.

Matthew Gregory Lewis (1775-1818)

Born in London on July 9, 1775, M. G. Lewis attended school in Westminster and Oxford. He traveled to Germany in 1792, where he learned to speak German. While there, he became well-acquainted with German Gothic fiction. He stated to his mother that the reading of Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* inspired him to write his most famous work, *The Monk*, published in 1796. Tradition has it that he completed the work in ten weeks and that it instantly made him a literary star at the age of twenty. Indeed, for the rest of his life, Lewis was referred to by his contemporaries as Monk Lewis. Lewis introduced graphic horror into the Gothic genre, describing in great detail physical torture and putrefaction, as well as steamy sexual encounters. Whereas Radcliffe relied on suspense, or the fear of violence, to motivate her readers, Lewis abandons the fear of violence for the violence itself. Unlike Radcliffe, Lewis used supernatural devices without feeling compelled to offer rational explanations for uncanny events. It was through such techniques that Lewis incorporated German popular literature into the mainstream of English literature. Lewis died of yellow fever on May 16, 1818, on the way home from Jamaica, where he was visiting his inherited holdings on the island.

Charles Robert Maturin (1780-1824)

Charles Robert Maturin was born in Dublin, Ireland, on September 25, 1780. Maturin attended Trinity College, Dublin. His family, noted Huguenot refugees active in the Anglo-Irish community, met with reversal when his father was dismissed from his civil service job. Maturin, who had taken orders in the Anglican church in 1803, attempted to augment his living by writing. Although his drama, *Bertram*, met with success on the London stage, Maturin's financial prospects continued to diminish. Some attribute his growing eccentricities to his attempts to deal with poverty. Certainly, both his nationalism and his criticism of the Anglican church did not endear him to the Anglo-Irish community. The author of several novels, Maturin is best known for *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820). There are many historians and literary critics who call this both the last and the greatest of the Gothic novels. His work attracted admiration from such literary figures as Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Makepeace Thackeray. The French writer Honore de Balzac even wrote a sequel to *Melmoth the Wanderer*. Maturin died at the age of forty-four on October 30, 1824, in Dublin.

Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849)

Born on January 19, 1809, in Boston, Massachusetts, Edgar Allan Poe is one of the most well known of all American writers. He was orphaned at three and raised by John Allen, with whom he had an uneasy lifelong relationship. Poe was a victim of depression; he turned to alcohol for relief and eventually became an alcoholic. His marriage to his beloved cousin Virginia Clemm ended with her death in 1847. While many critics suggest that Poe is a post-Gothic writer, he nevertheless uses many of the conventions of the Gothic form in his own work, including medieval settings, supernatural occurrences, terror, and ruins. Certainly, "The Fall of the House of

Usher"(1834) has all of the Gothic ingredients. Moreover, Poe is particularly important to the ongoing influence of the Gothic on contemporary literature, moving the genre from an external to an internal focus. Poe died in Baltimore on October 7, 1849, from complications related to a brain lesion.

Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823)

Ann Radcliffe, born Ann Ward in London on July 9, 1764, wrote a series of Gothic romances that set the course of the genre for years to come. Indeed, Radcliffe's name is nearly synonymous with a particular style of the Gothic, one that uses the supernatural but generally provides a rational explanation at the end. Young Ann Ward married William Radcliffe, a well-to-do Oxford graduate, in 1787. They had no children and traveled extensively. Radcliffe's diaries of her travels seem to have provided settings and detail for her novels. Unlike other more notorious Gothic writers, Radcliffe lived in relative obscurity, although she achieved immense success with her novels. In 1794, Radcliffe published what was to become the most popular of her novels, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Like other Gothic novels, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is set in rugged mountains. Radcliffe's novel, *The Italian* (1797), written in response to Lewis's *The Monk*, is generally regarded as the superior novel, however. Alastair Fowler in *The Oxford Illustrated History of English Literature* credits Radcliffe with establishing "wild landscape as a standard feature of romance; even if, as she wrote, the full terror of landscape was already fading." Fowler further argues that Radcliffe's technique was deliberate: by interspersing elaborate description into her narrative, Radcliffe "keeps delaying the action and distancing it into perspective." Perhaps the most influential of all Gothic writers, Radcliffe retired from writing at the height of her career, unhappy with the uses to which her writings were put. Ann Radcliffe died suddenly in London on February 7, 1823.

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (1797-1851)

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, born in London on August 30, 1797, to feminist Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, moved in the most radical literary circles of her day. At sixteen, she became the mistress of the poet Percy Shelley and a close personal friend of George Gordon, Lord Byron. The death of her mother when she was ten days old haunted her all her life. Mary Godwin, as the daughter of two intellectuals, was well educated and self-taught, able to hold her own against some of the best minds of her time. In the summer of 1816, Mary Godwin, her lover Percy, and her stepsister Claire traveled to Switzerland, where they took up residence near Lord Byron on Lake Geneva. It was here that the well-known ghost story competition among the young literati produced Mary Shelley's best-known novel, *Frankenstein*. In December of 1816, Percy Shelley and Mary Godwin married. Six years later, Percy Shelley died by drowning in the Ligurian Sea. Mary Shelley died in London from a brain tumor on February 1, 1851. Her work continues to exert influence on contemporary fiction and criticism.

Horace Walpole (1717-1797)

Born September 24, 1717, in London, Horace Walpole was the Earl of Orford. Educated at Eaton and Cambridge, Walpole became friends with Thomas Gray, Richard West, and Thomas Ashton, early members of the so-called Graveyard School of poetry. Gray in particular influenced Walpole in his development of a Gothic imagination. In 1739, Walpole toured the Continent with Gray, crossing the Alps, another important influence on his development as a Gothic writer. In 1747, Walpole purchased Strawberry Hill, a home on the Thames River in Twickenham. For nearly thirty years, Walpole built and rebuilt the house, turning it into a "little Gothic castle," in his own words. Walpole also established a private press at Strawberry Hill, and it was from here that he published his most famous work, *The Castle of Otranto*, in December 1764. Initially, Walpole hid the fact that he was the author of the work, saying that it was a translation by William Marshall of a medieval Italian text. The book met with success, however, and in the second edition, Walpole revealed his own authorship. He told a friend in a letter that the idea for the novel had come to him in a dream. *The Castle of Otranto* is particularly significant because it was the first Gothic novel written. Indeed, the novel provided for later writers nearly every convention found in subsequent Gothic writing. After a long life of letters, politics, and architectural innovations, Walpole died at Berkeley Square, London, on March 2, 1797.

Representative Works

The Castle of Otranto

The Castle of Otranto, by Walpole, published in December 1764, is universally regarded as the first Gothic novel. Set in some undefined medieval past, the novel draws on heroic romance as well as legends and folklore. In this one novel, Walpole established virtually every convention of Gothic literature. These include the Gothic castle, a presence so real as to nearly be a character in and of itself. He also uses gloomy weather, clanking chains, midnight bells, and subterranean passageways. The story is a strange one: Manfred, Prince of Otranto, has one son, Conrad. On the eve of Conrad's marriage to the lovely Isabella, a huge antique helmet falls on Conrad and crushes him. Manfred decides to put away his wife and take Isabella as his wife in order to continue his line. This is not something Isabella wants and thus begins the chase and imprisonment. In due time, readers find that the peasant Isabella encounters in the passageways is really the true heir of Otranto; the death of Conrad was in repayment for the sins of his father. It is impossible to overestimate the influence this novel has had on the course of Gothic writing. Walpole's invention and imagination set the arc of the novel for years to come.

"The Fall of the House of Usher"

Edgar Allan Poe's most famous story was published in 1834, some years after the height of the Gothic movement. Nevertheless, the story is, as are many of Poe's stories, classically Gothic in setting, theme, and mood. Fred Botting, in *Gothic* writes, "The house is both a Gothic manifestation, an architectural ruin set in a desolate and gloomy landscape and a family equally in decay, dying from an unknown and incurable disease." The story also contains the element of claustrophobia in the premature burial of Roderick Usher's sister as well as the scent of incest in the intimately close relationship between Usher and his sister. Unlike earlier Gothic novels, however, the plot of "The Fall of the House of Usher" is not episodic, but rather builds steadily and intensely to its nearly excessive climax, when, just as Roderick Usher announces he has buried his sister alive, she bursts through the door, and the entire house collapses. Poe concentrates on "avoiding all impressions alien to his effect," thereby giving "his tales an extraordinary unity of tone and colour," according to Edith Birkhead in her seminal book, *The Tale of Terror: A Study of the Gothic Romance*. Poe's transformation of the Gothic in this and other works continues to heavily influence contemporary horror writing.

Frankenstein

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* was published in 1818. The novel does not fit neatly into any generic designation, but many critics suggest that it is the first modern work of

science fiction. However, Shelley's emphasis on isolation, wild landscapes, supernatural occurrences, and the haunting presence of the double places the novel within the context of the Gothic. The narrative of *Frankenstein* is complicated; it opens on a boat sailing in the Arctic, when the crew sees a large figure driving a sledge. The next day, they find another sledge, this one containing Victor Frankenstein, who then recounts to the captain of the vessel the story of his life and the creation of the monster. Shelley also includes some six chapters from the monster's point of view, in which he speaks of his own life. Ironically, it is through the pen of a woman that this novel transforms the Gothic from a feminine form of literature. That is, most earlier Gothic novels featured heroines fleeing for their lives and honor. In Shelley's novel, there are virtually no female characters, and Victor is a cold and hard scientist. Indeed, Shelley brings together both the rationality of science and the irrationality of the will to power. Victor is the model of a man seduced by the power of science, unable to see until it is much too late that there are some things, such as the creation of life, that belong to God alone.

Melmoth the Wanderer Written by Charles Robert Maturin in 1820, *Melmoth the Wanderer* is often called the last Gothic novel. It is the story of a Melmoth, a Wanderer who has bargained his soul for a longer life. Regretting the choice he has made, he finds that if he can persuade someone to take his bargain on, he will be free. Most notable in *Melmoth the Wanderer* is Maturin's convoluted narrative style. While it hearkens back to the medieval frame story, it also looks forward to post-modern distortions of chronology and location. These dislocations create a supernatural story more closely related to dream sequences than the novels that had come before. Inside the frame is a series of tales that recount Melmoth's visits to the people he wants to take on his bargain. For example, in one story, he appears to a young woman whose lover has gone mad. The Wanderer offers to cure him if she will take on his bargain. She refuses. Indeed, although the Wanderer chooses to appear to people whose lives are utterly miserable, and although the Wanderer promises them that they can have the entire world, none of them will trade their immortal souls for what Melmoth offers. At the conclusion of the novel, Melmoth has been unable to get out of his bargain and must sacrifice his soul. Edith Birkhead in *The Tale of Terror* suggests that the Wanderer is connected to the legend of The Wandering Jew, Dr. Faustus, and Milton's Lucifer. One might also add Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Ancient Mariner to this list. Certainly, in his deeply divided, alienated state, he resembles the hero/villains of other Gothic novels. It is in the unity of its human misery, however, that the novel makes its mark upon the genre.

The Monk

M. G. Lewis wrote *The Monk* in 1795, when he was just twenty-one years old. It took him all of ten weeks to complete the novel, and it appeared in print in 1796. Lewis wrote the book after reading Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Two different stories comprise *The Monk*. In one plot, two lovers, Agnes and Raymond, are separated by their parents and the Catholic Church. Agnes is pregnant and is sent to a convent where she is chained to a wall and tortured. She gives birth to her baby, who then dies in front of her. In the other plot, the monk Ambrosio breaks his vows of chastity through the

machinations of the evil Matilda. Through a series of complicated plot twists, Ambrosio murders one woman and rapes another. He ends up in an Inquisition prison and then sells his soul to Satan. He dies a horrible and prolonged death. Critics of the day found the novel to be both obscene and blasphemous. Nevertheless, the novel was wildly popular. *The Monk* shifts the Gothic novel away from the explained supernatural of Ann Radcliffe; the supernatural in *The Monk* is truly supernatural. In addition, Lewis's prose is both graphic and intense; his descriptions of the putrefaction of the dead baby, for example, are particularly disturbing. Nevertheless, *The Monk* continued to expand the popularity of the Gothic novel in its heyday of the 1790s.

The Mysteries of Udolpho

Radcliffe's Gothic novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho* built on the groundwork begun by Walpole. In this novel, Radcliffe draws on many of the conventional tactics of the Gothic novel but emphasizes the use of suspense. She sets *Udolpho* in the medieval past, 1584, and in France and Italy. Her novel is not the bloody, steamy affair of many of her contemporaries, like Lewis; she instead chooses to use long passages describing sublime landscapes. Her novel does, however, include chases through subterranean passages and considerable violence. The narrative structure of the story is complicated: the protagonist, Emily, finds herself in an apparently haunted castle, replete with shadows, footsteps, inexplicable noises and music, and veiled portraits, under the control of her aunt's evil husband. Radcliffe introduces many supernatural elements into the story but includes explanations for all of them by the time the novel concludes. *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, along with Radcliffe's later novel, *The Italian*, set the standard for Gothic literature in the 1790s.

Vathek

First written in French and then later translated into English, *Vathek*, written by William Beckford and published in 1786, is the story of a mad caliph's vices and his descent into hell. Beckford formulated the idea of *Vathek* at a Christmas Eve orgy at Fonthill. Many consider *Vathek* the best Oriental tale in English. Lord Byron, in particular, found Beckford's work to be powerful. Certainly, any reading of *Vathek* will acknowledge Beckford's infatuation with *The Arabian Nights*. Some critics have identifed Vathek's wild life as a reflection of Beckford's own; the author led a life of excess and eccentricity. For all that, *Vathek* moves the Gothic novel out of medieval Europe and into an exotic, Oriental setting. The novel exerted considerable influence on writers such as Hawthorne, Poe, and Stephane Mallarmé. Artists and musicians also engaged the fantastic world of *Vathek*.

Wieland

In 1798, Charles Brockden Brown, an American, published *Wieland*, the first Gothic novel written in the United States. The work is known for its psychological depth as well

as for its Gothic excess. Brown explores deeply the role of religion in the lives of driven characters. For Brown, morality resides in the individual conscience, and revealed religion may produce horrific results. In *Wieland*, a ventriloquist's evil tricks, along with religious fervor, convince Wieland, the main character of the novel, that God wants him to kill his family. He does so, killing his wife and children. His sister narrowly escapes to narrate the tale. In the novel, Brown tries to negotiate between rational Enlightenment and religious fervor. By so doing, Brown shifts the Gothic tale away from supernatural events and superstition into the realm of human psychology. Is Weiland mad or deluded? Do his crimes spring from insanity, or has his "religious" calling merely rendered him irrational? A dark and brooding book, *Wieland* remains a masterpiece of American literature.

Critical Overview

Gothic literature has elicited spirited critical debate from its earliest days. According to Botting in his book, *The Gothic*:

Between 1790 and 1810, critics were almost univocal
in their condemnation of what was seem as an
unending torrent of popular trashy novels. Intensified
by fears of radicalism and revolution, the challenge
to aesthetic values was framed in terms of social
transgression: virtue, property and domestic order
were considered to be under threat.

Such reactions from critics are not surprising. The aesthetic values of the eighteenth century included order, proportion, and decorum, based largely on classical models from the Greeks and Romans. Works of art (including literature and architecture) that flouted these conventions and took shape from the medieval past were looked upon as inferior, so much so that the term "Gothic" was applied to anything that seemed barbarous or hideous. However, while Gothic literature may have been scorned by the intelligentsia and literary critics of the day, it found rapid and overwhelming popularity with the reading public. That the reading public included growing numbers of women and middle-class readers may suggest a reason for the widespread popularity of the genre. It is also likely that the shift in readership offered a threat to established scholars and writers of the day, making their response to Gothic literature vitriolic in the extreme.

Contemporary criticism was not entirely negative, of course. No less a personage than the Marquis de Sade, in his book *Idee sur les Romans*, offered that "this kind of fiction, whatever one may think of it, is assuredly not without merit; twas the inevitable result of the revolutionary shocks which all Europe has suffered." The Marquis de Sade points particularly to Lewis's *The Monk* as a work of special merit.

More recent criticism has approached Gothic literature from a variety of directions. Punter in his *Literature of Terror* outlines a number of approaches critics often take. First, critics often see Gothic literature as a "recognisable movement in the history of culture, with recognisable sociopsychological causes." That is, events and ideas present in the culture find an outlet through Gothic literature. Punter, David Stevens in *The Gothic Tradition*, and Ronald Paulson in "Gothic Fiction and the French Revolution," an article appearing in the journal *English Language History*, among many other critics and historians, all comment on the connections between contemporary historical events and the rise of the Gothic.

Another critical track is the formalist approach. That is, critics examine the narrative structure of the Gothic novel to find those elements that bring unity to the work. Conversely, other formalist critics approach Gothic fiction, according to Punter, by revealing its "narrative complexity and its tendency to raise technical problems which it often fails to resolve."

Three important critical strategies prevalent in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century include psychoanalytical, Marxist, and feminist critiques. In the first place, the work of Sigmund Freud, particularly his 1919 essay, "The Uncanny," informs many critics, who use Freud's formulation of the death wish, the Oedipus complex, repression, and divided self as productive means of entry into the complexities of Gothic fiction. Likewise, Marxist critics examine the class structures of the novels. There are clearly upper- and lower-class characters in all the novels under discussion, and these characters reflect the class biases of the novelists themselves. Finally, feminist critics, such as Margaret Doody, concentrate either on an analysis of the female characters of Gothic literature or on the role played by female writers in the development of the Gothic.

Although the Gothic movement itself may have ended in about 1820, the Gothic continues to exert considerable influence on both literature and criticism. If anything, critical interest in the Gothic continues to grow at a remarkable rate, perhaps because of the renewed interest in monsters, the uncanny, the supernatural, and the unexplained evident in late twentieth-century and early twentyfirst- century culture.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Andrews Henningfeld is a professor of English literature and composition who has written extensively for educational and academic publishers. In this essay, Andrews Henningfeld considers the device of the "double" in Gothic literature and connects the prevalence of this device to psychological, cultural, and historical causes.

Perhaps the single most interesting literary device used by Gothic writers is that of the "double." Generally, the most common form of doubling in literature is the *doppelgänger*, a German term meaning "double-goer." A literary *doppelgänger* often takes the form of an alternate identity of the main character. Sometimes this can be in the physical form of a biological twin; sometimes writers create a demonic character that functions as a representation of another character's dark side. A famous example of this technique is Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Sharer*. In Gothic literature, the *doppelgänger* is often threatening and a cause for terror. Shelley's *Frankenstein* offers one of the best examples of the use of a *doppelgänger* in Gothic literature. As Aiga Ozolins points out in the article "Dreams and Doctrines: Dual Strands in *Frankenstein*," "There is ample evidence in the novel that the creature functions as the scientist's baser self." Further, Edgar Allan Poe makes use of the double in "The Fall of the House of Usher." In this case, Roderick Usher and his sister are biological twins, so closely connected that when the sister appears to die and is buried, Usher realizes too late that she has been buried alive. The horror of premature burial is doubled by this technique. The reader is first horrified by Usher's proclamation that they have buried her alive; and then even more horrified by Usher's horror. While the *doppelgänger* may be the most apparent form of the double in Gothic literature, there are many other, more subtle ways, that writers introduce notions of doubling in their fiction. Through mirrors, artwork, blurred characters, confusion between the dead and alive, the divided hero/villain, and *déjà vu*, doubles in Gothic literature proliferate like reflections in a funhouse mirror.

So prevalent is the notion of doubling in Gothic literature that it is difficult, if not impossible, to identify Gothic novels that do *not* use the device in some form. One way that Gothic writers often introduce a double is through the use of literal mirror images. A character gazes into a mirror, for example, and sees not only himself but also his darker side at the same time. Robert Louis Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll looks in his mirror to behold the demonic Mr. Hyde.

Less apparent, but no less effective, is the use of a figurative mirror image. In an essay in *The New Eighteenth Century* discussing Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, critic Terry Castle argues, "Characters in *Udolpho* mirror or blur into one another. Characters seem uncannily to resemble or replace previous characters." Castle also points out the inability in this novel for characters and readers to distinguish the dead from the living. Again, death is a mirror image of life; the confusion over who is dead and who is alive created by this mirroring is major point of terror. "The Fall of the House of Usher" makes use of this device in the confusion of the burial of Usher's sister. Is she dead, or is she alive when placed in the tomb? Is she alive, or is she dead when she suddenly bursts into the room where Usher is in the process of revealing his doubts about her death to

24

the narrator? "One sure sign of the double," argues critic Margaret Anne Doody in "Desert Ruins and Troubled Waters: Female Dreams in Fiction and the Development of the Gothic Novel," appearing in the journal *Genre*, "is his haunting presence."

Another way that Gothic writers introduce doubling into their work is through the use of artwork. It is a stock device in Gothic fiction that portraits and artwork can come alive at any moment. In Lewis's *The Monk*, the evil Matilda has a portrait of the Madonna painted for the monk Ambrosio. Unbeknownst to Ambrosio, however, Matilda has had her own image embedded in the picture of the Madonna. Thus, when Ambrosio adores the portrait of the holy Madonna, he also adores the satanic Matilda. This adoration of a doubled portrait leads to violently sexual dreams and Ambrosio's ultimate destruction.

A much less obvious, but nonetheless potent, use of the double is in the creation of the wanderer, a stock character in Gothic literature, represented by such characters as Maturin's Melmoth, Shelley's monster, and Coleridge's Ancient Mariner. These characters are outsiders, the mirror images of the "civilized" men or women. They are alienated from society, solitary, and estranged. In *The Adversary Literature: The English Novel in the Eighteenth Century   A Study in Genre*, Frederick Karl describes the wanderer as "truly countercultural, an alternate force, almost mystical in his embodiment of the burdens and sins of society." Thus, the wanderer stands as a double for the character enmeshed in the trappings of society. For example, the Ancient Mariner doubles the Wedding Guest in Coleridge's poem. The Mariner, a wanderer, is doomed to periodically accost a civilized person and share his story. The confrontation allows brief respite for the Mariner, as he shares his burden with his civilized double.

The self-divided hero/villain, found so often in Gothic fiction, offers yet another way to examine the notion of doubling. In this case, the character is often brave and cowardly, strong and weak, moral and depraved. Certainly, Shelley's Dr. Frankenstein falls into this category. He is a brilliant scientist, so bent on overcoming death that he crosses the boundary that divides the moral from the immoral. He sees himself to be above such petty and bourgeois distinctions, a precursor of German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's *Ubermensch*, or "Overman." However, Frankenstein is both triumphant and repentant, a deeply troubled and deeply divided individual, so deeply divided that the warring sides of his psyche seem to belong to a set of mirror image twins.

Even time and experience become doubled in Gothic fiction through the use of *déjà vu*, the feeling that one has experienced an event before, and memory, the recollection of a real event. In many ways, this feeling is like a haunting; it is difficult, if not impossible, to identify why one has the feeling. By introducing the sense of *déjà vu* in their stories, Gothic writers bring both the past and the future into the present. Although a character may only experience an event once in reality, the twin devices of recollection and *déjà vu* allow the experience to happen again and again and again within the pages of the novel.

Finally, a number of critics identify an important theme in Gothic literature: that the sins of the father will be visited upon the son. In other words, the evil that someone does in his or her lifetime will be repaid in the lives of his or her offspring. Again, while this may

not seem like an obvious use of doubling, it allows a Gothic writer to reintroduce the injustice perpetrated by a previous generation on the current generation, until the injustice is righted. Thus, sin is doubled and doubled until it is corrected.

Given that the use of doubling techniques features so heavily in so much Gothic literature, perhaps it is important to identify the roots of the double, as well as critical interpretations of its function in the literature. Most obviously, the use of the double in Gothic literature seems to spring from the duality of the Middle Ages, the era that Gothicists attempt to recreate in their writing. Certainly, medieval romance offers many models of the use of the double: Malory's story of the twins Balin and Balan who meet each other in combat, unknown to each other, is an excellent example, as is the Guinevere/false Guinevere motif of the Arthurian legend. G. R. Thompson's chapter, "A Dark Romanticism: In Quest of a Gothic Monomyth," in *Literature of the Occult* speaks to the duality of the Middle Ages made graphic by "the evocation of the transcendent, upward thrust of Gothic cathedrals" and "the vision of the dark night of the soul and the nightmare terrors of demons." That both are so present in the literature and the iconography of the Middle Ages demonstrates at least one channel through which notions of the double find their way to Gothic literature.

Likewise, the eighteenth century was also a time of extreme duality. The Enlightenment emphasis on reason and rationality, so dominant in this time, denies fully one half of human experience, that of passion and emotion. Writers of the eighteenth century were obsessed with distinguishing good from evil, truth from falsehood, and reason from passion. Perhaps the only way, then, for writers to account for both sides of this duality was to separate them in the creation of doubling experiences. And yet, throughout Gothic literature, it is as if what has been divided struggles mightily for reunion, a reunion that often results in death.

There are a variety of critical interpretations of how the double in Gothic literature functions as a response to the dualities discussed above. Frederick Frank in *The First Gothics* calls the Gothic "the literature of collapsing structures where even the narrative context itself is in a constant state of fall with no possibility of a visionary reordering." He further quotes Thompson, who argues that Gothic literature "begins with irreconcilable dualities." Thus, the attempted synthesis or reunion of the divided narrative, the divided psyche, and the divided culture ultimately and inevitably fails.

Botting in *The Gothic* identifies the use of the double in Gothic literature, along with other stock features, as the "principal embodiments and evocations of cultural anxieties." The growth of science, for example, with the decline of religion offers such an example of a cultural anxiety. Thus, Frankenstein and his monster are both embodiments of the anxiety caused by the replacement of ultimate meaning with science. Likewise, the French Revolution, with its violent upheaval of social structures, is yet another cultural anxiety.

Finally, many critics turn to psychology for an interpretation of the function of the double in Gothic literature. Freud, in his essay "The Uncanny," reviewed the work of Otto Rank, who studied "the connections which the 'double' has with reflections in mirrors, with

shadows, with guardian spirits, with the belief in the soul and with the fear of death." Freud argues that although the double starts out as a form of ego protection in children, it becomes "the uncanny harbinger of death☐a thing of terror." Certainly, readers in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century would find it difficult to even think about the notion of the double without referencing Freud and perhaps Carl Jung. The double can be seen as a representation of the divided self, personifying the pleasure seeking id, the self-aware ego, and the morality of the super-ego. Likewise, mirror images provide a way that the self can project its own darkness out of itself onto another.

Doubling, then, serves not only as a literary device designed to invoke terror in the reader, or as a complicated narrative maneuver, but also as an impetus for self-reflection and growth. Doody offers that "The most important point regarding the double is the necessity to confront and recognize the dark aspect of one's personality in order to transform it by an act of conscious choice." That is, the double allows a character to both confront his or her own darker self and reintegrate that self. Thus, the double, be it as *doppelgänger*, literal or figurative mirror image, artwork, or *déjà vu* functions as a means for self-confrontation and selfknowledge not only for the characters in the stories but for the reader of Gothic literature as well.

Source: Diane Andrews Henningfeld, Critical Essay on Gothic Literature, in *Literary Movements for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay excerpt, MacAndrew examines Gothic conventions in use for over two hundred years, finding that "writers chose the Gothic tale as a vehicle for ideas about psychological evil."

Gothic fiction is a literature of nightmare. Among its conventions are found dream landscapes and figures of the subconscious imagination. Its fictional world gives form to amorphous fears and impulses common to all mankind, using an amalgam of materials, some torn from the author's own subconscious mind and some the stuff of myth, folklore, fairy tale, and romance. It conjures up beings☐mad monks, vampires, and demons☐and settings☐forbidding cliffs and glowering buildings, stormy seas and the dizzying abyss☐that have literary significance and the properties of dream symbolism as well. Gothic fiction gives shape to concepts of the place of evil in the human mind.

It was a new literary form in the late eighteenth century. At that time, the purpose of Gothic fiction, like that of the Sentimental novel, to which it was closely allied, was to educate the reader's feelings through his identification with the feelings of the characters; to arouse his "sympathy," as the aesthetics of Sensibility demanded, by evoking pity and fear; and to explore the mind of man and the causes of evil in it, so that evil might be avoided and virtue fostered. The earliest Gothic romances are literary fantasies embodying, for didactic purposes, ideas about man's psychology that were the culmination of a century of philosphical speculation on the subject. In them, good and evil are starkly differentiated absolutes, but as succeeding works delved deeper into the idea of evil as psychological, evil quickly began to be seen as relative and, in no time, its pleasures were being explored. All these works were based on accepted views about the human mind. Later authors, employing the same literary devices as the early works, introduced changes that both reflected and developed modifications of these views. As tales of the weird and horrid persisted through the nineteenth century, using the same stock characters and settings again and again, they gradually pieced together among them a picture of evil as a form of psychological monstrosity. The original querying into the origins of evil shifted to ambiguous presentations that questioned the nature of evil itself.

The highly conventionalized nature of the settings and characters, structures and imagery of Gothic fiction has always been recognized. All too frequently, however, these features have been dubbed "Gothic machinery" or "clap-trap" because, like other forms of popular literature, Gothic fiction has been seen as fare for a sensation-seeking audience and not, therefore, worth literary analysis. As a result, the course of the convention has not been traced. Instead, Gothic fiction has been called escape literature, intended to inspire terror for terror's sake. Such descriptions have concealed the important ideas these tales contain. The view of the early Gothic romances as "just" a form of escape does not adequately explain why they appeared when they did or why their appeal was so immediate and so strong. Descriptions of the genre as a literature of violence reflecting a violent age, or as a literature of sensation needed to perk up a jaded age are circular as well as contradictory. Recent attempts to treat Gothic literature

as an aspect of Romanticism also fail to see its significance as a convention. When we see that Gothic tales have continued to appear for two hundred years, and that the convention has been put to use by major writers as different from each other as Emily Brontë and Henry James, it is evident that something more is involved than a continuing taste for a ghoulish kind of bedside reading, and that these works are not confined to a single period of literature.

From Walpole's maddened and murderous princeling in *The Castle of Otranto* to the self-tormented scientist in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, the same conventional features keep reappearing because ideas of the same kind lie behind these works. That is, these and other writers chose the Gothic tale as a vehicle for ideas about psychological evil□evil not as a force exterior to man, but as a distortion, a warping of his mind. Walpole's slight romance yields such an interpretation, so does Stevenson's novel, so do the Gothic tales that appeared in the long stretch of time between them.

This is not to say that Stevenson and Walpole held the same view of evil, or of man's psychology in general. Indeed, their ideas on the subject form a sharp contrast. The great interest in tracing this literary convention lies in the changes that take place within it, which correspond to the changes in thought on the subject that have occurred since Locke first set forth his theory of the workings of the mind. What seems to have happened is this: following Locke (who was to the eighteenth century what Freud has been to the twentieth), eighteenthcentury thinkers had devoted a great deal of their energies to the study of the mind, the nature of perception, the means to knowledge, expanding, adapting, and modifying Locke's ideas. It was the first era in which the mind was studied inductively, and the changes in world view, especially in ideas about the moral nature of Man, that such thinking reflected and also helped bring about were given literary expression in a number of different genres, but most directly in the Sentimental fiction of the time, of which Gothic literature is a part. Within this general literary development, Gothic fiction first made its appearance when Horace Walpole, his head full of a romanticized, eighteenth-century medievalism, awakened from a dream of which he could remember only a scrap and, under its influence, turned out *The Castle of Otranto*, at white heat. Though he himself felt the importance of this slight work, which, to the end of his life remained his favorite among his writings, he expected his fellow literati would scorn it as a "romance." Instead, his anonymous tale received high praise from literati and reading public alike. He had given fictional treatment to some of the major preoccupations of his time that were also his own concerns, and, after an interval, others began to copy his work□many a castle, many a tyrant, many a hero and heroine of perfect virtue and courage appeared. Naturally, however, Walpole's successors each took his devices and used them a little differently. Clara Reeve declared *Otranto* was too extravagant and confined herself wherever possible to the "Natural"; William Beckford, romping off into the Arabian Nights, introduced the grotesque into the genre; Matthew Lewis added the tormented monk who was immediately picked up by Ann Radcliffe, herself the chief among terror-mongers, whose villains had influenced Lewis in the first place.

In this rush of authors making use of and modifying one another's devices, there is more than a simple desire to share in the latest literary fad. Different though they were as personalities, these writers recognized the possibilities of the new genre for the expression of some of the prevailing views of their age, which they all shared, views not previously given fictional form. Each uncovered the implications of preceding works, recognizing the intuitions behind them. Thus, each delved deeper into the common subject, adding new devices to the convention as they were needed and producing works whose further implications could again be picked up by a successor to add a new round to the developing spiral of the genre. This process continued throughout the nineteenth century, as writers embodied the views of the later age in the same way. Thus, Mary Shelley, Edgar Allan Poe, and Nathaniel Hawthorne added twisted scientists to the mad monks of Lewis and Radcliffe. Among distorted human shapes inherited from the eighteenth century, monsters and demonic animals appeared in the nineteenth. The ghosts and devils of Walpole, Reeve, Lewis, and Radcliffe reappeared considerably modified in Maturin, Le Fanu, Brontë, and James, and to them and Beckford's Giaour were added vampires and witches. Settings were changed from medieval to contemporary, a man's house turned out to be still his Gothic castle and his soul, already reflected in paintings and statues, began to look back at him from mirrors and, worse still, from his double, a living, breathing copy of himself.

Gradually, if we follow the course of the convention as it winds through the nineteenth century, feeding its weird tales into the mainstream of realistic fiction, we can trace changes in ideas about the place of evil in the mind. The moral absolutes of eighteenth-century thought crumble before a shifting, relative morality. Soon Edgar Allan Poe is playing with ideas of evil and madness. By midnineteenth century, Emily Brontë has evoked a primitive *spiritus loci* to confound earlier notions of evil as unnatural; by the 1890s Henry James is placing evil in the eye of the moral arbiter. In tracing the convention, we can see the developing ideas that preoccupied the late eighteenth century and obsessed the nineteenth. In Gothic literature of those years, with its monsters and madmen, we find suggested imaginatively writers intuitive understanding of human evil.

Thus, within this literary convention, as in any other, changes and developments have occurred while it has retained its basically stable and recognizable outlines. Individual works within the convention embody the particularlities of the author's thought in the devices common to the whole convention and thereby reveal both the ideas of the particular moment and the overall purpose of the convention itself. That common purpose, which ties these works together, emerges from the peculiar form of symbolism found in Gothic tales. In this literature, the entire tale is symbolic. In analyzing it, one has to speak of storms that "stand for" the villain's anger or heroines that more closely represent a concept of virtue than flesh-and-blood women. Unlike the artfully buried symbols customary to a realistic work, the flagrant, all-pervading symbolism of a Gothic tale is almost, though not quite, allegorical. This literature is not allegory because its referents are deliberately hazy. The surface fiction is full of vague, unexplained horrors designed, not to render a precise meaning, but to evoke the emotion of "terror." Yet, these effects of "terror" in Gothic tales refer to something beyond the fictional devices that produce them. The quasiallegorical effect derives from what lies behind the terror-

inspiring fictional devices. These tales make use of the realization that monsters in fiction frighten because they are already the figments of our dreaming imaginations.

They are the shapes into which our fears are projected and so can be used in literature to explore the subterranean landscape of the mind. Terror is evoked when the ghost, the double, or the lurking assassin correspond to something that is actually feared, known or unknown. The fictional beings of Gothic fiction, whether they be human or animal, or manifestations from the "Beyond," whether they be universal archetypes or the pettiest of childhood bogies, symbolize real but vague fears that the reader recognizes as his own and all men's. Beneath the surface fiction there is a probing of humanity's basic psychological forces, an exploration of the misty realm of the subconscious, and the symbols correspond to psychological phenomena that yield to literary analysis. Yet it is probably this quasi-allegorical nature of Gothic symbolism, with its meaning lying almost entirely outside the fictional surface, that has caused this convention to be read only for its surface fiction, about which, it is true, little more can be said than that it evokes fear for fear's sake.

The authors of Gothic fiction, in writing their symbolic fantasies, necessarily chose a deliberately artificial form, for which they took their materials from earlier literature. *The Castle of Otranto* has several immediate antecedents—works that show an early use of historical setting, a ghost here and there, occasional sinister and supernatural happenings, and it has remote ancestors in Shakespeare and medieval romance. These and other predecessors have, of course, been traced. Thorough studies have been made of the relationship of Gothic fiction to the graveyard poets, to Shakespeare and Spenser, and to the combination of antiquarianism and the movement of Sentimentalism that swept the late eighteenth century. But all this is mere learned lumber unless it shows how Gothic fiction does something new. Since Gothic fiction was, as has been generally recognized, a new genre, it follows that it was doing something different with the materials of its predecessors. To discover what that is, it is necessary to uncover the ideas and aesthetic principles that gave rise to these works by analyzing them as symbolic constructs and to trace the convention with all its accretions through time and space. When this is done, the heritage on which Gothic authors drew throws further light on the meaning and purposes of their works.

The source and fountainhead of the entire Gothic tradition, Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, appeared in 1764, twelve years before its first important successor, Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron* (1775), twenty-two years before William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786), and nearly thirty before the first works of Ann Radcliffe. It is a rather frothy little romance, so crammed with events and relationships that it reads like a plot summary of itself. If Walpole had set out to stock a warehouse of Gothic materials for his successors, he could hardly have done better. *Otranto* is peopled with two-dimensional characters embodying virtue and vice; its setting constitutes a representation of the villain's character; it is an indirect narration, a story mediated through two voices before it reaches the reader; and its imagery and supernatural events lead to an interpretation of its meaning as an eighteenthcentury psychological tale. All these features reappear in later works. Thus, an examination of *Otranto* tells a great deal about the convention to which it gave rise.

The medieval setting, the thunderous villain, the sensitive hero and heroine, the ghosts and other wonders that identify *The Castle of Otranto* as a Gothic tale were at least supposed to have been adopted from medieval romance. Here and elsewhere the relationship is tenuous at best, as the eighteenth century probably knew. A Gothic novel is to a medieval romance what an artificial ruin in an eighteenth-century garden was to a genuine one, and Walpole's romance is like his house, consciously fanciful in its medievalism. He himself said of Strawberry Hill, the house he transformed into a "Gothic" mansion: "Every true Goth must perceive" that the early rooms "are more the works of fancy than of imitation." The medieval setting of *Otranto*, too, is largely a creation of its author's imagination. Walpole uses his medieval tale to make a fictional reality of evil as a psychological state; not for historical accuracy, but to appeal to eighteenth-century sensibilities. He employs it in accordance with the late eighteenth century's aesthetic concept of the sublime as evoking pity and terror to draw the reader out of himself.

The first Gothic characteristic of *Otranto* is its presentation as an ancient manuscript rediscovered. This produces an indirect, mediated narration that imparts an air of strangeness to the exotic setting. Medieval Italy is already distant from the reader in time and space and, when he is asked to suppose himself imaginatively to be reading a manuscript of shadowy authorship unearthed and presented to him by an unidentified "editor," a sense is imparted that he is about to delve into a world that will be difficult to understand. In the preface to the first edition, Walpole's "editor" surmises that the story, the work of an unknown chronicler, is possibly by "an artful priest." He speculates about the date of composition, establishing a sense of obscurity by preventing the reader from pinpointing the origin of the manuscript and by remarking on the quality of the original Italian of which his "translation," he says, is a poor rendering. All this puts us on notice that a mysterious world is about to be revealed.

Sentimental and Gothic novelists frequently use fictitious editors of this sort. They are more than just a means for the author to conceal his identity. The statements these "editors" put into their "prefaces" must not be taken at face value. Rather, they are the first of many signals alerting us to the kind of reading required of us. For instance, by setting the "editor" between us and the "chronicler," who is himelf relaying the story and, besides, is presented as suspect, Walpole guards against our rejecting the story because of its blatant artificiality, by putting us on notice that we must follow it according to its own rules.

Thus alerted, we can see that the "translator" criticism of the writer's "moral" and his surmise that the suspect monk was attempting to "confirm the populace in their ancient errors and superstititions" is not a straightforward statement but a device of irony designed to attract our attention to that "moral." The "editor" remarks that the benighted medieval chronicler has erred in basing his work on so flimsy a precept as "that *the sins of fathers are visited on their children"* (Walpole's italics). Yet, in fact, the psychological aberration of incest☐also a staple item in Gothic tales☐is Walpole's central theme and he is using the editor's words to attract our attention to it. The plot is, in fact, an unravelling of the effect on children of their fathers' deeds, good and bad. From the crushing of Manfred's frail son Conrad under the giant helmet and Manfred's murder of

his daughter to the hero Theodore's fulfillment of the prophecy, the children's lives are affected by their fathers' lives. And Manfred himself is driven by the demon of inherited evil. He is presented as not intrinsically wicked but as ruled by passions aroused by his obsession with the prophecy that his line will not retain its unlawful rule over the princedom. He was, we are told, naturally humane, "when his passion did not obscure his reason," but it does, in fact, obscure his reason throughout the novel. Like a medieval Oedipus, he tries to prevent the prophecy from coming true and his own evil deeds and his downfall are the result of his desparate effort to maintain the position he holds through his grandfather's crimes. Thus, the sins of the fathers are visited on the children in his case, too, but not in the sense that Manfred himself or his children have the divine wrath visited upon them. The awareness that his deeds are wrong and the sense that he is forced farther and farther down the path of evil maddens him and is actually the cause of his crimes. Thus, in this first of the Gothic novels, the problem of evil is already presented as a psychological problem created in the ambience of the family.

The characters who must carry the burden of this theme of inherited evil are also typically Gothic, being highly simplified figures useful for the embodiment of ideas. They are eighteenth-century, not medieval, figures, and, like the characters of Sentimental novels, their physical appearance corresponds to their spiritual state. The hero Theodore, his noble nature shining through his peasant's disguise, represents the Right and the Good. A handsome physical reincarnation of his grandfather Alfonso, the virtuous usurped prince whose giant ghost is haunting the castle, Theodore is nobility itself. The three women, all perfectly virtuous, are also perfectly beautiful. The son and heir is physically weak and puny, representing the weakness of Manfred's usurping claim in the face of just retribution. Manfred has more substance than they, because he is a figure torn by the conflict of good and evil within himself, but he is still a beetle-browed villain, also drawn without subtlety. These romance characters are like figures in a crowded tapestry. They talk in declamatory, set speeches that make the novel, crammed with action though it is, seem slow-moving, almost static. Hardly effective as a tale of adventure, it envelops the reader, as in a dream, a sort of symbolic nightmare.

Otranto has a considerable stock of stage effects that became typical of Gothic fiction, not just in themselves, but in the way they are used. The portrait of Manfred's grandfather is not a Gothic device just because it supernaturally steps out of its frame and disgustedly slams a door in Manfred's face. It is typical of Gothic fiction because its gesture of scorn shows us Manfred's degeneration. It reveals that he has slipped lower morally than his grandfather. His ancestor's sins weigh so heavily upon him that they torment him into evil greater than his grandfather's original usurpation. The portrait serves as a reflection of Manfred, just as the statue of Alfonso reflects Alfonso's grandson Theodore. Typically, the device that gives us the reflection of the villain is a distorting mirror, giving the wicked man a monstrous shape, while the hero is mirrored faithfully. The way the statue shows signs of life, bleeds when Manfred stabs Matilda, is an example, like the action of the portrait, of the way the quasi-allegorical aspect of Gothic fiction works. These supernatural happenings are "translatable"; for example, the significance of the statue's bleeding can be restated as: "the spirit of Goodness (Alfonso) bleeds metaphorically in compassion at the piteous sight of Virtue (Matilda)

destroyed." (It is unfortunate, but beside the point, that Walpole chose to make it a nosebleed.) The other supernatural phenomena in the novel work in the same way.

The central device in *Otranto* became the most famous of all Gothic devices: the identity of the castle or house with its owner. The castle in Walpole's novel *is* Manfred. The wife and daughter he dominates so completely are confined to it almost entirely, as if they lived and breathed and had their being within his personality. The comings and goings of other characters, demanding entrance, fleeing secretively, appearing suddenly, directly reflect their relations with him. And finally, as the novel ends in Manfred's moral collapse, the castle, disobeying the laws of nature, collapses too, disintegrating into rubble as other such buildings would do in later novels.

The identification of castle and man make the castle a manifestation of Manfred's mind. In turn, this causes the giant ghost, with which Walpole again risks making the reader laugh, to render its meaning. Appearing in pieces though it does□first the enormous, sable-plumed helmet, then an arm, then a leg□it is the ghost of Alfonso, a manifestation of "the real owner . . . grown too large to inhabit [the castle]" mentioned in the prophecy. Haunting the castle of Manfred's mind, it is his own awareness of the right and the noble that have been usurped by evil. The animated pieces of the giant suit of armor, unintentionally comic though they are, have a signifiance in relation to the overall meaning of the novel. Thus: the helmet crushes the weakling Conrad; that is, the first sign that Manfred's unlawful claim is to be wrested from him□ the helmet□kills the son through whom that claim was to be maintained. The helmet is too big for ordinary princelings, that is, Manfred's and Conrad's heads are figuratively too small to bear their responsibilities as princes. Conrad is too feeble physically to sustain even the first blow of retribution; that is, Manfred's claim to the castle is too weak to endure. The successive appearances of the giant mailed hand and the leg in armor and, finally, the full armored figure of Alfonso continue this theme.

Conrad's death renders Manfred more frantic than ever and so more villainous, showing how he continues to spin the web of evil out of himself. Because this event leaves him without an heir he sets in train the other dire events of the novel, all of which ultimately add pieces to the central portrait of Manfred himself. Other features of the tale also serve to characterize him. Theodore, the hero, for instance, embodies not merely nobility in the abstract but that noble sense of honor that Manfred has had to repress in himself to commit his evil deeds. It makes sense, consequently, that the villain should try to imprison the hero under the same giant helmet; that is, the threat of retribution makes Manfred aware of the unlawfulness of his position. This, in turn, awakens his sense of honor (Theodore speaks up from among the bystanders), which he immediately tries to repress. Theodore escapes temporarily through the hole the helmet has made in the paving of the courtyard, bringing him into the subterranean passages. That is, as Manfred's honor, he is confined in the dark recesses of the castle or Manfred's mind. And here he helps Isabella, the heroine, to escape from Manfred's lustful and incestuous pursuit, Manfred's sense of honor being, indeed, the only impulse that might lead him to spare her. The evil in Manfred, however, is more powerful than his honor, as we see when he angrily imprisons Theodore again, or in other words, again shuts up, represses, his sense of honor.

These correspondences between the characters and abstract qualities give this and other Gothic tales their quasi-allegorical air, but in the scenes that yield this kind of interpretation there is also a great deal of sexual symbolism that adds a rather different dimension, turning the interplay of abstract qualities into an exploration of Manfred's aberrant psychology. Much of the sexual symbolism revolves around Isabella. The daughter figure, who was to have married Conrad, becomes the object of Manfred's incestuous lust, and eventually marries the hero. When, fleeing Manfred, she comes upon Theodore in the subterranean passages, Isabella directs Theodore to open a secret lock in a trapdoor leading to a tunnel, although both are strangers to the place and the only light is a single moonbeam. Should we miss the sexual undertones to this scene, we later find her, in that incident frequently cited by critics, refusing out of maidenly modesty to follow Theodore into the depths of the caves, where they may take refuge from imminent danger. This moment in the novel is often pointed out as an example of the ridiculous lengths to which the authors of Gothic tales go to emphasize the "purity" of their heroines. But the whole scene has sexual significance. Isabella's refusal to go deep into the caves with Theodore can be seen as a refusal of sexual advances rendered symbolically in a tale in which actual sexual advances by these embodiments of Virtue would be impossible.

As a result of her refusal, her father finds the two of them at the mouth of the cave and there is an immediate clash between him and Theodore, who almost kills him with a sword. Thus, the handsome, youthful hero has been brought into direct conflict with both the father figures in the novel, Manfred and Isabella's father, who are contending for both Isabella and hegemony over the principality to which Theodore is, in fact, heir. The story reenacts the myth of power wrested from the old king by the young prince. In its association with the incest theme, the conflict over the daughter figure between the boyish hero and the two father figures suggests an Oedipal struggle between son and father for sexual possession of the woman. We should note here that the open conflict between the young and the old man is precipitated by the "overniceness" of the young woman in her relations with the young man. This sort of subtlety pervades the entire Gothic tradition. There are many other features of the novel that have distinct sexual overtones, such as the stabbing of the second daughter figure, Matilda, the giant sword, and more.

The rest of the novel also lends itself to this sort of interpretation. In summary, the cardboard characters of *Otranto*, moving through improbable supernatural events, tell us that Manfred, a good character at heart, has been driven and twisted into evil in his attempt to maintain his inheritance, which is the character (castle) passed on to him from his grandfather whose enthroned wickedness usurped the place of the Good (Alfonso) within him. Driven wild by his sense of his own impotence (his barren wife Hippolyta and his feeble son who is destroyed), Manfred descends to incest. This sin, which mirrors the self, is presented first explicitly in his attempt to marry Isabella then symbolically when he stabs his daughter Matilda. This is again a self-destructive impulse to repress all goodness within himself, for Matilda, an entirely spiritual being who wished to devote her life to God by entering a convent, represents goodness itself, divorced from the entanglements of worldly life. She recognizes Alfonso in Theodore, instantly loves him (the Good), and so releases him from the prison in which Manfred

has confined him. Thus, Manfred's good daughter, whom he spurns when his evil is upon him, releases his sense of honor again, but it only plagues him the more. As a consequence, after many a complication, Theodore (Manfred's honor) again rescues Isabella (the object of Manfred's incestuous lust). Honor, however, is once more negated when Manfred kills Matilda, mistaking her for Isabella as she talks with Theodore before the statue of Alfonso. This murder of his own spiritual being brings about both the collapse and the regeneration of Manfred. When the enormity of the deed bursts upon his consciousness, Manfred and the castle collapse simultaneously. The spirit of Alfonso (Manfred's spirit of Goodness) is translated into heaven as Manfred recognizes his own evil and the destruction he has brought on himself, and retires to a spiritual life in a monastery.

As the successive generations of Manfred's line have become increasingly degenerate under the distorting pressure of evil, so the descendants of Alfonso have grown increasingly noble through suffering. The spirit of nobility bursts asunder the walls of the castle, the closed world of Manfred's evil, and Theodore stands forth, not as the inheritor of a crumbled ruin, but as the personification of triumphant nobility above and greater than the worldly power represented by the principality of Otranto.

Thus, the apparently tragic ending of the novel is symbolically optimistic. The view of good and evil it conveys is consonant with the deistic outlook of Walpole and many of his contemporaries and the otherwise incongruous comic resolution in the final paragraph, in which Theodore and Isabella decide on marriage to be sustained by contemplation of the beloved spirit of Matilda, makes sense as a symbolic rendering of moral order restored.

It may be objected that this sort of interpretation reads more into Walpole's tale than is really there. Eighteenth-century novelists are not usually thought of as dredging up subconscious sexual images, or writing dream fantasies, or fictionalizing psychological ideas. Yet what we know of the late eighteenth century and of Walpole himself provides evidence to support these possibilities. All Walpole remembered of his dream was the giant hand on the stair rail, but his own feeling that he wrote the novel under the pressure of that dream indicates that he was able to release his imagination and allow the story to well up in his mind, rather than starting with an idea and a conscious plan. That he should have chosen a medieval setting for it was, he said, natural to a mind afloat in the Gothic atmosphere of Strawberry Hill, and, indeed, he was just the person to invent the device of the identification of the villain and his castle, regarding his own house, as he did, as an expression of his personality, an indulgence of his fancy. At the same time, the sort of personal expression this suggests was quite naturally welded in Walpole's work with the fictionalization of ideas. His interests lay with the antiquarianism that was part of the Sentimentalist movement of the day, a movement that, in its many aspects, was bent on exploring the emotions. In literature, Sentimentalism was embodying ideas about human nature, and Walpole was part of that movement.

Thus, personal reasons account for Walpole's having been the one to produce the tale that began the whole tradition, while the age he lived in accounts for the genre's having appeared when it did. No such work, after all, appeared from the pens of authors under

similar personal pressures in earlier times. The late eighteenth century was an era of interested inquiry into the nature of the human mind and of an interest in the inner self that was also manifested in other new genres appearing at the time which probe and reveal the psyche.

Although Walpole and his contemporaries cannot have known his work would establish a literary convention, they were aware of the nature of the work itself. We can already see in the preface to the second edition of *Otranto* what Walpole saw himself as having achieved in the novel. He states explicitly that when he blended "the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern," the ancient, which was fantasy, freed his imagination, while the modern, reflecting the real world, lent reality to his characters. The characters are not very convincingly real, of course, but they are recognizably eighteenth-century figures embodying current ideas about the human mind. By placing them in the world of dreams and fairy tales, Walpole was able to present his age's concept of human evil□ pride, hatred, violence, cruelty, incest□as part of man's psychology. The one kind of romance enabled him to delve into his own subconscious, the other helped him to relate what he found there to the human condition in general.

Source: Elizabeth MacAndrew, "Introductory Gothic Literature □What It Is and Why," in *The Gothic Tradition in Fiction*, Columbia University Press, 1979, pp. 3-52.

Adaptations

The Best of Gothic Horror is a collection of abridged novels and stories by Edgar Allan Poe, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Mary Shelley recorded on audio tape by Countertop Audio and released in June 2000.

A film of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" was produced in 1928 and directed by Jean Epstein. A second film adaptation of the story starred Vincent Price and was directed by Roger Corman in 1960. Both versions are available on videotape.

Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, a film directed by and starring Kenneth Branagh, was released in 1994. The film claims to be a much closer rendition of Shelley's novel than the earlier film *Frankenstein*, directed by James Whale and released in 1931, although this early version is very popular with viewers. Both are readily available on video.

An audio tape of an abridged version of *The Castle of Otranto*, produced by Naxos Audio Books in 1995, provides a brief introduction to the famous work that started the Gothic movement.

Professor Jack G. Voller maintains an impressive and comprehensive website at http://www .litgothic.com with research suggestions, a library of e-texts, extensive factual material, a large database, and critical articles. The site is easily navigable, reliable, and very useful for a student starting a study of the Gothic.

Professor Douglass H. Thomson of Southern Georgia University maintains a site at http:// www2.gasou.edu/facstaff/dougt/goth.html that offers a superb glossary of literary Gothic terms.

Topics for Further Study

Many critics suggest that the Gothic continues to influence contemporary art and literature, primarily through the media of film and video. Consider Michael Jackson's *Thriller* video, various film adaptations of *Frankenstein*, and a selection of films based on Stephen King's books. How do these works reflect the basic characteristics of Gothic literature? How do twentiethand twenty-first-century representations transform the idea of the Gothic prevalent in earlier centuries?

Read selections from Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and the Beautiful*, and then connect Burke's ideas to one Gothic novel. How do Burke's ideas find expression in the novel you select? Be sure to use specific examples from the text to support your claim.

Read about scientific, biological, psychological, and spiritual explanations for why humans dream. Sigmund Freud's *On Dreams* might also provide you with useful information. Connecting your reading about dreams with the interior landscapes of Gothic fiction may help you understand the imagery and narrative present in many Gothic novels.

Through parody, writers reveal and mock standard conventions of a given genre. For example, the *Airplane* series of films renders the convention of the disaster film both visible and very funny. In her novel *Northanger Abbey*, eighteenth-century writer Jane Austen parodies the Gothic novels of her day. Read *Northanger Abbey* and identify the specific characteristics Austen is parodying.

Compare and Contrast

1770-1820: Revolutions in North America and France cause changes in systems of government.

Today: Breakup of the former Soviet Union in 1991 continues to cause widespread shifts and changes in government structures in Europe.

1770-1820: The French Revolution produces the Reign of Terror, a period of great violence, bloodshed, and uncertainty.

Today: Terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon on September 11, 2001, cause great loss of life, destruction, and uncertainty.

1770-1820: Growing interest in the supernatural, the irrational, and the terrifying is evidenced by novels such as *The Castle of Otranto*, *The Monk*, and *Frankenstein*.

Today: Growing interest in the supernatural, the irrational, and the terrifying is evidenced by the popularity of writers such as Stephen King, television programs such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *X-Files* and suspense films such as *The Sixth Sense*.

1770-1820: Romantic writers and philosophers privilege feelings and emotions as legitimate ways of knowing; they also locate truth in beauty.

Today: Postmodernist writers and philosophers suggest that all reality is no more than language and that ultimate truth is impossible to locate.

What Do I Read Next?

The Days of the French Revolution (1999) by Christopher Hibbert offers an excellent and readable introduction to the important historical event. Hibbert often uses vignettes of people's lives and events to bring to life the historical detail.

David Blayney Brown's *Romanticism* (2001) in the Art and Ideas series focuses on European artists during the years 1775-1830, connecting radical new ideas about art to the larger social and political scene of the day. An important consideration for any student is how the Gothic fits within the larger scope of the Romantic movement in art, literature, and music.

A readable and thorough biography of Edgar Allan Poe is Jeffrey Meyer's *Edgar Allan Poe* (2000). This book concentrates on the events and details of Poe's life rather than offering a critical history of his works. As such, it is an important companion piece to studies of Poe's works.

Evil Image: The Literary Art of Terror from Daniel Defoe to Stephen King (1981), edited and introduced by Patricia L. Skarda and Nora Crow Jaffe, is a compilation of Gothic short fiction and poetry from the past two hundred years. The book is an excellent start for students who want to read a wide variety of Gothic literature in a short period of time.

Three Gothic Novels (1966), edited by E. F. Bleiler, contains the texts of *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole, *Vathek* by William Beckford, and *The Vampyre* by John Polidori as well as a fragment of a novel by Lord Byron. Bleiler also provides a short introduction to each of the novels included.

Further Study

Austen, Jane, *Northanger Abbey*, edited by Elizabeth Mahoney, Everyman's Press, 1994.

This novel is a parody of the Gothic romance, popular
in Jane Austen's own day. The student acquainted
with the conventions of Gothic novels will
find *Northanger Abbey*, originally published in 1818,
an interesting and comical read.

Goddu, Teresa A., *Gothic America*, Columbia University Press, 1997.

Goddu examines the Gothic in American literature
from the 1770s through the 1860s, looking particularly
at African-American, southern, and female writing.
The book would be of interest to anyone
concerned with the way that oppression and social
myth interact to produce the Gothic in literature.

Oates, Joyce Carol, ed., *American Gothic Tales*, Plume, 1997.

Oates selects forty-six American tales, ranging from
some by Charles Brockden Brown in the eighteenth
century to Nicholas Baker in the twentieth century.
What the tales have in common is a "gothic-grotesque
vision," according to Oates. Students of the Gothic
should enjoy this influential collection.

Spark, Muriel, *Mary Shelley*, Constable, 1988.

This book is a very well-written biography of the author
of *Frankenstein* by a well-known British writer.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Literary Movements for Students (LMfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, LMfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on

46

classic novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of LMfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of LMfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of classic novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members educational professionals helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in LMfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by LMfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

LMfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Literary Movements for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the LMfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the LMfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Literary Movements for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Literary Movements for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from LMfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

Night.☐ Literary Movements for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from LMfS (usually the first piece under the ☐Criticism☐ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on ☐Winesburg, Ohio.☐ Literary Movements for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of LMfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. ☐Margaret Atwood's ☐The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,☐ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Literary Movements for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of LMfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. ☐Richard Wright: ☐Wearing the Mask,☐ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Literary Movements for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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