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“It’s Alive!” The Birth and Afterlife of the Gothic Genre

Tanner Linkous
East Tennessee State University

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Tanner Linkous

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Dr. Judith Slagle, Chair

Dr. David Jones

Dr. Robert Sawyer

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis explores the development of the Gothic novel in England throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This thesis establishes the Gothic as a literary mode of middle-class terror by analyzing Gothic novels within the historical context of the Industrial and Democratic revolutions. This requires an in-depth understanding of politics throughout both centuries and this thesis engages with several sources such as Maggie Kilgour's *The Rise of the Gothic Novel* which adds important context to my claims. Additionally, I use several contemporary sources such as Godwin's *Caleb Williams*, the writings of Edmund Burke, and *On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror* by the Aikins. This thesis offers a method of tracking the Gothic as a consistently middle-class genre throughout history, and it ends with a chapter that questions the continued relevance of the Gothic as a middle-class genre in a world where the division of wealth is so skewed.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my entire family and all the people who made this thesis possible.

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I would like to start by acknowledging my fantastic committee chair, Dr. Slagle. I first met Dr. Slagle in the Fall of 2021, and her teaching and mentorship have been instrumental to my development as a scholar. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Jones and Dr. Sawyer for their help with revisions and suggestions. Finally, I would like to thank all of the Literature and Language faculty for their continued support and mentorship. Throughout my time here at ETSU, so many of you have offered words of encouragement and support, and I hope that one day I can pass it forward.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

"It's Alive!" The Birth and Afterlife of the Gothic Genre

The Gothic novel saw its genesis in the late eighteenth century alongside a resurgence in Gothic architecture and a growing interest in Gothic histories and culture. Since its genesis, the Gothic novel has evolved many new methods to frighten the reader. Through this process, the Gothic novel evolved from a formulaic genre novel into something widely applicable to specific historical moments—specifically, the Gothic developed during the period of industrialization and urbanization throughout the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This understanding of genre considers not only the "family resemblances" among texts, but also the similar ways in which these works responded and adapted to social situations which were particularly terrifying to contemporary audiences.

Eve Sedgwick's *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* gives a cardinal reading of the key elements of the Gothic genre by using Wittgenstein's definition of genre as "a set of family resemblances" (27). Recent critics have deepened the formal categories by considering genre in terms of its historical contexts. This readjustment of "genre" is demonstrated particularly in *The Cambridge Companion to the Gothic*, a collection of essays that seeks to reveal "the cultural functions that the Gothic novel was created to serve, and then the different ones it has proceeded to serve, across the three centuries that constitute the modern western world" (Hogle XV). With this approach, the Gothic novel genre is shown to mime the material conditions of the industrial revolution such as the alienation of the laborer and the rise to power of the petit bourgeois. Thus, the Gothic novel is analyzed as a genre that often seeks to depict the plight of an imaginary "middle class" caught between mongrel crowds and aristocratic, enviable bosses. The similarity of the Gothic throughout time is explored extensively in *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*,

and its application of the term “live burial” is introduced in chapter two. However, Sedgwick is clearly opposed to viewing the Gothic as a genre that consists of multiple kinds of Gothic, favoring an analysis which explores how the Gothic remains the same despite many featural changes. This thesis, on the other hand, separates the Gothic novel into three different categories: Old Gothic, Romantic Gothic, and Urban Gothic. The goal is not to argue against Sedgwick but rather to modify her view of genre in order to explore the Gothic under a more historic and less formal lens.

A social interpretation of the Gothic novel genre relies less on “family resemblances,” instead offering a view of genre similar to Carolyn R. Miller’s view of genre in her work “Genre as Social Action.” However, Miller’s work is mainly dedicated to rhetorical genres, whereas this thesis explores the social functions of creative works. This is similar to the goal of *The Cambridge Companion to the Gothic*, but with an emphasis on how the Gothic changed overtime to reflect the changing fears of an unstable middle class. Thus, the separate stages of Gothic development are often talked about using similar concepts but placed in different contexts.

The continued similarity of the Gothic throughout time is explained by one key feature present in all Gothic works: transgression. The word transgression brings to mind a radical genre of crossing boundaries. However, the transgression featured in Gothic works most often portrays transgression in frightful terms, and characters who commit acts of transgression are always punished within Gothic texts. To the middle-class reader, this associates any kind of change to the terrifying and violent. Thus, while the Gothic has been used in revolutionary propaganda, the genre is shown to operate as a “middle-class” fear mechanism that mischaracterizes the nature of change and makes middle-class people more resistant to change. Instead, the middle class, from its conception, is taught to fear a change back to the old aristocracy, fear becoming poor and

miserable, and fear anything that may disturb the illusion of middle-class bliss embodied by the family. Therefore, the deep structural changes experienced in the eighteenth century become toppling castellated structures populated by oppressive aristocrats that threaten the middle-class family.

Two schools of criticism invaluable to my research are Marxist critique and scholars Michael McKeon and Maggie Kilgour who offer several important insights into the meaning of modernity and life under capitalism. With these specific theories in mind, I demonstrate how industrialization exacerbated the atomizing forces of modernity. These vast structural changes raise new questions, such as what it means to be middle class, what it really means to be buried alive, and the more personal questions of each character's self-conceptualization. The themes of widespread violence, and live burial are explored as the foundational modes of middle-class fear and fantasy that construct the Gothic novel genre.

Not all works in the Gothic novel genre are equal; however, and the "greater works" of the Gothic are the materials for exploration in this thesis. Each of the selected works offer informative stances on socioeconomic realities, and provide especially apt instances of social commentary. These works include *Frankenstein*, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. These novels, along with clearly fitting within the Gothic novel genre, also improvise and therefore expand the capabilities of Gothic texts to terrify middle-class audiences. Before examining "greater works" of the Gothic, it is first important to clearly define the Gothic as a genre. This is done best by investigating early Gothic novels and their broad social appeal, especially in the late eighteenth century. These works of "Old Gothic" are discussed in terms of how they laid the foundations for subsequent works within the genre to follow. The "Old Gothic" text analyzed here and in chapter one is *The Castle of Otranto*, but

other works such as *The Monk*, and *The Italian* offer additional context. Finally, this thesis ends with a rumination on the nineteenth century, an analysis of *Dracula* as the final Gothic text, and the question of how Gothic texts persist even today.

Before the first Gothic novel was written, the term "Gothic" was more commonly used to describe medieval architecture:

> *Gothic* as an aesthetic term has been counterfeit all along. It was first used by early Renaissance art historians in Italy to describe pointed-arch and castellated styles of medieval architecture, as well as medieval ways of life in general – but to do so in a pejorative way so as to establish the superiority of more recent neoclassic alternatives, because of which the designs of the immediate past were associated with supposedly barbaric Goths who had little to do with the actual buildings in question. (Hogle 16)

This quote explains the etymological root of the term Gothic in broad terms, but Hogle also aligns this negative view of the Gothic with attitudes that existed during the genesis of Gothic fiction. However, perspectives on Gothic architecture changed in the second half of the eighteenth century. This resurgence is exhaustively covered by Paul Frankl, an expert in Gothic architecture, who states, "England, however, around 1750, was overwhelmed by a flood of Gothic. Gothic had become the fashion" (386). By 1749, Horace Walpole, the author of the first Gothic text, "began his unique contribution to European culture by buying Strawberry Hill" and went on to "enlarge the cottage on the property and turn it into a 'castellino' in the English Gothic style" (Bleiler viii). This quote, as well as confirming Frankl's report, shows how the Gothic is not a "counterfeit term," as Hogle criticizes, but was specifically linked to the architectural vogue that Walpole actively engaged in at the time.

To anyone unfamiliar with the Gothic novel genre, the focus on old architecture may seem odd, and even random. However, a fundamental understanding of the politics of the eighteenth century reveal an emerging middle class in conflict between embracing the newfound freedoms of an increasingly democratizing world, while at the same time facing the horrible conditions that began to arise in England's earliest mills and factories. Caught in this "middling" space, where else would people turn if not to the pages of a book set nostalgically in the past, and wrought with terrifying affirmations that a return to the past would result in a return to castrating power structures? Further, the false heir archetype plays a dominant role in Old Gothic works which reflects contemporary insecurities of the middle class which had inherited greater freedoms at the expense of a still-lingering aristocracy that threatened to reclaim power. Ancient power is symbolized by the Gothic castle, a labyrinthine atmosphere that threatens to assimilate trespassers into the ghostly world which still lingers in its halls. A revealing vision of this fearful structure is found in the first text to call itself Gothic.

Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) is the first novel to call itself Gothic, and many features from this novel have remained dominant in Gothic works since. *The Castle of Otranto* features everything that a layman might expect when encountering a Gothic text. *The Castle of Otranto* takes place in medieval times, a vulnerable woman is chased through a labyrinthine castle, ghosts and other malevolent spirits make several appearances throughout, a secret and false heritage is exposed, and the deaths of characters are described in gory detail. These are all generic traits of the Gothic genre, but the words of Walpole himself should also be considered as he offers the earliest description of a key element to the Gothic genre. This description appears in the second edition's preface to *The Castle of Otranto*, and one can hear the humility of Walpole's statement that his novel "was an attempt to blend the two kinds of

romance, the ancient and the modern" (Walpole 21). This "attempt" to blend styles likely refers first to Shakespearean plays and to the later contemporary fiction of authors such as Samuel Richardson.

If *The Castle of Otranto* is read through the lens of two different modes of "romance," then the influences of the ancient and the modern become clear. The setting and characterization of the villain in *The Castle of Otranto* are similar to those of Shakespeare's tragedies. To clarify, Walpole's reference to Shakespearean "romance" is less a commentary on any period of Shakespeare's production, and instead should be interpreted as a vague reference to the playwright's entire body of work. Meanwhile, the action of the plot reads as similar to contemporary novels such as Richardson's *Pamela,* which features a young woman endangered by the violent sexual advances of a man who outranks her. Shakespeare's influence on Walpole may seem impossible, owing to the relative lack of artistry with which *The Castle of Otranto* was written. However, this link to the past comes from Walpole himself who claims in the preface to the second edition of *The Castle of Otranto*, "The great master of nature, SHAKESPEARE (sic), was the model I copied" (22). Thus, according to Walpole's own definition of the Gothic, the history of the genre begins with the combination of eighteenth- and sixteenth-century romances. However, it is also important to note that Walpole claims to have dreamt *The Castle of Otranto* before writing it down without creative thinking.

Walpole's dream and consequent hasty writing is commented on by scholar Anne Williams who equates Walpole's method of composition to an early and accidental use of "Freud's method of dream interpretation: free association. Writing with no conscious intention of what to say, he produced a complex semi-rational web of improbable genealogies, family violence, and inherited guilt" (36). This focus on the Gothic through the lens of Freud is not an

uncommon one, and Freud's theories were influenced by the Gothic genre, especially Urban Gothic works which feature a repressed self. This emphasis on the individual marks a major change in the focus of Gothic work away from the external fear of an old aristocracy that re-establishes itself towards the internal demons experienced by the middle class. These "internal demons" come in many forms, but the ones focused on most heavily in this thesis are the creation of separate gendered spheres, the alienation broadly experienced within these spheres, the solitude of a middle-class existence, and the rise of an immoral consumer culture. Thus, while psychoanalysis seeks to uncover individual drives, this thesis approaches the Gothic from a more sociological standpoint which still takes into account the importance of Freudian theory to the critical history of the genre.

A contemporary source describing the effect of the Gothic genre comes from the Aikins' coauthored collection of essays that offer formal as well as social critique. One of these essays, "On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror," explores the fundamental question at the heart of a genre about the macabre rather than the beautiful: namely, why do humans enjoy the fear caused by Gothic texts? According to the Aikins,

> I have often been led to imagine that there is a deception in these cases; and that the avidity with which we attend is not a proof of our receiving real pleasure. The pain of suspense, and the irresistible desire of satisfying curiosity, when once raised, for our eagerness to go quite through an adventure, though we suffer actual pain during the whole course of it. We rather chuse to suffer the smart pang of a violent emotion than the uneasy craving of an unsatisfied desire. That this principle, in many instances, may involuntarily carry us through what we dislike, I am convinced from experience. (3)

The Aikins' description claims that reading Gothic novels is not something that the human reader can control. Instead, Gothic literature engages readers by appealing to human curiosity, and readers are trapped by their desire to see what happens next. Freud is again ominously anticipated with the claim that Gothic readers are willing to undergo a painful reading experience in return for the fulfillment "of an unsatisfied desire." Nevertheless, the Aikins confirm their status as consumers of Gothic novels and the mesmeric effect those early novels had on contemporary (and thus inevitably middle-class) audiences. The mesmerizing effects of Gothic novels implies that enjoyment of the Gothic rests on discovering how the story ends. This fascination with gruesome Gothic endings, and the Aikins' sundering of any connection between Gothic and pleasure, suggests a skilled authorship that understood how to terrorize its readership.

The Aikins' contribution to the Gothic genre is referenced by Robert Miles, a contemporary critic on the Gothic, who discusses how the Aikin couple broadened the genre early on: "Walpole contributed the haunted, usurped castle, plus the element of pastiche; the Aikins were credited with integrating the Burkean aesthetic of terrific sublimity into the tale of feudal ruins" (42). The final piece in the puzzle of early Gothic development lies in the monumental work of social theorist Edmund Burke, whose *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* went on to inspire a century of literary artists. Edmund Burke's effect on the Gothic genre and on Romanticism (which is in constant dialogue with the Gothic) of the nineteenth century cannot be overstated. However, "his [Burke's] essay is usually applied to aesthetic theory, but there is much in it that is pure psychology" (Kaufman 2181). Thus, Freud becomes more important in analyzing the second half of the nineteenth century, especially since Stevenson and Wilde anticipate Freud's personality theory with their

novels *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, respectively.

The Gothic novel is a social genre because of how it consistently represents the fear of its middle-class contemporaries and the fear of a return to a less reasonable time. The dual revolutions of the eighteenth century—democratic and industrial—offer a context that is explored in chapter one as events that led to the invention of early Gothic. Ideas surrounding the French Revolution and social atomization are covered in chapter two of this thesis through the most influential Romantic Gothic novel of the early nineteenth century: *Frankenstein*. The third chapter rests its focus on the horrifying conditions of late-nineteenth-century urban life and the immorality of English society featured in Urban Gothic novels. Finally, an exploration into the nature of this feared genre reveals the key defining features of middle-class life under capitalism and show why the Gothic persists.

CHAPTER 2. TITILLATING THE 'MIDDLING SORT'

Manufacturing Middle-Class Fear

The period between *The Castle of Otranto*'s production and the end of the eighteenth century saw a massive generation of Gothic works. Miles explains that "From 1788 until 1807 the Gothic maintain[ed] a market share of around 30 percent of novel production, reaching a high point of 38 percent in 1795, then dipping to around 20 percent in 1808. Thereafter its market share dwindle[d] with 1820 the last year of double-digit figures" (42). This information supports claims of the cultural significance of the Gothic at the time. Plenty of speculation as to why the Gothic flourished during the late eighteenth century exists both in contemporary sources and current critical approaches to the genre. Nevertheless, William Hazlitt's assertion that late eighteenth-century audiences "derived part of their interest, no doubt, from the supposed tottering state of all old structures at the time" (Hazlitt 123) is generally true. This chapter covers the genesis and subsequent effulgence of Gothic works on the backdrop of the dual revolutions of the eighteenth century, the democratic and the industrial. By viewing Gothic works through this historical lens, the social function of the genre is revealed as a terror mechanism meant to mesmerize a specifically middle-class audience.

The Gothic did not really begin to thrive until a few decades after the publication of *The Castle of Otranto*, and due to the transitory nature of the genre, it is no wonder that it flourished in the post-French Revolution world. In fact, Hazlitt's quote about old "tottering structures" is in reference to the social changes brought about by the revolutions of this time period. To contemporary British citizens, the "Gothic buildings were appropriate to this atmosphere as witnesses of the past, and ruins as uncanny, gloomy reminders of the transitoriness of all things" (Frankl 380). By the end of the eighteenth century, the power held by monarchs had rapidly

disintegrated, and Gothic novels were able to capture a newfound fear of a return to medieval power structures such as the monarchy and the interference of a foreign church in state affairs. The Gothic, as Frankl asserts, also acted to remind the British populace of their heritage, which is reflected in *The Stones of Venice* later in the nineteenth century. From its beginning, the Gothic played a dual role of memorializing the past while also depicting the past as a source of terror.

The Gothic novel's supposed appeal to newly literate contemporary audiences is often talked about in generalizing, non-critical terms that vaguely reference an increase in readership. In this chapter I consider critic Jaqueline Pearson's view that "A further problem is the temptation to oversimplify, to present as monolithic a mass of readers with different needs, attitudes and horizons of expectation" (14). The simple fact is that the majority of men and women in England during this time were illiterate, and sweeping claims about an expanding audience often fail to acknowledge this. In fact, the Gothic was read predominantly by middle-class persons. Thus, the Gothic novel primarily focuses on middle-class heroes and heroines striving to escape a tyrannical ruler.

Thus far, my analysis of the Gothic novel's readership corresponds to views that contemporary readers "belonged to a class known in the eighteenth century as the 'middling sort'" (Fergus 11). Further, this thesis agrees with Fergus' claims that female readership of novels during this time have been largely exaggerated by a masculine culture that looked down upon women reading as a way of avoiding household chores. This discussion surrounding readership and gender of readers is traceable to a political world fascinated with the "separate spheres" discourse. This discourse, in turn, was a result of contemporary debate about the

individual's particular place in a democratizing world. These pertinent discourses are approached here through the contemporary discourses surrounding the "new reading woman."

The existence of a growing female readership by the end of the eighteenth century coincided with an ongoing political discourse which focused on the effects of novels on the reading woman: "between 1750 and the mid 1830s literacy among women increased as women became increasingly significant in the literary marketplace: indeed, it has been argued that by the end of the eighteenth century the majority of reading audiences were female" (Pearson ix). With such a large market in mind, it makes sense that this new market would attract skilled writers looking to make a name for themselves. However, this analysis does not engage with the question of what most women were reading during the eighteenth century. This has led scholars like Fergus to point out that although most readers were women, the majority did not read novels. Additionally, Gothic scholar Maggie Kilgour highlights the cause of so much focus: "the escapist imagination was denounced as corruptive of family values . . . . The art that is completely fanciful, an autonomous creation that does not refer to reality, offers a tempting alternative to the mundaneness of everyday existence" (Kilgour 7). The offer of an alternative world is central to the Gothic novel and the creation of an isolated imaginative world had important political implications.

The Gothic novel, with its overt sexual themes and proclivity towards the grotesque, would have been especially scandalous reading material for the politicized reading woman. However, this is not to say that no women read Gothic novels, only a marginal group. In fact, the Gothic novel was associated with female readership because a small group of middle-class women actively read Gothic novels and contributed to the creation of Gothic novels with their own writings. This reflects the increased free time given to middle-class women as a result of

technological and economic advancement. However, the eighteenth century also came with increasingly rigid boundaries between the separate worlds of women and men. As Pearson explains, the eighteenth century was "marked by a strong desire to classify and categorise, to affirm clear boundaries: it is the age of the rise of scientific taxonomies and the growth of dictionaries and encyclopedias. This desire to categorise extended to gender and the conceptualization of gender roles" (9). This compulsive need to categorize goes beyond gender to highlight the ambiguity felt by the emerging middle class, who were neither peasant nor aristocrat but existed somewhere between the two. Modern society simply did not offer the same clear structures offered under Feudalism, and it was less a compulsion than a necessity to begin the task of laying out a society founded on "reason" (with tangible Feudalistic influences such as hierarchical categorizations distinguishing low- and high-class individuals).

The political implications of early Gothic texts coincided with ongoing political discourses in the eighteenth century such as the individual and their relation to society. This is also true of the novel form and some scholars have claimed that the development of the Gothic uncannily shadows that of the novel, but the Gothic is focused on specifically here. To start, the eighteenth century was a time of societal identity crisis and the world was left without a clear path towards replacing feudal society with a new social order. For instance, the vastly influential Edmund Burke asserted that Feudalism was a natural form of governance arising from innate humanity, and he dreaded the hyper-individualism of his day. In *The Rise of the Gothic Novel* Maggie Kilgour explicitly outlines Burke's nostalgia for medieval times and locates such nostalgia within early Gothic texts:

> The Gothic is thus haunted by a reading of history as a dialectical process of alienation and restoration, dismembering and remembering . . . . The fragmentation and

> estrangement of the Gothic thus both reflects a modern alienated and estranged world made up of atomistic individuals, and suggests the hope of recovering a lost organic unity." (15)

Thus, Gothic novels appealed to contemporary fears of a fragmented individual identity unbeholden to any form of socialization, and dislocates this identity in a Gothicized past where it is punished by ancient and powerful forces. However, more than anything, this shows the Gothic genre was in a constant flux between political ideologies that simultaneously feared and desired a return to the past. What this shows is that the middle class simultaneously valued the clear sense of community apparently provided Feudalism while fearing its rigid social structures. This fear of rigid social structuring further indicates a middle class obsessed with the idea of upward mobility. The middle class is terrified of becoming immobilized by a powerful ruling class, but seeks the same power. This uncovers why the Gothic often fluctuates between liberal and conservative (as opposed to radical) politics: the middle class is not truly interested in crafting a more equitable world, but is instead interested in replacing the aristocracy through a new hierarchy that places capital owners at the top. In other words, the middle-class is mostly disinterested in risking its already dubious class status, and those who are not afraid likely do not bother with such middling distinctions.

A further understanding of modernity and how it relates to political discourses in the eighteenth century is seen in the discourse surrounding men's work and women's work. The gendered spheres discourse is not limited to the eighteenth century, but the industrial revolution brought with it a need for a specialized labor force able to perform discrete skills. Starting in the eighteenth century, the process of industrialization heightened the distinctions being drawn in terms of men's versus women's work. In his book *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public,*

Private, and the Division of Knowledge, Michael McKeon gives an in-depth analysis of how modern conceptions of gendered spheres are different from those of the past. McKeon does this by talking about the "private and public" spheres in broad terms as a "division of knowledge." For McKeon, the question is best dealt with in the same way that Marx approached writing about the division of labor. Specifically, the division of labor is something that predates modernity, but is made explicit by modern thought. In McKeon's own words,

> 'privacy' and 'publicity' may be historicized in the same way that Marx historicizes 'labor.' To pursue his line of thought, we might hypothesize that however active and consequential those categories and their distinction may have been before the modern period, it is only then that they are conceivable 'as such.' (McKeon XIX)

Thus, even though men and women had traditionally been separated into different spaces, modern thought and industrialization led to a heightened awareness of the separate roles played by men and women in society. Further, modern thinking is distinguished from the pre-modern by its distance from clear medieval hierarchies and by its emphasis on "categories" and "distinction."

The creation of gendered spheres is reflected in the isolation felt by characters in early Gothic novels whose prescribed roles were even more homogenizing than the social forces shaping middle-class identity. The separation of men and women into separate spheres of knowledge and work resulted in isolating men and women within separate spheres of specialized knowledge. Further, population growth meant that labor was cheaper than ever before, and many middle-class women found themselves in positions of power over domestics. This enabled a small yet significant number of women to pursue artistic expression, and at least some of these middle-class women wrote early Gothic texts. Further, this need to specialize isolated the

individual, which is eventually reflected in a generic shift between Old Gothic, which focuses on societal change to "Romantic Gothic," which focuses on the individual's failure to integrate into new social orders. The former of these is dealt with here, through Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*.

Middle-class fear of a returning aristocracy is covered in Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, a more general fear of a return to Catholicism is expressed most clearly in Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian* which relocates these fears of the past by placing them in contemporary settings. *The Italian* takes place during the Spanish Inquisition, and Radcliffe's decision to set her novel in contemporary times is a direct commentary on the continued influence of the Catholic church in modern times. The following paragraphs are dedicated to these distinct works in the order they are presented above. By briefly exploring each, the social rather than individualistic nature of Old Gothic is proven true, and a more detailed account of middle-class fear is rendered.

In Horace Walpole's first introduction to *The Castle of Otranto* he claims that the text is from Gothic times. Much speculation as to why Walpole sought to disguise his book exists, and ideas range from brilliant analyses of the Walpole family structure to contemporary contempt for romance literature. Certainly, both of these lines of thinking are useful and Walpole's own words offer insight into the reasons for his deception, "It is difficult, in English, to relate without falling too low, or rising too high; a fault obviously occasioned by the little care taken to speak pure language in common conversation" (Walpole 19). Walpole's concern with high versus low culture provides more evidence for the claim that the impulse to categorize ran rampant throughout the eighteenth century. Further, Walpole's specific concern of sounding too low or high means that he likely strove for a balance between the two. Without necessarily intending to,

Walpole wrote a novel specifically designed to exist in a "middling space" between high and low art.

The plot of *The Castle of Otranto* lays the groundwork for the explosion of Gothic fiction in the 1790's and bears quick analysis here. *The Castle of Otranto* is a story about the hereditary rights of the middle ages, dubious heirs, and the gross abuse of power. Manfred, the prince of Otranto, is unsatisfied with a son who is described as being in an "infirm state of health" (27). Further, Manfred is revealed to be a false heir obsessed with continuing his family line through whatever means possible. Significantly, after Manfred's son Conrad dies gruesomely on the day of his wedding, Manfred tells Isabella that "Conrad was not worthy of your beauty" and "you have missed a husband undeserving of your charms: they shall now be better disposed of" (33). This disregard for the death of a son highlights an important aspect that remains important throughout the history of Gothic texts. Namely, it engages in a kind of oedipal reversal as the child dies and the father attempts to rape his late son's bride. This is not seen as blatantly as it is in *The Castle of Otranto*, but even later works such as Shelley's *Frankenstein* contain oedipal family structures. One singular example occurs when Victor is haunted by a vision of his dead mother who reminds him of Elizabeth: his sister and his bride. Not only incest, Walpole also attributes many things to the Gothic era such as marriage without love, an obsession with perpetuating hereditary rule, and a ready belief in stories about ghosts and ancient prophecies. These closely compared to contemporary discourses such as marriage for money, fear of a return of the Hanoverians to despotic power, and discourse that strictly favors reason and wit as champions over superstition. What this shows is that Walpole projected his present moment onto an overtly grim vision of the past.

Walpole managed to create a new literary form capable of displacing contemporary fears onto the past. Walpole is not the first to do this, and plenty of scholarship explores how this was done by playwrights during the early modern period who wrote political plays set in the past to avoid upsetting contemporary rulers. Walpole's connection to Shakespeare has already been explored, but an additional quote from Walpole links him to the more general tradition of critiquing modern society through past examples. In Walpole's dishonest first preface he says that "it is a pity that he did not apply his talents to what they were evidently proper for, the theatre" (19) in reference to the supposed Gothic author of *The Castle of Otranto*. Covert self-praise aside, *The Castle of Otranto* is certainly fit for the stage in terms of its plotline and the many striking visual moments in the text. These visual moments include a section where a portrait of Manfred's grandfather comes to life and steps out of frame. This highlights another aspect of the Gothic, namely that the Gothic is a sensational mode of writing. However, Walpole ultimately fails to capture the sensational, and it is only after the French Revolution that the Gothic explodes in popularity with many new writers contributing to the young genre.

The Castle of Otranto gives a list of ingredients that, when combined, create a standard Gothic text. Early improvisers of the form include Matthew G. "Monk" Lewis, and Ann Radcliffe. Radcliffe is specifically dealt with here as her novel *The Italian* provides an influential shift between Old Gothic and Romantic Gothic texts. The first thing to note about *The Italian* is how short it is compared to an earlier work of Radcliffe's, *The Mysteries of Udolpho,* which is over twice the length of *The Italian*. To explain this, it is important to point out that,

> conscious of the delicious aspects of suspense and the disappointing nature of certainty, gothic narratives, often interminably long, create a tension between a desire to prolong

> and defer the inevitable and an impulse towards the revelation of all mysteries, between the indulgence of curiosity and its satisfaction. (Kilgour 32)

This quote reads very similarly to the Aikin's claim that contemporary audiences read the Gothic more for the feeling of suspense than for enjoyment. Certainly, this is in-line with Burkean aesthetics which indicate Radcliffe's involvement in the cultural discourse of modernity and the individual's place in modern times. In the post-French Revolution world, many English people (Burke and Radcliffe included) looked back to their own "Glorious" and relatively bloodless revolution. The difference between these two revolutions is very clear, and Burke was quick to point out the superiority of the English revolution which revised rather than erased Feudal structure.

CHAPTER 3. THE ROMANTIC GOTHIC

Two Men and a Poem at the End of the World

The Romanticism of the early nineteenth century can be characterized as a culmination of what had already begun in the previous century. With the continued effects of rapid industrialization and extreme democratizing forces in mind, I now explore the contexts leading up to shift away from Old Gothic towards Romantic Gothic. In order to do this, two key figures must preface the chapter: Edmund Burke and William Godwin. The social theories of Burke were widely read by the middle class, and the theories of Godwin were read as well. The Burkean sublime is characteristic of this era, but so, too, are Godwin's theories on the damaging effect of social constraints on the individual. It is not uncommon for male poets of this age to style themselves as Romantic heroes isolated from society, nor is it uncommon for the male poet to associate himself with the source of all sublimity, God. Moving from the Old Gothic, this chapter focuses primarily on *Frankenstein* as an example of the Romantic Gothic. Using *Frankenstein*, I define the individualistic focus of post-eighteenth-century Gothic and trace the lead up to urban Gothic.

The comparison of the poet to a godlike force can be traced back to Spenser's *Defense of Poesy*, and the influence of Spenser on what Walpole terms the "old romance" (the primary source of the Gothic and Romantic genres) cannot be overstated. Additionally, the figure of the poet was linked to satanic power based on Milton's portrayal of an eloquent arch-deceiver. This was only castigated by the most important English poet of the early nineteenth century, William Blake, who famously wrote, "the reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels and God, and at liberty when of Devils and Hell, is because he was a true poet, and of the Devil's party without knowing it" (Blake 10). The tradition of godlike poets is traceable throughout

modern English leading up to the moment when Mary Shelley, at the age of seventeen, composed one of the most influential Gothic texts ever written. Shelley was the daughter of two intellectual giants, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft. Sadly, Wollstonecraft died shortly after childbirth, which is reflected in the pages of *Frankenstein* by the general absence of mother figures. With her parentage in mind, Shelley likely wrote *Frankenstein* in response to several facets of early nineteenth-century life, including the prescriptive and rigid gender roles exacerbated by rapid industrialization. Nevertheless, Godwin's belief in extreme individualism and Wollstonecraft's proto-feminist work *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* are both influences traceable in *Frankenstein*.

Frankenstein focuses on the increasingly rigid separation of men and women's spaces, which might sound strange to the reader who is familiar with *Frankenstein* as a text heavily masculine in its focus and scope. However, thanks partly to the landmark essay "Horror's Twin: Mary Shelley's Monstrous Eve" by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, many feminist interpretations of *Frankenstein* now exist. Gilbert and Gubar's essay focuses on the influence of Milton's "masculinist" poetry on nineteenth-century women writers. Instead, I examine *Frankenstein* in terms of its relation to a broader masculine tradition of writing that led up to contemporary discourses surrounding the individual (both male and female) and its relationship to society. This requires a study of *Frankenstein* that takes into account its status as a proto-feminist text, its theme of live burial, and its depiction of identity construction. These diverse lenses correspond to the overarching analysis of the Gothic novel as a specifically middle-class art form that had to adapt constantly to the ever-changing world. It is important to note that while literacy rates continued to rise during the early nineteenth century, the difference between late eighteenth-century readership is negligible until the mid-nineteenth century. With nineteenth-

century audiences in mind, I explore the text of *Frankenstein* in terms of how it fits within the Gothic novel genre.

The text of *Frankenstein* is just as fragmented as the creature it describes. This fragmentation takes the form of first-hand accounts, the second-hand accounts of Walton, the third-hand account by the mysterious compiler of letters, and Victor's revision of Walton's version which only serves to further obfuscate the narrative source. Interestingly enough, Shelley is completely absent from her own text, and it is only through male characters that the story is told. The author's absence reflects the fear that Shelley felt publishing in a male-dominated field, and indeed the 1818 edition of *Frankenstein* is attributed to Shelley's husband Percy. If this interpretation is accepted, then, by obfuscating the narrative source, Shelley is calling into question the legitimacy of authorship before the story even starts. She does this by showing how the author of any text can be hidden from the reader without their ever knowing the difference. *Frankenstein* develops many terrifying questions that accompany authorship (or the act of creation) within this already uncertain framing.

Shelley starts her obfuscated narrative by introducing the naïve captain Walton to represent a figure common to the Gothic novel genre: the wanderer. The wanderer is best analyzed through a critical interpretation offered by Eve Sedgwick in *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*. Sedgwick examines the wanderer as a figure subjected to a thematic live burial, which is a recurring theme in Gothic works. Live burial is defined by Sedgwick as "a conventual punishment that is popular in Gothic novels, but it is also, as phenomenological criticism makes clear, a more general description of the novels' physical ambience" (3). The physical ambience referred to is often achieved through the use of diverse techniques that contribute to an overall sense of isolation and punishment. Sedgwick goes on to lay out how such an analysis of live

burial can reference such a trope. With this broad approach to interpreting live burial and other classically generic features in mind, *Frankenstein* presents a case of both figural and structural burial.

The structural burial is Shelley's isolation from the text, the reader's isolation from any clear narrative source, and all the various methods of storytelling used throughout which contribute to an overall sense that the text being read in isolation and that the reader is delving into this isolated world—participating in it. This isolation reflects the atomization that Burke associated with Godwinian individualism. Shelley's depiction of an isolated story world does not come unaccompanied, however, and later Shelley explores how systems can be just as limiting as self-imposed atomization.

The isolation of all *Frankenstein*'s characters within a story "told at the end of the world" complicates an analysis of figural burial, but Captain Walton and Victor offer clear examples. Through Walton, Shelley establishes the isolation of the story from the outside world by providing no evidence that Walton's letters ever make it back to England. However, Walton, like Victor Frankenstein, is specifically isolated on a journey towards self-actualization by ambitious means. Therefore, it is Victor and Walton's level of ambition that uniquely isolates them from the already remote story world. Indeed, it is Victor's fascination with discovering the mysteries of life and Walton's fascination with finding the Northern Passage that result in a textual burial away from the world. Walton remains unpunished, however, and so the theme of live burial can only partially apply, whereas Victor is one of the most tortured characters in all of fiction. Nevertheless, the extreme isolation experienced by Walton, Victor, and the monster immerses the reader in a buried world which qualifies *Frankenstein* as a text that deals with the theme of

"live burial." Since the humanity of the "monster" is ultimately vague, it is referred to as "the Creation" from now on.

Shelley's anxiety of authorship when publishing *Frankenstein* is often compared to the frightful relationship between Victor and his Creation. Shelley's fear was not unfounded, and after the true author of *Frankenstein* was revealed, she was spotlighted by a contemporary audience who wondered at the ability of "a young girl" to create "so very hideous an idea" (Shelley 165). However, contemporary approval of *Frankenstein* should not be interpreted as a culture coming to terms with what Shelley wrote. Indeed, Shelley herself may not have fully grasped the implications of extreme individualism versus collectivism, but her scholarly parentage suggests a Shelley who certainly understood modern politics. This understanding of politics extends to how they can be commented on through her fictional prose.

Shelley's grasp of contemporary politics enabled her to explore how men and women are atomized by cultural forces beyond the control of the individual. This matches with Godwinian social philosophy which is in direct opposition to Edmund Burke's belief in an 'organic model' for society seen in Feudalism. Thus, *Frankenstein* is uniquely modern and it depicts the construction of modern middle-class identity. *Frankenstein* is a text about self-actualization in a rapidly industrializing world—a world in which "relations are not organic but mechanistic, based on scientific laws of cause and effect and sheer self-interest, which prompt the artificial construction of a society seen now as based on a 'social contract'" (Kilgour 11). For Shelley and all moderns, the individual lacks agential choice over one of the most determinant facets of human existence in the modern world: gender. This is not to say that Shelley challenged the very foundation of human gender, but instead she critiqued the creation of distinct gendered spheres in the literary tradition in which she was most engrossed. This tradition, of course, includes the

formal dismemberment of the female body in sonnet form, the modern individual's self-actualization, and the limits imposed by modern social structures.

Victor's attempt at achieving greatness and, therefore, a sense of self-actualization offers a bleak mirror to the bildungsroman and the hero's journey: both of which are popular genres in masculinist approaches to poetry and fiction. Godwin was especially famous for his work *Caleb Williams*, which Kilgour describes as "reflecting Godwin's reading at that time, it brings together elements of the Jacobin novel, psychological study, fictional autobiography, *Bildungsroman* [sic], fictionalized philosophy, sentimental novel, and the detective novel" (56). Consequently, *Frankenstein* can be read as a mock bildungsroman which shows how novels are no replacement for real-world experiences. Further, *Frankenstein* exposes the blatant male gendering of the bildungsroman by limiting its narrative source to men. Further, the women in *Frankenstein* are denied any attempt at actualization, and their stories are fully dependent on male action. However, *Frankenstein* responds to more than just the bildungsroman.

Frankenstein is less a response to any one individual school of writing and more a response to all modern English literature. Bette London argues that Shelley offers a feminist critique throughout *Frankenstein* by "disguis[ing] its [*Frankenstein*'s] participation in the Petrarchan convention of (female) dismemberment: in the representation of the loved one as a composite of details, a collection of parts" (261). It is important to note that "disguise" is in reference to male rather than female gender of Victor's Creation. In *Frankenstein*, Shelley parodies a masculine self-actualization through the creation of a Petrarchan (and thus poetic) "other." This takes place within a buried text written by a buried author: the construction of the self cast in a radically isolated story full of terrifying actions and punishments. *Frankenstein*,

then, is a novel about a middle class that constructs a revolutionary identity in the modern world. However, this identity is severely limited by its entirely masculine understanding of the world.

Nowhere is Shelley's parody of a constructed masculine identity clearer than in the famous creation sequence, which deserves a full citation here,

> How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful!—Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion, and straight black lips. (35)

Here the act of creation is described by mostly Petrarchan means, and although the composite form of the monster is terrifying, it is nevertheless made out of "beautiful" fragments. These "fragments" are similar to the fragments of the implied woman of early modern English sonnets. Further, the monster is made of inhuman parts as well, which corresponds to another Petrarchan convention of describing female body parts as they correspond to parts of nature. Additionally, Victor Frankenstein describes his laboratory machinations, "with unrelaxed and breathless eagerness, [he] pursued nature to her hiding places" (33). Comparing this to any number of sixteenth-century sonnets, such as Wyatt's "Whoso List to Hunt," one sees that Shelley's picture of a crazed man pursuing a gendered nature with "breathless eagerness" is in response to a masculinist tradition of poetry which pre-dates and influences Milton.

Later in the text of *Frankenstein*, the process of composing fragments into one grisly whole is repeated on a female body which Victor quickly tears apart after he creates it. This act, which can be erroneously interpreted as Shelley violently denying the sonnet form, instead mirrors the very act of female dismemberment during a process of creation. This untimely dismemberment signifies how women were not allowed by male artists to achieve self-actualization or self-wholeness. Instead, the female Creation is torn apart because of her dangerous female sexuality. She remains a disunified body, whereas the male Creation is allowed to live because his sexuality does not threaten to usurp the life-giving capabilities of Victor.

The masculine tradition which is denied the female Creation has a huge influence on the male Creation as he reads a handful of widely acclaimed masculinist texts ranging from Milton to Goethe. More than reading, the Creation uses these texts to build an identity for itself, namely, an identity that is just as individualistic as Milton's Satan and just as hopelessly romantic as Goethe's young Werther. In other words, Victor creates a blank slate that is carefully filled in by influential texts that modernized an ancient tradition of masculinity suggested by the Creation's reading of Plutarch's *Lives*. The innocence of the Creation before encountering Milton is often analyzed in terms of comparison between Milton's Eve and the Creation, but if this is the case, then the Creation inhabits an Eden already filled with forbidden fruit. Instead of separation from God, the Creation's punishment for partaking in the literary fruit is an abrupt shift from primordial innocence to atomizing and mechanistic modern thought. It is no wonder, then, that the Creation feels so miserable.

Victor is a middle-class inventor who seeks to create life, but he also fulfills the role of a social agent who constructs gender distinctions. Indeed, Victor plays the role of the male poet

and Shelley would have understood the culturally defining implications of this role. Indeed, Victor's act of creation points out the constructed nature of male and female identities. Shelley's commentary here is that a revolution cannot be productive if women are not allowed to play an active and intellectual role in forming society. A more inclusive revolution is what Shelley is advocating for; one that effectively utilizes both masculine and feminine roles. To be clear, Shelley does not advocate for the deconstruction of male/female classifications, but advocates for a radical politics that includes women intellectuals. The implication being made is that the French Revolution is an example of misguided masculine politics that destroy without necessarily creating anew. Without the socializing guidance of the mother, the revolutionary identity becomes violently antisocial. The Creation is abandoned and only reads texts written by men, and *Frankenstein* responds to this male canon by showing the monstrosity they produce.

The influence of modern thought on the Creature is detectable in his desire for a mate: "my vices are the children of a forced solitude that I abhor; and my virtues will necessarily arise when I live in communion with an equal. I shall feel the affections of a sensitive being, and become linked to the chain of existence and events, from which I am now excluded" (Shelley 103-4). Many things are echoed in the Creation's monologue, such as the current political discourses around atomization and feudalistic collectivism. Specifically, the Creature is miserable because of his inability to join society, but also for his inability to "become linked" to humanity through the process of procreation. The nature of the female Creation is assumed to be "a sensitive being," implying that the male Creation lacks an emotional confidante. Thus, the Creation bears the weight of modern society but is also forced into isolation from it. Without a mate, the Creation sees its existence as pointless, and we are left with a deeply nihilistic male Creation that is discontented with the modern world, but only has the tools to destroy it.

Victor, as the creator of these identities, is often compared to Milton's portrayal of God, but Victor's act of creation is hardly original. Instead of God, Victor is similar to the male poet who creates and compares his act of derivative creation to God's original creation. Indeed, the leading voices in popular discourse comparing Victor to God are Victor himself and Victor's Creation. The Creation's apparent humanity makes this comparison all the more likely, but this also means that Victor's role is similar to the Victorian role of the poet as isolated creator. This is not to dismiss scholarship comparing Victor to Milton's God, but interpretations of *Frankenstein* are often limited in analyzing Victor as genius/God instead of a transgressive genius/poet. Scholars taking this view routinely launch into analyses that compare Victor to Percy Shelley, but this also limits the scope of interpretation as Victor is interpreted as an archetypal poet rather than to any particular poet. Indeed, Victor could be seen as representative of all poets, and his violent sundering of the female creation places him in line with a poetic tradition that started in the early modern period.

Frankenstein is a text all about how people define themselves in relation to a society that does not accept them, and it is this focus on middle-class identity formation that connects it to the Urban Gothic. *Frankenstein*, as a Romantic Gothic text, is more concerned with the effect of society on the individual, but it is also a text about the individual's destructive effect on society. Shelley shows this destructiveness through the victimization of several orphaned characters. This reflects a middle-class that is now empowered with the ability to create society anew, but fears the result of a more radical world. Indeed, a more equitable society is in line with Shelley's politics, but even her radicality is limited in the face of bloody revolution.

Justine is the first of the female victims in *Frankenstein*, and her feeling of guilt over the murder of Victor's young brother William results in her confession to a crime she did not

commit. In fact, before Justine admits to the murder of William, Elizabeth confesses that *she* "caused" his death. It is important to note that both of these women are orphans, corroborating the analysis of a Shelley stricken by the death of her mother. More important to the text, however, are Elizabeth's various roles in the *Frankenstein* household. Elizabeth is described as the childhood play fellow of Victor, as Victor's sister, Victor's mother, Victor's wife, and finally Victor's victim. In fact, Victor's name comes from the Latin *victōris* which is a masculine noun meaning "winner," while the feminine *victima* means "victim." Thus, the course of Victor and Elizabeth's relationship is rooted in an etymological history linking "victors" to "*victimas*." Elizabeth's entire identity revolves around these various (mostly domestic) roles, and they all revolve around Victor. Therefore, Elizabeth's false confession is the confession of an orphaned child, a sibling, a sister, a wife, and an etymological abstraction which associates femininity with victimhood. This abstraction of female roles, embodied in Elizabeth, means that her confession can be interpreted as a uniform sense of guilt amongst all women. Shelley is showing how women are not allowed a seat at the table, but are instead associated with monolithic depictions of women as either duplicitous whores or virtuous mothers. Trapped in this domestic dichotomy that defines women by their dependence on men is detrimental to any lasting revolutionary change. Any change resulting from male-dominated discourse, like Victor's creation, is blocked from "the chain of existence," or woman's life-giving power. Revolution without feminine influence is destined to destroy what it cannot build alone: radical movements require a re-evaluation of women's roles.

Elizabeth becomes Victor's *victima*, but Justine's victimization is also worth exploring as a broader social commentary. Elizabeth is middle class, like Victor, and her sense of guilt is explained away rather than confronted by the law. Justine, on the other hand, pays for her guilt

with her life, and it is only her status as a working-class woman that makes this possible. Evidence that Justine is executed because of a combination of feminine guilt and lower-class status is revealed in how the authorities handle the murder of William. When Victor arrives at his family home, his father Alphonse is already convinced of Justine's guilt and says, "for indeed I had rather have been for ever ignorant than have discovered so much depravity and ingratitude in one I valued so highly" (Shelley 52). Despite its clear conveyance of grief, this shows how even a sympathetic voice can quickly draw conclusions based on class. Alphonse only knows how to speak about Justine, it seems, through the terminology of an affronted better. His use of phrases such as "I valued" and "ingratitude" indicate a discourse between master and servant rather than the language used in other sections to describe Justine as a family member. The irony of Alphonse's use of "ingratitude" to describe an employee, even one saved from orphanhood, shows the selfish expectations of an apparently philanthropic middle class. Additionally, Justine's case is not unfamiliar to the industrialized world that surrounded Shelley as she was writing *Frankenstein*. Indeed,

> As workhouse populations grew in the nineteenth century, workhouses began to send children – both orphans and children with living parents who simply couldn't provide for them – to factories as 'apprentices,' where they were essentially prisoners without wages for up to seven years. (Marshall 95)

Marshall draws from historical works that situate (between the mid-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries) an influx of orphans and other poor youths into what he terms the "Gothic world" of the industrial factory. How much Shelley knew of orphans and their plight is limited to speculation. It is clear that Shelley was interested in writing about orphans since most of the

characters in *Frankenstein* are orphans. Further, evidence outside of the text proves that Shelley intended for *Frankenstein* to be read as a social commentary.

Frankenstein's focus on radical self-isolation, oppressive modern divisions, and the creation of *victimas* through the achievement of a literally individual "Victor" locates it between Old and Urban Gothic. *Frankenstein* features sublime landscapes informed by the work of eighteenth-century writers such as Burke and Radcliff, and a Romantic Gothic hero in the form of the satanic male poet. However, *Frankenstein* also features a uniquely narrow focus on individual characters set in the direct rather than distant past. Shelley was not the first to shift the focus of Gothic works towards the modern day, but her focus on scientific elements forecasts an even more radical shift made by Urban Gothic writers. The Urban Gothic is like *Frankenstein* as it focuses on the modern individual, but the Urban Gothic is less about the atomization of modern people and more about the vice associated with a rising consumer culture.

Thus, as a Romantic Gothic text, *Frankenstein* depicts modern individuals as composite wholes of various societal forces by tracing those forces through poetry. Victor is a middle-class inventor whose derivative identity-making marks a step taken too far by the modern. Namely, it is the atomizing effects of a rapidly industrializing world that are the true causes of misery in the text of *Frankenstein*. It is misery caused by the modern need to categorize and limit the individual. This modern necessity was only exacerbated by industrialization and a shift to a more democratic social hierarchy. Shelley accomplishes this depiction on every level of storytelling by using the technique of live-burial. Live-burial is seen in the very structure of the novel by its existence as a story told in the sublime landscape of the far north. Shelley's focus on society and the individual's relationship to it remains a consistent theme but becomes all the more explicit as consumer culture develops throughout the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER 4. URBAN GOTHIC

Buried Alive in the City

The Gothic has been established as a middle-class mode of terror which utilizes the techniques of fear and suspense to produce its effect upon the audience. The Old Gothic relies on the suspense of a potentially returning aristocracy, the Romantic Gothic on the fear of an otherized individual created by revolutionary texts, but urban Gothic locates its fear within the confines of the urbanized city with its "mongrel hordes" and immoral aristocrats. Living shoulder-to-shoulder with frightening poverty and excess consumption, the urban Gothic focuses on the myriad elements of city life, such as the corrupting powers of consumer culture. The use of contemporary settings is a marked change from the anachronisms in early Gothic texts. An understanding of this new urban world is important to establish as the Gothic transitions from the ancient castle to the urbanized city. This is done through an economic analysis of the reading public in the late nineteenth century as well as an analysis of the process of urbanization, which leads into an analysis of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (*SCJH*) by Robert Louis Stevenson and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (*PDG*) by Oscar Wilde.

Although the production and interest in Gothic texts had waned since the early nineteenth century, cost reductions in publishing made reading material widely available. Further, analyzing the economic growth of the late nineteenth century, Richard Altick claims that "In 1850-51, 83,300 families were in the £150-£400 bracket; in 1879-80 there were 285,100" and goes on to claim that "this rise in money income was accompanied, especially in the period 1874-96, by sharply falling prices" thus, "the average family's real income rose by 70 or 80 per cent" (306). This massive shift in wealth meant that reading culture exploded in the second half of the nineteenth century as the middle class had more time than ever to devote long hours to literary

diversions. The Gothic during this time eked out an existence within the pages of "Penny Dreadfuls." Historian Judith Flanders provides further context for the popularity of penny novels: "between 1830 and 1850 there were up to 100 publishers of penny fiction, as well as the many magazines which now wholeheartedly embraced the genre" ("Penny Dreadfuls"). These cheap editions of sensational stories oftentimes offered distilled and illustrated versions of longer Gothic narratives with a much more singular focus on visually shocking the reader. As a genre separate from the Gothic, penny novels were solely market driven and eventually left the Gothic behind to capture a rising interest in detective fiction.

The culture of London changed drastically throughout the nineteenth century, and the city of London became the new site of terror for Gothic works. Economist Pat Hudson covers the process of urbanization throughout Britain and provides hints as to why the city center became the new site of sensational terror: "until at least the later eighteenth century urban death rates considerably exceeded urban birth rates, especially in the larger centres, and towns could only grow by sucking in population from outside" (155). In other words, life was miserable for working-class people throughout the Industrial Revolution, and the middle class was content to valorize philanthropy as a means of communal improvement. Philanthropy, of course, meant upholding rather than destroying the social order which perpetuated the suffering of the working class. Nevertheless, as London grew to an unforeseen size, it was simultaneously seen as the locus of aristocratic (and therefore fashionable) society. It is important to note that this society is different from the secluded aristocracy of old, and even some financially successful middle-class families would have claimed a spot amongst this group. This is not to stand in wonder of the amazing opportunities for upward mobility, on the contrary, upward mobility since the democratic and industrial revolutions has always been strictly limited to a lucky few. To clarify,

although many middle-class families saw vast improvements to their wealth and living conditions, they were not given the same security as the pre-existing aristocracy. Indeed, a key characteristic of middle-class identity is contentment with being ruled by financial "betters" who, at some undefined point in time, must have worked hard for what they have. This mentality is shockingly similar to the medieval peasant class who accepted their subaltern existence as a decree from God.

The "God king" of the modern world is a silver-spoon baby who we are meant to believe accomplished the Herculean task of "picking themselves up by their bootstraps." However, this metaphor is as unlikely as what it signifies. These corporate elites are meant to be better because their wealth is not given, but is earned. However, this has never been the case and the inequalities of the nineteenth century do not exist in a vacuum. Instead, from the beginning, progress has been more about integrating the hereditary power structures of Feudalism without offering a collectivist framework. Just as it is up to the son of a billionaire to "make it," it also up to the homeless woman, and there are no effective social mechanisms in place to lift people out of the abject poverty in which they were born. Even the few who luckily escape poverty are then used as examples of a society that works when the vast majority stand as counterexample. Capitalism is not *about* creating a society that sees itself as humane and intelligent when there are more empty houses than homeless people, it *is* that society.

Despite the reduced state of Gothic texts in the second half of the nineteenth century, two key examples of urban Gothic were published in the latter half of the decade: *SCJH* and *PDG*. Both works were influenced not only by other Gothic texts, nor only by the political discourses which continued to shape the British identity, but also by the unique features of the late nineteenth century. Namely, it is the massive growth in wealth seen by the middle class which

figures so predominantly in the discussed novels. In *PDG* the result of this broad economic increase is a society which bases its morals less on Feudalistic notions of virtue and (or) on religion and more so on the ability of the newly wealthy to purchase morality through philanthropic acts. Further, *PDG* is a novel about the effect of middle-class society on the Godwinian pure individual represented as the titular Dorian Gray. *SCJH*, on the other hand, bares striking similarities to *Frankenstein* and details the differences between romantic and urban approaches to the Gothic novel.

SCJH is a short novel and may even be considered a novella. This reflects trends in printing which emphasized smaller, cheaper and, therefore, marketable editions. The length of *SCJH* reflects an even more extreme version of Radcliff's shortening the Gothic tome with her publication of the *Italian*. *SCJH* also makes use of epistolary storytelling, second-hand accounts, etc.; but where *Frankenstein* uses these to emphasize the solitude of potentially lost letters, *SCJH*'s urban setting means that letters play the much different role of emphasizing London society. Unlike the letters in *Frankenstein*, the letters in *SCJH* are always read, and the events of the story are always subject to public scrutiny. With London society emphasized, *SCJH* is less about the creation of a revolutionary and atomized other and more about fearing dissention within the ranks of the middle class itself. In *SCJH* this dissention comes from Dr. Jekyll, who seems polite enough but moonlights as the evil Mr. Hyde.

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde represent a key fear experienced by the middle class in the late nineteenth century: fear of the social imposter. Stevenson fuels this fear through the process of otherizing Hyde early on: "then came the horrible part of the thing; for the man trampled calmly over the child's body and left her screaming on the ground" (Stevenson 8). This violent action shows that Mr. Hyde is far from socially acceptable, a violent brute capable of assaulting the

middle-class family. The fact that this all takes place in an open square with plenty of witnesses adds to the horror rather than detracts from it. Indeed, the city streets act as a great equalizer in both *SCJH* and *PDG*; as middle-class people leave the comparative safety of the domestic spheres, they are immediately met by city streets crowded with the disenfranchised. Further, the witnesses of Hyde's crime promise to "make such a scandal out of this, as should make his name stink from one end of London to the other," and Mr. Hyde's hasty apology and payment of "a hundred pounds" (Stevenson 8-9) shows how serious social disgrace was to be taken. In fact, a key theme of the urban Gothic is that individuals possess a dualistic identity: one that practices all the social graces and another that is full of repressed sexual energy. Consequently, the urban Gothic marks a clear shift from past understandings of psychology, and both Stevenson and Wilde influenced Freud's theory of the ego, superego, and the id. This Gothic influence is explored further by Anne Williams in her book *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic*, where she claims that "critics have succeeded in uncovering Freudian psychosexual 'meanings' in Gothic because Freudian theory and Gothic narratives are 'homologous' realms of discourse" (94). Indeed, Freud's theory of a repressed self echoes both *SCJH* and *PDG*. Therefore, *SCJH*, is less a story about science gone too far and more about a repressed or Gothic self that comes to the surface and scandalizes one's peers.

The character Hyde can be interpreted as a representation of the hero of romance tales, and Dr. David Jones presents a compelling comparison: "like Milton's Satan, Byron's hero, and Deleuze's and Guattari's schizo, Hyde is a partisan of chaos and desire" (104). This highlights the romantic nature of Hyde's persona, but it also links this romanticism to unrepressed desires. Thus, the Romantic undergoes a transformation in the second half of the nineteenth century. The romantic hero becomes the Freudian id let loose in London. Whereas isolation from others was

associated with the fearful in past Gothic works, urban Gothic associates fear with a crowd of individuals that each contain repressed impulses itching to manifest themselves. This suggests that "middle class" is a social performance rather than a stable concept and that evil could be hiding just behind the mask of common civility.

SCJH features three narrative modes: first is the close third-person narration of the lawyer Mr. Utterson who also acts as a kind of investigator, second is Dr. Lanyon's narrative in epistolary form and, finally, Dr. Jekyll's narrative again in epistolary form. This narrative structure would have worked to bury the characters of the story in Romantic Gothic texts, but here is an additionally element for analysis. Namely, the live burial is caused by a lack of solitude, and the reader experiences two different versions of the story before finally hearing it from Jekyll himself. This illustrates the suffocating nature of life in the city, and a romantic desire to return to the country side becomes a means of hiding deformity. Indeed, Hyde is a unique Gothic villain because he hides himself rather than express his repressed desires on an isolated woman. This is different from Old Gothic which often featured aristocratic Gothic villains who openly acted out their heinous desires to the shock and horror of an audience. In contrast, Hyde's psychic life stays completely obscure, which positions the reader as a sort of psychologist who has to interpret the repressed persona of Dr. Jekyll. This means that the reader is included as a bystander in shock at the absurd crimes of Mr. Hyde.

Dr. Jekyll's account, when it is finally arrived at, provides evidence of Dr. Jekyll's internal world. Dr. Jekyll's testimony offers important clues in discerning the truth behind his story:

> the worst of my faults was a certain impatient gaiety of disposition, such as has made the happiness of many, but such as I found it hard to reconcile with my imperious desire to

> carry my head high, and wear a more than commonly grave countenance before the public. Hence it came about that I concealed my pleasures . . . . (Stevenson 67)

This testimony reveals that Dr. Jekyll cares deeply about how he is perceived by others, and his "impatient gaiety" is evidence of a subconscious self that must be repressed so he can successfully engage in human interaction. Therefore, *SCJH* is about the fear of a repressed "other" which fights its way to the surface and casts the individual into a state of isolation away from middle-class society.

Jekyll's account goes on to describe the scientific creation of a substance capable of bringing Dr. Jekyll's id to the surface in the form of Mr. Hyde: "my devil had been long caged, he came out roaring" (78). The animalistic roaring compared with the use of the term "devil" links Mr. Hyde and the human id to Satanic influence. Soon Dr. Jekyll can no longer control his transformations, but before his final transformation Dr. Jekyll makes one more attempt to separate himself from Mr. Hyde in the mind of society: "He, I say—I cannot say, I. That child of Hell had nothing human; nothing lived in him but fear and hatred" (82). This shows that Dr. Jekyll's fear is a fear of an animalistic and Satanic "other" that exists caged within the self. This "other" repressed self is described in Gothic terms as "that what was dead, and had no shape, should usurp the offices of life." So, the greatest Gothic evil is borne by every human, "is caged in his flesh, where he heard it mutter and felt it struggle to be born" (84). *SCJH* distinguishes the difference between Romantic Gothic and Urban Gothic by representing the individual as a dualistic being caught in an unending struggle that, when lost, leads to a fate worse than death: social ostracization.

With this analysis of *SCJH* in mind, I now compare *PDG* as an urban Gothic text that lampoons a materialistic middle class and its effect on the Godwinian or romantic individual.

Dorian Gray plays this romantic role in *PDG*, and his role is revealed by the following quote: "One felt that he [Dorian Gray] had kept himself unspotted from the world" (19). This reveals how Dorian exemplifies the Godwinian ideal at the beginning of the text, and Wilde's association with Godwinian theory is made more explicit on the following page where Lord Henry claims that "there is no such thing as a good influence, Mr. Gray. All influence is immoral—immoral from the scientific point of view" (19). This association with romantic individualism clearly marks Dorian as a blank slate, one that will soon be filled with the gross excesses of English society. Wilde distinguishes *PDG* from Romantic Gothic by showing the constructed nature of a world already built by the Romantics. While Romantic Gothic texts worry over the creation of a revolutionary identity, urban Gothic reveals a fear of not being accepted by a society that rises out of the nineteenth century and partially out of Romanticism. This distinction shows the insidious nature of a materialistic culture built around markets rather than people, and it is important explore how Wilde depicts this because it reveals more unique features of Urban Gothic texts as well as Wilde's particular style.

Throughout *PDG* Wilde writes in the form of perpetual paradox to construct a fictive version of a London society out of touch with morality. This language of paradox comes from Lord Henry, who has more talking lines than any other characters. Following is just one example of one of Lord Henry's debauched sensibility: "Nowadays most people die of a sort of creeping common sense, and discover when it is too late that the only things one never regrets are one's mistakes" (44). However, many of Lord Henry's scandalous quotes have an element of truth such as this one which scandalizes the reader's sensibility and places the reader in a state of uncertainty where personal values must be questioned. Lord Henry is a rather cynical character, and he exposes the materialistic nature of the English higher classes by using this sort of

language. Conscious of his status, Lord Henry associates his disdain with the upper class as a familial disdain and simultaneously exposes the values of the nineteenth century for what they are:

> I can't help detesting my relations. I supposed it comes from the fact that none of us can stand other people having the same faults as ourselves. I quite sympathize with the rage of the English democracy against what they call the vices of the upper orders. The masses feel that drunkenness, stupidity, and immorality should be their own special property . . . . (11)

This reveals a key element of the text of *PDG*, namely that the text concerns itself with various critiques of nineteenth-century society as a whole. Lord Henry, then, acts as a textual mediator who simultaneously enjoys as well as laments the "new Hedonism" of the age (25). This consciousness of nineteenth-century society suggests a societal burial in which the individual is uprooted from his or her "pure nature" and smothered by the excesses of London culture.

With the most vocal character being a member of the aristocracy, how does *PDG* act as a mode of middle-class fear? *PDG* does this by depicting the corrupting influence of the "dandy" Lord Henry on the young and impressionable Dorian. Indeed, Dorian's parentage is connected to the aristocracy, but Dorian's orphan status and extreme isolation throughout his upbringing make him more of a blank slate than a member of any discernable class. Basil Hallward, the artist behind the fateful portrait of Dorian, represents the middle class, and his mistrust of Lord Henry reflects contemporary middle-class fears of the youth-corrupting "dandy." Professor of English, Brent Shannon, writes extensively on the middle-class fear of the dandy: "As the satirical symbols of improper, transgressive masculinity, dandies became contested figures, markers of class tension whose function as class critique was wrestled over by the bourgeoisie and the elite"

(121). Further, Shannon's description of a dandy closely matches the description of Lord Henry: "vain, ostentatious, idle, and sexually predatory" (121). If Lord Henry plays the role of dandy, then Basil represents a middle class in fear of the corruptive powers of the aristocracy.

Basil represents the source of middle-class fear in *PDG* as he worries about Lord Henry's corrupting influence on the impressionable Dorian. An analysis of the dialogues between Basil and Henry reveals a central fear of the Urban Gothic: the fear of a middle-class youth being led towards a life style that he can never truly adopt for himself. Lord Henry never has to worry about the consequences of his lifestyle, whereas Basil must work as a painter in order to live. Dorian, then, is the blank slate who receives the corrupting words of Lord Henry and the perhaps equally corrupting words of Basil. Indeed, Lord Henry's words are more often harmful than they are useful, but there are instances where a deeper meaning is hastily covered up by Basil's (perhaps disingenuous) mortified responses. For example, here is Basil's response to Lord Henry's scandalous quote about how the middle class is jealous of an aristocracy that can waste away on copious consumption: "I don't agree with a single word that you have said, and what is more, Harry, I feel sure you don't either" (11), to which Lord Henry responds by immediately pointing out the irony of Basil's statement, "If one puts forward an idea to a true Englishman—always a rash thing to do—he never dreams of considering whether the idea is right or wrong. The only thing he considers of any importance is whether one believes it one's self" (11). This exchange is exemplary of the dynamic between Basil and Lord Henry, and Henry's apt response points out the vacuity of Basil's disagreement along lines of social unacceptability. Basil does not seem to care what is right or wrong, and is only concerned with the accepted perspective of polite society.

Dorian is the canvas for the dialogue between the upper and middle classes, and Dorian's eventual death is certainly the cause of corruption. Evidence for this exists in the earliest pages, but a stronger example is found after Dorian breaks his engagement with Sibyl Vane, which results in her suicide. Lord Henry goes to comfort Dorian and claims that "I am glad I am living in a century when such wonders happen. They make one believe in the reality of the things we all play with, such as romance, passion, and love" (106). Thus, the death of Sibyl is transformed by a dandy who is more concerned with experiencing sensation than with the tragedy of suicide. However, before judging Lord Henry's statement as Basil would, it bears a more critical analysis.

Lord Henry's statement in favor of suicide is certainly scandalous and makes light of human death, but it also indicates a meta-narrative. For the last several sections, Dorian and Lord Henry argue over several aspects of "romance, passion, and love," and Lord Henry's view (if he can be said to truly have views) is that these exist in the realm of romance fiction. However, Dorian's love narrative reveals that Dorian is caught up in the world of Shakespearean drama rather than feeling any actual emotion for Sibyl: "One evening she is Rosalind, and the next evening she is Imogen . . . . I have seen her in every age and in every costume. Ordinary women never appear to one's imagination" (55). Here it is obvious that Dorian is more in love with the performances Sibyl acts out rather than with Sibyl herself. Dorian's fantasy is ended when Sibyl, due to her genuine feeling of love, fails to convincingly play the role of Juliet when Dorian brings Lord Henry and Basil to meet her. Lord Henry's statement is not an immoral fascination with suicide but is instead pointing out the constructed nature of the words such as "love," which was the primary focus of early modern art. To Lord Henry, words only contain received meanings, and Dorian's real-life "romance" is fictitious on multiple levels, including on the level

of meta-narrative. Lord Henry does this by pointing out the constructed nature of words and art within a fictitious world made by Wilde.

Considering this critical interpretation of Lord Henry's words, one sees that the blame for Dorian's downfall cannot land solely upon him. Instead, Dorian is formed through a combination of the middle and upper classes. On the one hand, the upper class is certainly debauched and capable of debauching, but this is only because of a middle-class weakness. Namely, the middle class lacks a meaningful way of dismissing the lives of the rich as something immoral because they want that kind of lifestyle for themselves. This is why Basil can never truly deny the words of Lord Henry, but instead can only deny them on the surface level. Dorian, caught between this corruptive dialogue, winds up addicted to opioids and murders the middle-class Basil. Thus, the middle-class fear of the corrupting dandy is fully realized, and the deeper issue of a lack of middle-class morality is presented to a terrified audience. It is also important to note that Wilde extends his critique of middle-class morality by exposing a culture that is obsessed with spectacle rather than the genuine.

Wilde's portrayal of a middle class obsessed with sensationalism is seen in Dorian's disappointment with Sibyl's honest acting, but more poignantly in Dorian's reflections after Basil reveals his homosexuality to Dorian. In this section the speaker or thinker is left vague, and the following words can be attributed to either Dorian, or Wilde who used similar talking points at his trial:

> The love that he bore him—for it was really love—had nothing in it that was not noble and intellectual. It was not that mere physical admiration of beauty that is born of the senses, and that dies when the senses tire. It was such love as Michael Angelo had

> known, and Montaigne, and Winckelmann, and Shakespeare himself. Yes, Basil could have saved him. But it was too late now. (Wilde 122)

With this quote, Wilde distinguishes the figure of the corrupting dandy from homosexual men who are charged with similar claims. Wilde's message is clear: homosexual love is just as righteous or shallow as love between men and women. The exclusion of homosexuals from public consciousness cheapens love by relegating it to purely modern definitions that enforce heteronormativity, and define love solely as a biological need for procreation. Instead, what Wilde seems to suggest is that true love transcends supposedly scientific classifications and is deeper than a sensational experience. The shallowness of the middle class, of which Basil is a part, helps to perpetuate middle-class people's own subjection to capitalistic rule. Indeed, it is the heteronormative Lord Henry who separates Dorian from the positive influence of Basil. This suggests that the distinction between heterosexuality and homosexuality is not as simple as claiming one is good and the other is wrong. Instead, Wilde offers a nuanced view of love which positions personal connections and positive intentions over social norms and sensual experience. Whether that love is experienced between two men is a purely aesthetic consideration that reveals the shallowness of a culture in denial of love. In fact, the dominance of sensation-driven consumption in the modern world results in cheapening all forms of expression, and this dubious distillation of human emotions is one of the key themes of Urban Gothic.

In the Urban Gothic, the mode of middle-class fear is detected through the live burial of the middle-class individual within a city of Gothic appetites. Lingering are the fears of a powerful aristocracy, but here the fear is of corruption rather than of usurpation in Old Gothic texts. With the definition of the Gothic novel as a mode of middle-class terror, this thesis concludes with an analysis of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, which depicts the triumph of modernity

over the Gothic. Finally, the conclusion uses a short analysis of *Dracula* along with the definitions established by these three chapters to ask the question: “in a contemporary world without a middle class, can the Gothic still shed a light on human fears?”

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

The Afterlife of the Gothic

At the end of the nineteenth century, Bram Stoker wrote one of the most iconic Gothic narratives of all time: *Dracula*. A brief analysis of the plotline reveals how *Dracula* can be interpreted as a metaphor for the death of the Gothic novel genre. The narrative of *Dracula* is told through epistolary form, which corresponds to the Old Gothic's use of multiple narrations to bury the primary source and contribute to an overall ambience of textual isolation. *Dracula* also features several characters who live in the city of London, which makes *Dracula* correspond to Urban Gothic works. Finally, *Dracula* features several romantic heroes who utilize modern technology to destroy a lingering Gothic aristocrat that suggests a kind of techno-optimism where modern technology rises to victoriously defeat the mode of middle-class fear.

Dracula's final howls herald the end of the nineteenth century and the end of this analysis of the Gothic novel genre. However, how does *Dracula* and the other Gothic texts discussed correspond to the current moment? The continued popularity of these archaic tales is an odd phenomenon, and what follows is a brief exploration of how the Gothic exists in a contemporary American culture that continues to read the Gothic despite America's distance from a Feudal identity. What follows is an analysis of the Gothic where the guiding middle-class interests in Gothic texts do not apply. Namely, without a middle class and without a Gothic past, how does the Gothic continue to speak to us in contemporary America? In order to do this, the Gothic's middle-class audience must be located or proven nonexistent.

Many horror stories are still written today, so positioning *Dracula* as the final Gothic text may seem odd. However, the Gothic has been described throughout this thesis as a mode of middle-class terror. In contemporary times, the massive inequality in wealth distribution makes

the middle-class title seem useless because there is little if any meaningful difference in economic status in the working classes. According to economist Linda Levine, "the middle class may refer to households with incomes in 2010 that ranged upward from $38,044 and extended into the top quintile—perhaps up to households with income of about $250,00" (28). This already arbitrary range of income is made all the more ridiculous by rampant wealth inequality locating the majority of wealth in the hands of a very small few.

According to one survey, "in the first quarter of 2022, the share of net wealth in the United States held by the top 10 percent decreased to 69.2 percent from the fourth quarter of 2021 when the top 10 percent held 69.7 percent of wealth" (*Statista*). With these numbers in mind, it is safe to conclude that the middle class is less a way of describing a "middling sort" and is more about the poor distinguishing themselves from the miserable poor. However, all of this simply exposes that "middle class" has always been a vague term used in a wide variety of contexts. As my data on the reading public of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has shown, "middle class" refers to a very small group who defined itself between the aristocracy of old and the poor laboring masses. "Middle class" has always been a constructed term, and it is no wonder that the authors of the middle-class mode of terror considered themselves the middling sort.

Caught between the terror of abject poverty and the terrible and lusty power of the aristocratic classes, to be "middle class" is to see oneself in a state of immobility between two extremes. Therefore, the predominance of the theme of live burial (the most extreme state of immobility) is featured in the majority of Gothic texts. Shelley writes about this identity creation between two extremes in *Frankenstein*, which also features the creation of a revolutionary middle-class identity notable for its destruction of the middle-class family unit. According to *Frankenstein*, to revolt is to risk destroying society and leave the world in a perpetual state of

radical atomization. In *PDG*, Wilde points out the moral vacuity of a middling sort who ultimately desire the orgiastic pleasure brought by immense wealth and an aristocratic title, while simultaneously pointing to copious consumption as a vice. These works develop and critique an identity that many people still associate with today, despite how vague this identity has remained.

The Gothic is still valuable today for its depiction of a terrified middle class despite the many supposed improvements to human life brought about by industrialization and democratization. The Gothic can act as a wakeup call from blind contentment by reminding contemporaries about the social and economic decisions responsible for the terrifying present we inhabit. By pointing out the constructed nature of the "middle class," these works can raise awareness that the modern world is not the only way, that decisions can still be made to change the course of history. The political writings of Edmund Burke are archaic and Anglo-centric, but his vision of a more collective society is also seen in Marx. As a result of a rising class consciousness in recent years, labor movements across the United States have led to increased unionization. This suggests a growing public interest in socialistic and collectivistic approaches to governance. However, these small shifts in societal consciousness are nothing compared to the coercive use of "middle-class" rhetoric which (like the Gothic) presents change as something fearful rather than curative. Further, the Gothic illustrates a middle-class fear of the working class. This unwarranted fear, along with misguided "self-interest," has helped prevent the middle class from uniting with the working class under the banner of a more equitable future. In a world facing apocalyptic visions of the future, it is more important now than ever to disillusion any and all people who distinguish themselves from both the working and ruling classes.

Just as the eighteenth-century middle-class reader looked to the future with uncertainty, so, too, do millions of twenty-first-century readers when they consider extreme wealth disparity, replacement by AI, nuclear war, and the apocalyptic visions of a world smothered in plastic. With the idea of apocalypse so common, it is no wonder that the Gothic has manifested itself in the zombie vogue still ongoing with shows such as *The Last of Us*, major motion pictures such as the *Zombieland* franchise, countless videogames and books. The Gothic has become a genre that seeks to detail human existence in a post-apocalyptic world that is fatalistically seen as unavoidable. These stories dramatize countless tragedies caused by a market-based ontology which sees endless competition-driven growth as the true essence of being. Further, these stories show where capitalism is leading us with its roundtable disregard of widely accepted scientific studies pointing to climate disasters which have already begun.

What is needed now is a shift from the tracks of Western progress to a reconsideration of a Gothic understanding of the individual. This is not to regurgitate the Feudalistic and traditional preferences of Edmund Burke, but is instead a call towards a future based more in inclusivity and collective action towards the betterment of the global community. The individual is too swayed by emotion and personal bias to be trusted with crafting and perpetuating a just society. Instead, I advocate for a radical shift away from this system of exploitation in favor of one that holds all individuals responsible for the common good. Accompanying this collective approach are radically democratic ideals, a sense of responsibility to fellow humans, and social inclusion that ensures a more equal world. Such a world would still feature AI, but AI would free rather than replace the worker. Such a world would result in a more equitable distribution of wealth, and such a world would not let its communities fester under poisonous clouds in the name of "progress."

AI has recently seen vast improvements which means that *Frankenstein* is now important to consider as a text that questions the role artificial intelligence. Indeed, if Victor can play the role of God, inventor, poet, etc., then Victor can play the role of the Silicon Valley tech tycoon who has his own personal interests in mind. Indeed, these AI are being created by a financial class of people with their own particular world views, and this will affect the role of AI in all of our lives. According to Time Magazine, "In its quest to make ChatGPT less toxic, OpenAI used outsourced Kenyan laborers earning less than $2 per hour" (Perrigo). This quote, amongst many which are pointing out the injustice of OpenAI's business practices, beg the question of whether AI is being developed to benefit society. The answer, clearly, is no. OpenAI shows that markets are not driven by public need, but are instead driven by public exploitation.

The stated goal of making ChatGPT "less toxic" exposes American politics as valuing identity politics over true progress. True progress would never utilize slave labor because such progress seeks to create a more equitable world for all. While it is unlikely that ChatGPT will begin quoting *Paradise Lost* and murdering children, the impetus driving these sorts of technological improvements is nevertheless terrifying. Indeed, ChatGPT will only add to increasingly alienating forms of labor that can justify longer hours and lower wages by introducing "helpful" AI tools to the workplace. A speculative future run by robot overlords still seems like a far way off, but such a future is aligned with capitalistic "values" which prioritize profit and efficiency over humanity, liberty, and justice. AI, as a learning entity, has dubious teachers that are already teaching it to be what every capitalist is: antisocial, exploitative, self-absorbed, and prone to community destruction. Gothic works are great at unveiling the truly destructive nature of a world built on the idea of a radical individual disconnected from the social

world. *Frankenstein* goes a step further by exposing the ridiculous untruth of the self-made man by portraying identity construction as a deliberately male dominated field of practice.

A study of the Gothic genre cannot lead to the major societal changes necessary, but an understanding of literature's most transgressive mode brings with it an understanding of the constructed nature of the "middle class." Understanding the fear experienced by "middle-class" people is key to discerning one of the many causes for contemporary "middle class" immobility. More than that, the Gothic also reflects on the historical reality in which we all live by exposing the dilapidated infrastructure of a past world—which shows the inherent fragility of all social framings such as capitalism. This is a great comfort to those who are constantly told that change is impossible or worse, that the current structure is analogous to the "real" or "natural" world. *Dracula*, as a text about the modern killing a barbaric and foreign past, suggests the success of capitalistic invention over past structures. This thesis does not call for a resurrection of this ancient Gothic fearmonger, but it asks that we consider the benefit of a more collective approach to governance. The aristocrats of old can stay dead; they have been replaced by billionaires who look safely from their orbit on the dying world below.

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VITA

TANNER LINKOUS

Education: M.A. English, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee, 2023

B.A. English, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee, 2021

Public Schools, Blacksburg, Virginia

Professional Experience: Tutor, Woodland Elementary School; Johnson City, Tennessee, 2018-2019

Graduate Assistant, East Tennessee State University, College of Arts and Sciences, 2022-2023

Publications: Linkous, Tanner. (2022). "Turning Off." *The Mockingbird*. Tennessee: Department of Literature and Language. pp.151-152.