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Gothic Representations: History, Literature, and Film

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GOTHIC REPRESENTATIONS: HISTORY, LITERATURE, AND FILM

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ABSTRACT

Gothic storytelling has come a long way since the publication of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764. This short novel created the standard motifs and tropes that will forever be associated with the genre—the destitute castle, the foreboding atmosphere, supernatural or inexplicable events, omens, prophecies, heroes, villains, and of course, a deteriorating world facilitated by the unconscious evils within humanity causing the complete destabilization of society.

This paper will examine the evolution of Gothic fiction and how it has been represented from its romantic heritage and Victorian upbringing to the American Gothic traditions of the nineteenth century and the contemporary Gothic scene. It will concentrate focus on the classic, most widely recognized Gothic icons, *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*, comparing and contrasting the inherent Gothic elements within each work to Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, and examining how certain criteria were transformed to fit the singularity of each novel. It will also study the development of Gothic literature in the United States by analyzing the most prolific early American author, Edgar Allan Poe, and how his works morphed European Gothic into a new literary tradition inspired by the unique landscapes and conditions of the United States of America. It will investigate the contemporary Gothic scene with special focus on the works of Stephen King, and explore how Gothic fiction underwent severe and radical changes over a short period of time from the end of World War II through the turn of the twenty-first century, stressing the timeless Gothic features, but also

divulging new Gothic elements that are completely original to the time period, or an adapted component from the Romantic and Victorian eras. Finally, it will analyze American Gothic film by selecting four individual works singular to their generations, *The Wolfman*, *Psycho*, *Jaws*, and *The Sixth Sense*, highlighting the Gothic elements within the films that are impervious to temporal changes in culture and society, but also revealing how each film is unique to the time period in which it was produced.

INTRODUCTION

<u>The Darkness</u>

There exists an innate, primordial instinct within human beings to fear the unknown. This impulse runs deep through ancestral bloodlines back to when early human civilizations attempted to explain the invisible world, to cast light upon the darkness. Things were less frightening if they could be explained with either rational tools or logical fallacies. Mysticism, superstition, and religion were the original fires that lit mankind's ignorance of the dark, but as civilizations progressed, science, reason, and rationality replaced these intangible faiths and creeds. The darkness was eliminated; however, humanity's macabre interest in the dark remained. The enlightened period of the eighteenth century may have shed light on the angels and demons of previous eras, but the inherent instinct was passed on. Since the origins of mankind human beings have always had a continuous obsession with the dark, and all the things that lurk within the shadows.

Humanity has not only had to fear the external shadows but also its own repressed darkness. If the psychology of human beings can be boiled down and explained by the simple struggle between good and evil, it may elucidate why art and culture have been so deeply influenced by the evil side—the darkness. Children are taught proper behavior from birth. They go through life with constant reminders about what is good, what is righteous, what is decent and moral. The evil is repressed into the subconscious; it becomes just a curious little artifact within the human psyche rearing its ugly head whenever it can, and in

many cases the subconscious opens the gates and allows the darkness to escape in the form of art. For centuries the darkness has been well represented in literature, from early Gothic novels like Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein*, the tragic and morbid tale of vengeance and redemption, and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, an alluring journey into a world where pleasure and sin blend together in a supernatural and explosive amalgamation, to the contemporary and post-modern novel like the science-fiction of the Cold War era and the vast library of Stephen King's Magical Realism. Mankind truly has a morbid fascination with the dark, and this is why Gothic literature has been able to transcend time and become one of the most enduring and celebrated literary genres.

It has been suggested that mankind's obsession with the thrill of being scared stems from a genuine, although veiled, fear that is in a state of constant progression. Humanity has always lived under a perpetual state of fear, but is this state of fear fueled by mankind's natural trepidation of the unknown? Do men and women secretly relish, on a subconscious level, the pulse-pounding adrenaline that is produced when a threat, in reality or in fiction, is made against a person's wellbeing? There have always been legitimate reasons for groups of people to be afraid; when the time span of human history is examined from a broad perspective it is easy to see that humanity has not been kind to itself—wars, manmade famines, genocides. During the mid eighteenth century when Gothic literature first appeared the western world was celebrating an enlightened era of social and technological prosperity. The enlightened thinkers had begun a confrontation with dogmatic religion. The blind faith people once had in

spirituality was being replaced with reason and science. The invisible, unknown world was disappearing as the miracles of religion were being explained by science. Mankind began to feel a void as science destroyed the joy of mystery. In the introduction to *The Return of the Repressed*, author Valdine Clemens explains:

> The ghostly element in Gothic tales offers a similar opportunity for the most rational, enlightened, and skeptical reader to regress to an exhilarating state of "daemonic dread." As a number of critics have pointed out, the preoccupation with primordial fear in late-eighteenth-century fiction signified a reaction against the increasing secularism of the postenlightenment era. (2)

Gothic tales, abundant in their supernatural mystery, could fill the void left behind by reason and science. Enlightened thought and technological progress could not interfere with fiction. Clemens also points out that although science and technology can be a blessing to society, it also creates a certain anxiety and uneasiness about the future (5). This apprehension is caused by the unknown direction in which science directs the world.

Fred Botting, in his essay, "In Gothic Darkly: Heterotopia, History, and Culture," points out that, "'Gothic' thus resonates as much with anxieties and fears concerning the crises and changes in the present as with any terrors of the past" (3). Gothic is a bridge between the past, present, and future. It uses current uneasiness about the future caused by scientific progress and connects it to the natural fear of the darkness from mankind's past.

After World War II there was an explosion of technological advances that culminated with the detonation of a hydrogen bomb and the beginning of space exploration; however, these scientific successes generated a massive amount of fear and hysteria about what the future might hold for mankind. Life was fairly comfortable in the postwar world, but the future was potentially disastrous. The men that built devices such as the hydrogen bomb as well as the other great scientific minds throughout history may have had a narrow view of how their enlightened ideas might impact the future. Clemens believes, "Gothic fiction helps to correct this condition of psychological short-sightedness by forging an imaginative connection with the archaic past" (5). The supernatural elements within Gothic tales remind people of the elation mankind once had with the unknown. Gothic fiction takes people back to an age before science had an explanation for the wonderful and fantastic phenomenon of the universe. It helps people remember and appreciate the mysteries of the dark.

Science-fiction author Isaac Asimov suggests that the popularity of Gothic fiction or horror stories involves a sense of vicarious living. In a collection of supernatural tales Asimov asks this question in the introduction:

> Why should we read these [horror stories] when none of us wants to be thrown into real-life situations involving fear and dread? We don't want to face wild beasts, or spend a night alone in a haunted house, or have to run from a homicidal maniac... But a life filled with peace and quiet becomes dreadful and would drive us to these things if we did not find some way of exorcising boredom. (7)

Boredom is produced when people become static in their endeavors. Boredom can certainly be considered a byproduct of the enlightenment; as reason and science removed the mysteries of life, what else was there to keep the human mind wondering? The darkness—the innate obsession with the unknown that exhilarates the soul—is elemental; it gets the heart beating, the blood pumping, the skin crawling, and the hairs standing on end. It is an ancestral, in-born trait that, despite scientific advances, will never go away.

Humans will always wonder what hides in the shadows. Despite what science and reason reveal about the world, our imaginations serve as a constant reminder of our natural obsession. We will always look into the unknown corners of the world and feel the presence of evil; we will hear the hungry monsters that want to devour our bodies and the malevolent spirits that want to poison our souls. We will forever wonder about the sinister possibilities lurking within the darkness, and within ourselves. This is why the Gothic continues to thrive today. It is mankind's window into a timeless world, the past, present, and future rolled into one horrifying, yet tantalizing experience.

I

Gothic Beginnings

Every story has a beginning, so does every storytelling genre. Gothic

fiction is no exception. Its beginnings lay in the simple publication of a short

novel, *The Castle of Otranto*, written by Horace Walpole, the son of England's

longest running Prime Minister. Before Walpole, the term Gothic was firmly

fixed in the annals of history, but a self-declaration attached to Walpole's novel

grafted the term onto literature, thus creating a new literary genre.

This chapter will analyze Walpole's novel, exploring the connection to the

term Gothic that Walpole ascribed to his text. It will also investigate Gothic

history and determine why Walpole declared his novel to be Gothic. Finally, it

will reveal the timeless features of Gothic literature that were established with the

publication of *The Castle of Otranto*.

Horace Walpole

In April of 1765 Horace Walpole was probably in a good mood. He may

have been sitting in the library of his immense Gothic structured home at

Strawberry Hill in the southeast suburbs of London, perhaps reading the newest

edition of the *London Chronicle*, which contained a favorable review of his first

novel, *The Castle of Otranto*. Walpole had been nervous about the reception of

the book, which had a small run of 500 copies in late December of 1764. He

knew the story was strange and exotic, and feared that critics and the public might

disregard it as a smutty mockery of Italian royalty. To combat these assumed

allegations Walpole had included a preface which introduced the story as an

antique work of romantic history. He explains:

> The following work was found in the library of an ancient Catholic
>
> family in the north of England. It was printed in Naples, in the
>
> black letter, in the year 1529. How much sooner it was written
>
> does not appear. The principal incidents are such as were believed
>
> in the darkest ages of Christianity; but the language and conduct
>
> have nothing that savours barbarism. (5)

He declares the plot of the story was concocted around the time it takes place,

during the first Crusade, a time of chivalrous knights and gallant gentlemen, a

time when western Europe was bursting with heroic and romantic tales of the

brave and noble families that fought with a fearless bravado against the invading

infidels in an effort to take back and sustain their god-given religious place in the

world. Stories like this were ripe for the picking and needed only to be pulled out

of the thin air. This connection to the era of the first crusade provided Walpole's

novel with an authentic, yet whimsical, feeling of old-world romance. Walpole

created this preface as a safeguard in case the reading public completely

disparaged the story, and in his opinion this was likely to happen because the

elements were too new for the time period, but if he grounded them in the past,

especially the romantic past, the novel would stand a better chance at success.

Walpole's preface established one of the original tropes of Gothic literature—the

link to the past. Several Gothic novels produced during the Victorian era have

their supernatural elements rooted in the past. There are ancient prophecies, old-

world settings, primeval spirits, and archaic traditions. The story itself becomes an antique, a "discovered text" that is translated and retold, or refashioned, into a readable work of fiction. This design would be duplicated in later Gothic texts. Mary Shelly sets up *Frankenstein* as a series of correspondences between the primary narrator and his sister. Bram Stoker crafted *Dracula*, not as a traditional manuscript, but as an assembly of interrelated diaries, journals, letters, and newspaper articles. Contemporary Gothic writers such as Stephen King have utilized this device as well. In several works of King's fiction he breaks away from standard prose and reveals details of the story through newspaper articles and other non-traditional means of fiction prose.

Despite the rationale behind the preface, Walpole's efforts proved to be unnecessary. The book sold and the reviews were positive. This prompted him to take full credit for the originality of the story, and to present the next edition as, "a new species of romance." Thus he added the subtitle, "A Gothic Story" (Clery 101-102). The second edition would be distributed to the public in April of 1765 with the full title *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story*. Gothic literature was born.

Gothic History

It would stand to reason, however, that Walpole was mistaken in his understanding of the term Gothic. As pointed out by Robin Sowerby, "It is well known that the use of the term 'Gothic' to describe the literary phenomenon that began in the later eighteenth century has little, if anything, to do with the people

from whom it is derived" (15). The Goths in history were a Germanic tribe that came out of southern Russia around the third century and spread their influence into parts of France, Spain, Italy, and England. They had no written literature of their own, so much of the history of the Goths was passed down orally or recorded by other peoples, and many of these records were kept by enemies of the Goths, so reports weigh toward being unfavorable. When Walpole was applying the term Gothic to his novel the historical Goths were recounted as a savage band of war-loving people. They were the enemy of the Romans, and as the Romans were regarded as the purveyors of civilization, the Goths were the converse; they were the destroyers, the corrupters. They were set up in a strict binary opposition to the Romans. They were savage whereas the Romans were civilized, they were ignorant whereas the Romans were educated, they were bloodthirsty whereas the Romans were peaceful. Sowerby also explains:

> Through History the word 'Gothic' has always been chiefly
> defined in contrasting juxtaposition to the Roman, and a constant
> factor in its various uses, perhaps the only constant factor, has
> continued to be its antithesis to the Roman or the classical. (15 –
> 16)

Almost all descriptions of the Goths denigrate them in contrast to the classical lifestyle of the Romans. Archeology can provide the historical facts—settlement, migration, time span, and details concerning culture; however, these particulars offer no explanation as to why Walpole assigned the term Gothic to his novel; an

exploration into Walpole's experience with the historic Goths and their cultural influence can reveal such details.

Walpole's first in-depth encounter with Gothic culture came in 1749, fifteen years before the publication of *The Castle of Otranto*, when he began a tour of the English countryside. He visited old ruins, churches, and houses constructed during the Gothic revival that took place during the early eighteenth century (Clery 100 – 101). Gothic architecture had become very popular in England. Many English citizens viewed the Goths as the original inhabitants of the British Isles, so Gothic influences had crept into English nationalism. Gothic designs and structures sprang up everywhere, from churches to private homes and government buildings. Walpole studied and wrote on the Gothic revival, he understood the evolution that had taken place from medieval Europe to eighteenth century England, he was familiar with the history and could identify the transitions that had taken place as Gothic influence spread into architectural design, but most importantly, he recognized the attractiveness of the Gothic revival. This is why he applied the word Gothic to his novel; he was hoping to piggyback on the popularity of Gothic history and culture, and for the continued success of his novel he needed to connect it to the historic Goths.

Presently when the term Gothic is applied to literature or film most people think dark thoughts. Their minds conjure up images of old, creaky mansions or castles full of cobwebs and furniture covered in dingy white sheets; they think about contemporary writers such as Stephen King and Dean Koontz; they remember movies that frightened them as children like *Night of the Living Dead*,

Jaws, The Exorcist, and *The 6th Sense.* They see human pain, suffering, blood, and death. The connotations for Gothic literature and film could go on forever. Since *The Castle of Otranto* Gothic literature has become tangled in a web of sordid story telling motifs. Gothic in its application to the creative arts has been redefined with each passing generation. In many ways Gothic has taken on a life of its own, it grabs and captures elements from other genres, slowly working new components into its dark repertoire. Indeed, the Gothic has changed, but its core, as created by Walpole, remains the same. Walpole's novel drafted the standard Gothic elements—a link to the past, a dark, ominous setting, the presence of the supernatural, obscure heroes, helpless maidens, sexual aggression, and a threat of destabilization. Its roots reach way back to the mid eighteenth century, and they remain firmly planted as the fundamental essence of the Gothic.

The Castle of Otranto

The Castle of Otranto tells the story of the Prince of Otranto, Manfred, whose ancestors usurped the rightful heirs of the principality. An ancient prophecy declares, "[T]he castle and lordship of Otranto 'should pass from the present family, whenever the real owner should be grown too large to inhabit it'" (Walpole 9). The real heir is the peasant Theodore, whose noble birth was concealed. In order for Manfred's family to remain the lords of Otranto he needs a son, but his only son, Conrad, is brutally murdered in a bizarre and supernatural fashion, and with no other sons this destroys the male bloodline. The novel then focuses on Manfred's deranged pursuit of his late son's bride, Isabella, as he

attempts to leave his current wife, Hippolita, who has become too old to bear any more children. Manfred hopes that Isabella will provide him the son necessary to prevent the prophecy from coming to fruition, but a series of supernatural occurrences averts Manfred from reaching his goals. Manfred is ruined, Theodore takes back his rightful place as the Prince of Otranto, and the prophecy is fulfilled.

All the terms and components that have become associated with the Gothic began in *The Castle of Otranto*. In identifying the novel as a Gothic tale, Walpole was labeling the literary elements within his novel as the primary tropes of the genre. Victor Sage notes in his explanation of the Gothic novel:

> [The Castle of Otranto] encodes various obsessions of the later Gothic... the setting in medieval and 'superstitious' southern Catholic Europe; the expectation of the supernatural; the conflation of hero and villain... the focus on the victimized but often defiant, position of women; the use of confined spaces—castles, dungeons, monasteries and prisons, to symbolize extreme emotional states by labyrinthine incarceration—all these characteristic modalities spring into being, more or less fully formed, in Walpole's tale. (146)

The castle backdrop has become the most widely recognized Gothic setting (most notably Castle Dracula and Castle Frankenstein), but through time this element would be adapted as necessary. The dark and mysterious castle is often turned into a new setting and sometimes becomes metaphoric. In Alfred Hitchcock's

Psycho the foreboding castle setting becomes the Bates Motel; in Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* it is the deep, dark ocean or the island of Amity; in Stephen King's *'Salem's Lot* it is the Marsten House. Time and culture have dictated these various changes as deemed appropriate or fitting for an individual work of fiction, but regardless of these moderate to extreme alterations, the rudimentary elements remain intact; the backdrop is dark, it is mysterious, it has the potential to breed monsters, and it serves as a prison encampment for the protagonist, a place where the story's hero feels trapped and in a state of constant danger.

In the novel Walpole does not spend a lot of time in direct reference to the castle setting, but through character action and dialogue the ominous setting is established. To begin with the story opens with the brutal murder of Conrad, which was apparently done by some invisible, supernatural force. From this point forward the story falls under a cloak of constant fear and panic. As the action progresses invisible forces continue to be at work within the halls and passages of the castle. Weather also helps establish the dark mood. Early in the novel, shortly after Manfred has made clear his intentions to seize Isabella as his new wife, he fiercely grabs hold of her hand, thus beginning the classic Gothic pursuit of a helpless maiden:

> She shrieked, and started from him, Manfred rose to pursue her, when the moon, which was now up and gleamed in at the opposite casement, presented to his sight the plumes of the fatal helmet, which rose to the height of the windows. (Walpole 17 – 18)

As if it is an act of divinity, the full moon casts a perfect glowing light onto the instrument of his son's demise, the helmet of Alfonso. Isabella notices this and cries out, "Look, my Lord! See, Heaven itself declares against your impious intentions" (Walpole 18). Isabella eventually flees into the underground labyrinth of the castle and Manfred's pursuit continues.

There is no shortage of the supernatural within *The Castle of Otranto*. After Conrad's mysterious murder the novel is ripe with ghostly occurrences. There are paintings that breathe, "At that instant the portrait of his grandfather, which hung over the bench where they had been sitting uttered a deep sigh, and heaved its breast" (Walpole 18); mysterious winds and breezes that seem to come from nowhere, "She approached the door that had been opened; but a sudden gust of wind that met her at the door extinguished her lamp, and left her in total darkness" (Walpole 20); statues and helmets that move by unseen forces, "At that instant the sable plumes on the enchanted helmet, which still remained on the other end of the court, were tempestuously agitated, and nodded thrice, as if bowed by some invisible wearer" (Walpole 57); mysterious moans, "A deep and hollow groan, which seemed to come from above, startled the Princess and Theodore" (Walpole 73); and the climactic, terrifying appearance of the classic Gothic specter, "[A]nd then the figure, turning slowly round, discovered to Frederic the fleshless jaws and empty sockets of a skeleton, wrapt in a hermit's cowl" (Walpole 109). The appearance of the specter—the living-skeleton— established a Gothic string that would last well into the twenty-first century; from

classic works of Gothic literature like *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* to contemporary films like *Alien* and *Jaws*, Gothic fiction's prevailing constant is the specter.

The characters in the Gothic represent the eternal struggle between good and evil. Sometimes this struggle takes the form of omnipotent forces from heaven and hell, but it can also be completely human or mortal. The human antagonists are usually men that have become corrupted by societal factors, maybe through greed, ambition, or jealousy. Their corruption symbolizes the precarious stability of society. They become corrupters themselves and if they are not trying to physically destroy the protagonist, they are trying to annihilate his morality and goodness. The protagonist often ends up fighting two battles, one external and one internal as he struggles against being manipulated by evil forces. There is usually a lead female role that stands between the antagonist and protagonist. She represents the goals of both the good and evil factors; the antagonist wants to destroy or ruin her, and the protagonist wants to save her.

In *The Castle of Otranto* the antagonist is Manfred. His family unfairly took the principality of Otranto, and as the title begins to slip through his fingers he becomes mad with rage and abandons all morality in order to sustain his nobility. Isabella is his target. He needs to have her, to possess her; she will become his wife and essentially his sex-slave and provide him the son necessary to prevent the prophecy from being fulfilled. When he first declares his intentions toward Isabella he says, "My fate depends on having sons, and this night I trust will give a new date to my hopes" (Walpole 17). This declaration carries a strong sexual overtone. He specifically expresses that, "this night" will give him hope

against the looming prophecy, meaning that he expects to have sex with Isabella this very night and conceive a child, the male bloodline necessary to prevent the prophecy's fulfillment. Sexual aggression from an antagonistic force became a dominating feature of Gothic literature. Manfred pursues Isabella throughout the remainder of the novel with the intention of having sex with her, by force if necessary.

Theodore is the protagonist, the unlikely hero who rises from obscurity to save the maiden, thwart the villain, and set all things into their rightful order. In the reader's first encounter with Theodore he is a peasant, an innocent bystander and witness to Conrad's murder. He is the only character who believes Conrad's death was more than just a freak accident. His intuition toward the murder combined with Mandfred's shortsightedness and madness lands him in Manfred's captivity, but his faith in providence and cunning intellect help him escape, and subsequently assist in the escape of Isabella from Manfred's clutches. As Theodore battles Manfred, his character slowly rises from a peasant's insignificance and he is revealed to be the rightful heir to the principality. Walpole provides hints toward this revelation in his resemblance to Alfonso, but also in a conversation between Matilda and Bianca. Matilda says, "I observed, did not you Bianca? that his words were tinctured with an uncommon infusion of piety. It was no ruffian's speech; his phrases were becoming a man of gentle birth." Bianca responds by saying, "I told you Madam… that I was sure he was some Prince in disguise" (Walpole 43). Finally, at the end of the novel, in

dramatic fashion, the statue of Alfonso has come to life and declares Theodore's true birthright:

> "Behold in Theodore the true heir of Alfonso!" said the vision:
> And having pronounced those words, accompanied by a clap of
> thunder, it ascended solemnly towards heaven, where the clouds
> parting asunder, the form of St. Nicholas was seen, and receiving
> Alfonso's shade, they were soon wrapt from mortal eyes in a blaze
> of glory. (Walpole 116)

These character signatures as well as other plot elements such as the setting, sexual aggression, and the maiden pursuit stand as load bearing pillars throughout the Gothic genre. They are the thematic constants in the Gothic storytelling equation.

At its core *The Castle of Otranto* is a ghost story. It has the perfect recipe for suspense, a formula that seems to have transcended time and found its way into several modern ghost stories in literature and film. There are statues and paintings that come to life, mysterious winds that extinguish candle and torch light, sighs and shrieks from invisible sources, and the appearances of ghosts and ghouls. Walpole's formula became a standard in later Gothic texts. *The Castle of Otranto* is the original source from which Gothic was given life, and even though different cultures and time periods have added new factors or adapted the old, once the layers are peeled back and the flesh removed, the bare bones of the Gothic remain the same as risen out of Walpole's novel.

II

Frankenstein Forever

Frankenstein is *not* a monster; he is a man, a character in a novel written by Mary Shelley which bears the same name. *Frankenstein* was originally published in 1818, and more than a century later in 1931 it would become a major motion picture starring Boris Karloff. Through the following years there would be sequels, remakes, and re-imaginings. The core story would be transformed to fit the contemporary world as modern authors and directors adapted the root elements for new audiences—brilliant scientist plays God, creates life, becomes dejected with his own creation, questions the morality of science, challenges the virtue of religion, and explores the darkness of the human soul.

Nearly two hundred years after the original publication of the novel, *Frankenstein* remains one of the most recognizable names in Gothic and horror fiction. Its cultural popularity and high literary esteem are proof of its timeless qualities, but the factors that make the novel so admired are directly linked to its predecessor, Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*. *Frankenstein* follows a similar literary blueprint as Walpole's novel, while at the same time adding its own unique ingredients to the Gothic genre. An exploration into the novel's history, narrative frame, setting, and characterization will reveal the features that were directly inspired by *The Castle of Otranto*, as well as superficial modifications Shelley added to the genre.

History and the Link to the Past

It all began in 1816 when a nineteen-year-old Mary Shelley was visiting the Villa Diodati near Geneva with her husband, the poet Percy Shelley, their friend and fellow poet, Lord Byron, and another friend, the physician, John Polidori. The group was reading a French translation of German ghost stories titled *Fantasmagoriana* (Crook 58). At some point the four decided they could do better than this collection of macabre tales and committed themselves to writing their own ghoulish narratives that could be assembled into an anthology of short stories. Shelley explains in her 1831 introduction to *Frankenstein* (transcribed in Murial Spark's essay, "Frankenstein"):

> "We will each write a ghost story," said Lord Byron: and his proposition was acceded to. There were four of us...
>
> I busied myself to think of a story—a story to rival those which had excited us to this task. One which would speak to the mysterious fears of our nature, and awaken thrilling horror—one to make the reader dread to look round, to curdle the blood, and quicken the beatings of the heart. (13)

Within *Fantasmagoriana* are two stories that Shelley admits inspired *Frankenstein*; one is about a man destined to be the destroyer of the human race, another is about a demon who morphs into a deceased bride (Crook 58 – 59). The only results this assembly of writers and friends produced were Polidori's *The Vampyre*, published in 1819, and Shelley's *Frankenstein.*

At nineteen-years-old Mary Shelley produced one of the most preeminent works of Gothic fiction. Published fifty-four years after Horace Walpole's, *The Castle of Otranto, Frankenstein* carried on the very young, yet well-established, Gothic literary tradition with similar tropes and standards that had been set in place by Walpole. In her essay "Mary Shelley, Author of *Frankenstein*," Nora Crook generalizes the Gothic elements:

> It contains most of the props of gothic terror fiction, albeit disguised. The mouldering abbey is transformed into Victor's laboratory… the towering spectre becomes an artificial man eight feet high… The villain's pursuit of the maiden becomes the mutual pursuit of Victor and his Creature. It has a fatal portrait (Caroline Frankenstein's) and sublime landscapes (the Alps and the Arctic wastes). The Creature, an undead patched from corpses, is explicitly compared to a vampire and a mummy. The embargoes secret is that of a human creation itself. (58)

According to Crook, Shelley essentially borrowed a design from Walpole, but then disguised the main features by transforming them into new scenarios, similar enough to maintain the work's status as Gothic, but different enough to be considered original. There are many elements that stand out as direct links to Walpole's novel; however, Shelley casts enough creative light to make them imaginative and unique.

Because the word *Frankenstein* has grown into its own industry and become synonymous with the term *movie-monster*, many people do not realize the

original 1818 novel contained a subtitle, *The Modern Prometheus*. In Greek mythology Prometheus was a Titan who stole fire from Zeus and gave it to mankind. As punishment Prometheus is chained to a mountainside for all eternity where a bird of prey pecks at his eyes each night. The parallels between the novel and the story of Prometheus are obvious: unsuspecting character has nothing but good intentions, catastrophe results because of the character's shortsightedness, character is punished for his actions. In attaching the subtitle *The Modern Prometheus* to her novel, Shelley was taking a cue from Walpole and connecting her story to the past, albeit a fictional past. She has linked her novel to the times of angry gods and the heroic mortals who stood against them.

When Gothic fiction is stripped of its flesh one of the elements that still unites the genre is the past. All the ghosts and demons, the prophecies and fortunes, the heroes and villains and maidens, all of these factors are embedded with a collective component that binds them to the story and the genre. This component is the historic past, be it the real-world past or a past invented by the author. The driving forces of the novel come from the past—the alchemic sciences, the long buried mummies, the entombed vampires, and the ancient prophecies. The past is the garden cemetery where Gothic monsters are grown. When Shelly titled her novel *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus*, she was not only informing would-be readers that this novel will bear a resemblance to the Prometheus legend, but she was also creating a vital bond between her novel and the past, much like Walpole did for *The Castle of Otranto* and the historic Goths.

Narrative Frame and Setting

The narrative framing of *Frankenstein* echoes that of Walpole's novel and has since then been duplicated in other Gothic texts. There are three narrators of *Frankenstein*, Captain Robert Walton, Victor Frankenstein, and the Creature. Whereas Walpole framed his story as a "discovered" text that was translated for the reading public, Shelley presents her novel as a series of letters that develop into an inter-textual relationship between the three narrators; the Creature relates his story to Victor, who passes it, and his own story, onto Walton, who in turn transcribes all the narratives in a series of correspondences with his sister. This was a common trend in early Gothic fiction; the reader is not just reading a story; he or she is reading letters, journals, diaries, or translations that forge the action and drama into a readable work of fiction. This style of storytelling steps outside the boundaries of conventional prose; it was a new and innovative method of fiction, and it provided for a stronger sense of realism. The content of the Gothic can take place within the most fantastic worlds. Stylistic devices like framing narratives introduce a sense of realism to an otherwise purely fantastical realm.

The setting of *Frankenstein* begins in northern London as Captain Walton is preparing for his voyage north. The sea captain is attempting to navigate the north passage and reach the pole. It is a perilous endeavor with every opportunity to suffer a very painful and miserable death. Already a foreboding atmosphere engulfs the reader. Walton writes to his sister how desperately alone he is; despite his capable crew, the captain wallows in a pitiful, lonesome world. "But I have one want which I have never yet been able to satisfy; and the absence of the

object of which I now feel as a most severe evil. I have no friend, Margaret"
(Shelley 5). Walton, who serves as the record keeper of Victor's and the
Creature's narratives, is internally isolated and as his voyage continues north he
becomes externally isolated as well. This feeling of remoteness or loneliness
reverberates through Gothic fiction. It adds an extra element or obstacle for the
hero to overcome and further charges the ominous setting.

Quickly action shifts to the icy labyrinth of the Arctic Circle where
Walton's ship becomes marooned and trapped on the frozen islands of ice.
Walton writes to his sister, "About two o'clock the mist cleared away, and we
beheld, stretched out in every direction, vast and irregular plains of ice, which
seemed to have no end" (Shelley 12). This setting is representative of the castle-
like corridors that frequently pop up in Gothic fiction, where characters blindly
claw their way through dark passages, lost in the shadows, trapped by the twisting
and turning halls, all the while being pursued by some sort of monster, be it man
or phantasm, like Manfred's pursuit of Isabella in *The Castle of Otranto*.

Shelley frequently uses surreal landscapes or dreadful settings in the novel
to emphasize danger and add feelings of hopelessness. Victor describes his own
laboratory as a "solitary chamber," and identifies it as a "cell." He also refers to it
as a "slaughter-house" (Shelley 50). When Victor and his family take holiday at
their family home in Belrive, a suburb of Geneva, Victor, still overcome with
grief over Justine's death, wanders alone through the mountains. He hopes to
take in a view that once supplied him with joy but in an ironic twist, as Victor
reaches the top of a steep summit he is subjected to gaze upon his unholy creation,

the Creature. Shelley builds up the suspense of this encounter by relying on the threatening aspects of the setting:

> [T]rees lie broken and strewed on the ground; some entirely
> destroyed, others bent leaning upon jutting rocks of the mountain,
> or transversely upon other trees. The path, as you ascend higher, is
> intersected by ravines of snow, down which stones continually roll
> from above; one of them is particularly dangerous, as the slightest
> sound, such as even speaking in a loud voice, produces a
> concussion of air sufficient to draw destruction upon the head of
> the speaker. (103 – 04)

This location atop the summit was supposed to renew Victor's happiness, to reinvigorate his soul, but instead he discovers that there is no place he can go where the Creature cannot find him. He will never again be happy; his life has become a failed experiment where there is absolutely no hope for redemption.

Characterization: The Gothic Specter

Any child in the western world can recognize the likeness of the creature in *Frankenstein*, though people familiar with Shelley's novel realize Frankenstein is the man, and the monster is the "creature" or the "daemon." When the non-literary mind describes Frankenstein the results are similar: stitches, scars, green skin, a torn, dirty sport coat, lumbering walk, monosyllabic grunts, and, of course, a pair of large, steel bolts fastened to each side of the neck. This portrait for the Creature, courtesy of Boris Karloff in the 1931 film adaptation, never appears in

the original novel, not even close. Only once does Shelley directly describe the

Creature in specific detail:

> 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 shriveled complexion and
>
> straight black lips. (53 – 54)

This was Victor's original encounter with the Creature after he animated it with

the spark of life. This is the classic specter of Gothic fiction, a powerful,

frightening creature, horrifying to look upon, and filled with extreme

malevolence. Later, when Victor comes upon his creation after abandoning it he

narrates, "[H]is countenance bespoke bitter anguish... while its unearthly ugliness

rendered it almost too horrible for human eyes" (Shelley 105). Words like "ugly,

horrid, horrible," and "hideous" in reference to the Creature appear throughout the

story. These abstract words, combined with the reader's knowledge that the

Creature was assembled from carefully selected pieces of flesh, allow the

imagination to create its own likeness. The Boris Karloff version of the

Frankenstein monster is a representation given to the world in the 1931 film, and

this image is what has become *Frankenstein*, it has permeated culture for over

eighty years, and thanks to the popularity of the original film it has become a permanent fixture within western culture.

But the iconic Frankenstein is not an accurate representation of its literary origin. There is no telling how Mary Shelley would feel about Boris Karloff's ape-like portrayal, but one thing is certain, the specter of Frankenstein has become its own quasi-industry, and it owes its life and popularity to its creator. Mary Shelley *is* Victor Frankenstein, and the Creature is the runaway hailstorm of movies, television shows, books, Halloween costumes and décor, and other immeasurable amounts of merchandise.

Characterization: Victims

Victor and the Creature are the centerpieces for the novel; they represent a yin and yang juxtaposition, good and evil, light and dark; however, to which each belongs is arguable because there is a constant shift in dynamics as the reader is persuaded to view both characters as villain and victim. Helen Stoddart calls this type of character the "hero-villain" in her essay by the same name. The hero-villain is a character that possesses both the qualities of a protagonist and antagonist; the reader roots for his success because he has been victimized by outside forces, but also questions the decisions he makes and the paths he chooses. Depending on the situation, the hero-villain can lean toward either side of his identifying label. Stoddart goes as far as to describe the hero-villain physically, "[H]e is dark and of powerful physique, and is frequently in possession of piercing eyes and an expression which indicates a mixture of

contempt and gloom" (177). In *Frankenstein* the reader's first encounter with

Victor is recorded in one of Walton's letters, "I never saw a more interesting

creature: his eyes have generally an expression of wildness, and even madness"

(Shelley 14), and when describing the Creature Shelly is constantly alluding to his

unnatural levels of physical strength.

Some readers and critics believe that Victor and the Creature serve as

mirror images of one another's unconscious minds; they are each other's fears and

hopes. In "Night Thoughts on the Gothic Novel," Lowery Nelson explains:

> In an orgy of narcissism, and as a sort of horrible retribution, he
>
> [Victor] had succeeded in creating his own Doppelganger, his alter
>
> ego, his objectified id: a hideous humanoid figure of more than
>
> human proportion. (37)

Victor and the Creature become intricately linked, they are the cause of each

other's anguish and they are the targets for each other's vengeance.

Both Victor and the Creature can be viewed as a hero-villain character.

Each one possesses redeeming and respectable qualities, but they also share a

madness that makes them reprehensible. Early in the novel Victor is just an

innocent boy yearning to learn the secrets of life. His curiosity is a celebrated

facet of youth. Victor professes that he is not after personal gain in his scientific

endeavors. He refers to wealth as an "inferior object," and then explains, "but

what glory would attend the discovery, if I could banish disease from the human

frame, and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death!" (Shelley 32). His

desires are to cure humanity of disease, to wipe out the invisible killers that

plague the world, and to give people an almost infinite chance at life. These self-declared altruistic ambitions cloak his secret desire for fame and glory.

The path which Victor chooses is what makes him a hero-villain, and it gives the novel another electrical jolt of Gothic authority. Victor spent his childhood and early adulthood becoming self-educated with the works of Albertus Magnus, Cornelius Agrippa, and Paracelsus, who were all noted philosophers, alchemists, astrologers, and occultists, and whom Victor refers to as, "[T]he lords of my imagination" (Shelley 33). These men were proponents of the ancient sciences, a time before the industrial age when metaphysics was a valid discourse for exploring the mysteries of the universe. Victor's father shuns these men, as does his professor at Ingolstadt, M. Krempe, who asks Victor, "Have you really spent your time in studying such nonsense?" (Shelley 39). When Victor answers yes the professor does not hold back his feelings of disdain:

> You have burdened your memory with exploded systems and
> useless names. Good God! In what desert land have you lived,
> where no one was kind enough to inform you that these fancies,
> which you have so greedily imbibed, are a thousand years old, and
> as musty as they are ancient? (Shelley 39)

Victor leaves this encounter with a list of new books and a schedule of lectures that will enlighten him on the *authentic* sciences of natural philosophy and chemistry. This meeting marks the beginning of Victor's path toward becoming the hero-villain. Victor will fulfill his youthful fantasies by combining the old with the new, the ancient with the modern sciences. His actions become a parallel

for one of the defining tropes of Gothic fiction. The industrial age and the enlightened era had discredited many ancient beliefs, and there was a certain void left behind as modern science put an explanation to the mysteries of life. Gothic fiction fills this void; it reminds people of the joy of mystery and suspense. Victor Frankenstein is most certainly an enlightened thinker, he is formally and self-educated, and he frequently challenges conventional thought, but he is also a bridge between the past and the future, he successfully melts together ancient beliefs with modern science, and his efforts produce the Creature, the unholy specter that serves as a personified representation of old-world mysticism meets new-world science.

The Creature's hero-villain status lays in his victimization and persecution. His deformities and horrid appearance make him the object of fear and loathing. He is essentially a new born child in the body of an eight foot tall, malformed, humanoid monster. He becomes an abandoned child left alone to survive in a world that hates and fears him. These obstacles make the reader admire the Creature when he is able to survive, and become educated, not just in the arts and languages, but he also learns love, compassion, and even hate when be assigns himself as the invisible member of a peasant family living in a small cottage. It is within this cottage that the Creature learns the true nature of man, and realizes that no matter what, people will never accept him. The Creature had been conferring with the blind grandfather when the rest of the family comes home:

At that instant the cottage door was opened, and Felix, Safie, and

Agatha entered. Who can describe their horror and consternation

on beholding me? Agatha fainted, and Safie, unable to attend to

her friend, rushed out of the cottage. Felix darted forward, and

with supernatural force tore me from his father... he dashed me to

the ground and struck me violently with a stick. I could have torn

him limb from limb, as the lion rends the antelope. But my heart

sunk within me as with bitter sickness, and I refrained. (Shelley

151)

The Creature is rejected by the peasant family, who destroys his only hope to find

a place where he could belong. If the lowest members of the social ladder, who

themselves are looked upon with disdain from the social classes above them, will

not accept him, no one will. This idea reflects the class hierarchy of the western

world in the eighteenth century. The people at the top persecute the people below

them, who in turn persecute whoever is even farther below them in an ongoing

pyramid of victimization.

This victimization begins the Creature's quest to get revenge upon his

creator, the man who callously brought him into the world only to abandon him.

Ultimately it is Victor who is to blame for the Creature's persecution. Victor,

who had the intelligence and patience to create life in a bizarre and intricate

scientific experiment, did not have the wherewithal to sustain it, or the foresight

to realize the consequences of his actions. Victor is responsible for the Creature's

loneliness, and it is Victor who will pay. The Creature's quest for vengeance

begins with the murder of Victor's kid brother, William, and ends with the strangling of Victor's wife, Elizabeth. The villain side of the hero-villain complex weighs more heavily for the Creature, and although nothing excuses his actions, the reader cannot help but remember he was the original victim, whereas Victor and society were the victimizers. Harold Bloom argues, "The greatest paradox and most astonishing achievement of Mary Shelley's novel is that the monster is *more human* than his creator" (3). Bloom suggests that the Creature is more loveable, hateful, pitiful, and frightening than Victor, and these qualities make him more human. The reader is able to connect more readily with the Creature, and see more of his own consciousness within him. The creature is like the Fallen Man, cast out of paradise, forced to fend for himself, fashioned into a mode of natural survival. The Creature's life becomes a very human enterprise.

Frankenstein Forever

The origins of *Frankenstein* have become lost within its own industry; however, through all the movies, merchandise, and novel adaptations, the essence of Shelley's original story has remained intact. The Boris Karloff monster may be the entrenched likeness of the Creature, but the core ingredients of the original story survive. *Frankenstein* is not just any old horror story or simple work of Gothic fiction. It is one of the foundation blocks for Gothic literature. Following in the footsteps of Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, *Frankenstein* continued the young Gothic literary tradition, but it did not follow the exact blueprint created by Walpole. It expanded, adapted, cut, morphed, and transformed the Gothic. It

used Walpole's design but also incorporated its own unique elements. These added-extras would become the new Gothic design, and future Gothic writers would in-turn use, dispose, or modify them as necessary for their own text. The most recognizable phrase from the *Frankenstein* industry does not even appear in the novel, it comes from the 1931 film when Victor screams, "It's alive!" All the *Frankenstein* adaptations and copy-cats may have drastically drifted from Shelly's original vision, but they did get one thing right, it has taken on a life of its own. It certainly is alive.

III

<u>The Dracula Phenomenon</u>

Eighty years after the world was introduced to the Frankenstein monster it would meet a new face of terror, the infamous Count Dracula. In 1897 Irish author Bram Stoker would publish *Dracula* and give birth to what would become a world-wide phenomenon. Similar to its *Frankenstein, Dracula* would race past the barriers of its own time and become a recognized name that would be feared, loved, cherished, and celebrated by fans of the Gothic and horror for generations.

Count Dracula, like the Frankenstein monster, is an image recognizable to almost every person in the western world, but this familiar likeness more than likely leans toward the film adaptations of the famed vampire rather than the descriptions in Stoker's novel. Perhaps the most famous portrayal comes from the 1931 Universal Pictures movie starring Bela Lugosi—slicked black hair with a prominent widows peak, penetrating eyes, carved, handsome features, immaculate, gentleman's wardrobe, and, of course, fangs. This particular image has lent itself to children's Halloween costumes for decades, and has made *Dracula* a timeless artifact of western culture; but above the visual appeal of the enigmatic Count, it is the artistic importance of the original novel that has helped the Transylvanian native endure for such a long period of time. It is a story bursting with beautiful, aesthetic prose, real-life, dynamic characters, and psychologically gripping conflicts.

Dracula is a novel that belongs to history. The very title makes the blood run cold and conjures images of blood and death. Many standard Gothic features

make an appearance—the narrative framing as a discovered text, a bridge between the archaic past and the scientific future, an ominous setting, prophetic warnings, and sexual aggression. Stoker used the Gothic essentials set in place by Horace Walpole to create the ultimate, most timeless vampire tale. *Dracula* was born into a literary genre over one hundred thirty years old and it has become one of the most celebrated works within that genre.

Narrative Framing

The framing of *Dracula* echoes the narrative style of Shelley and Walpole. *Dracula* is not formatted like a typical novel; it is a collection of journals, diaries, letters, newspaper articles, reports, and memorandums, assembled into a logical order where action and events become plot. The readers have almost a dozen different narrators to guide them in the story. Jerrold E. Hogle identifies this style as counterfeit, and refers to it as a "playful fakery." He explains that narrations set up as letters, journals, diaries, and other non-traditional story-telling mediums are an attempt to create a sense of nostalgia for the past (111). This approach to writing creative fiction is inherently Gothic. In *Dracula: Between Tradition and Modernism*, author Carol A. Senf explains the stratagem behind the assembly of different narrative techniques, "[I]t is a strategy that unites the uncanny with the ordinary, the ancient with the modern, and the mythic with the scientific" (20). *Dracula* is similar to the Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* in that it can be treated as a "discovered" text. Stoker "discovered" these various journals, diaries, and newspaper clippings and carefully assembled them into the appropriate

sequence of events. Like Walpole's novel, Stoker prefaces his story with a dedication to his friend that explains the narrative style:

> How these papers have been placed in sequence will be made manifest in the reading of them. All needless matters have been eliminated, so that a history almost at variance with the possibilities of latter-day belief may stand forth as simple fact. There is throughout no statement of past events wherein memory may err, for all the records chosen are exactly contemporary, given from the standpoints and within the range of knowledge of those who made them. (vi)

Imagine a young Bram Stoker rummaging through a dusty old chest in some creaky attic. He comes across a handful of letters and journals written by Jonathan Harker, Mina Harker, and the various other characters. How tantalizing would this have been? Vampires! Young Stoker begins reading the scrap collection of papers and realizes that when arranged in the proper order, they tell a story, but this is not a novel or a regular work of fiction, this is a handful of letters and journals. This is *real*, or at least *more real* than the standard book. Monsters like vampires cannot exist in the present, science has destroyed that myth, but they could exist in the past, before science and technology began to erase the wonderful and terrifying mysteries of life. Treating *Dracula* as a discovered text creates an anchor that holds the novel firmly to the past, and the past is one of the most central factors in Gothic literature. Horace Walpole did this with *The Castle*

of Otranto, Mary Shelley did it with *Frankenstein*. When a story is framed as a discovered text it becomes more credible, no matter how fantastic.

The Past-Future Bridge

Dracula is deeply rooted in the past, but like *Frankenstein*, there exists within the novel an attempt to bring the past to the present, to unite the old beliefs and superstitions with the modern sciences. Seward and Van Helsing represent this unification of old and new, past and present. When Lucy Westenra takes ill due to Dracula's attacks, Seward with all his knowledge of the current medical sciences is baffled and must send for further help from his old mentor, Van Helsing. In a letter to Arthur Holmwood, Seward describes Van Helsing, "He is a philosopher and a metaphysician, and one of the most advanced scientists of his day; and he has, I believe, an absolutely open mind" (Stoker 123). Having an open mind is probably the most vital trait of Van Helsing. Seward is blinded by his reliance to modern medicine, he is content with treating Lucy solely with blood transfusions, but Van Helsing, who is versed in the modern sciences, also has knowledge and faith in the ancient traditions. He becomes a bridge between traditional belief and modernity.

Victor Frankenstein is as a similar bridge in his own novel. In *Frankenstein* Victor mixes the teachings of the alchemist with those of the new sciences, his results are a tragic failure whereas Van Helsing eventually succeeds in his endeavors. Both of these men of science sought to combine old-world belief with new-world technology, but Victor failed because his recipe included

an extra variable—greedy ambition. He sought to revolutionize scientific understanding for his own fame and glory, Van Helsing is a self-proclaimed warrior of God. He uses his combined knowledge of the past and future to thwart evil. He is also more disciplined than Victor because he respects the limitations of mankind, and his motivation is truly righteous and altruistic. He acts in God's service; Victor acts like God.

When Seward's blood transfusions fail, Van Helsing concocts a new plan of attack involving garlic flowers. Seward observes in his diary:

> We went into the room taking the flowers with us. The Professor's actions were certainly odd, and not to be found in any pharmacopoeia that I ever heard of. First he fastened up the windows and latched them securely; next, taking a handful of the flowers, he rubbed them all over the sashes, as though to ensure that every whiff of air that might get in would be laden with the garlic smell. Then with the wisp he rubbed all over the jamb of the door, above, below, and at each side, and round the fireplace in the same way. It all seemed grotesque to me. (Stoker 144)

At first Seward is a non-believer, but his respect for Van Helsing prevents him from being overly critical. Eventually Seward makes the transition and accepts that there are things in the universe beyond what can be explained in scientific text books. Stoker himself held a keen interest in science and was surrounded by the discourse his entire life. Three of his four brothers held careers in medicine and were contributors to the science and medicine within the novel, however, as

noted by Senf, "Unlike his brothers, Stoker was apparently more interested in theoretical science" (75). His interest in theory may suggest a desire to break the boundaries of grounded science, similar to Van Helsing reaching beyond the limits of modern medicine.

The Setting

An ominous setting is central to Gothic fiction. The title *Dracula* carries several connotations concerning setting: a rocky and wild Transylvania, a foggy London, and of course, Castle Dracula, with spiraling towers, moldering bricks, creaky doors, and dark passages. Stoker, like Shelley, relies on using landscapes to emphasize the dark and foreboding atmosphere. On Jonathan Harker's journey to Castle Dracula, Stoker is constantly building suspense with Harker's descriptions of the countryside. Just before embarking on the final leg of his travels Harker writes, "The grey of the morning has passed, and the sun is high over the distant horizon, which seems jagged, whether with trees or hills, I know not" (Stoker 5). Harker is headed towards this "jagged" horizon which resembles sharp, canine-like teeth, as if he is headed directly into the mouth of the beast. Stoker then does something interesting with Harker's narration, he focuses on the beauty of the country that passes him by, the "mass of fruit blossoms," the "green swelling hills," and "the "mighty slopes of forest" (Stoker 7). This transition of focus onto the visual beauty provides a higher shock when the reader realizes that Harker truly is headed into the mouth of the beast. Stoker does not waste any time before shifting back to more evil and menacing descriptions of the

landscape. As Harker's carriage train overpasses the Carpathian Mountains, darkness falls and Harker records:

> There were dark, rolling clouds overhead, and in the air the heavy, oppressive sense of thunder. It seemed as though the mountain range had separated two atmospheres, and that now we had got into the thunderous one. (Stoker 10)

Finally, Harker reaches his destination and the reader is introduced to the illustrious Castle Dracula that will become legendary in literature and cinema:

> Suddenly I became conscious of the fact that the driver was in the act of pulling up the horses in the courtyard of a vast ruined castle, from whose tall black windows came no ray of light, and whose broken battlements showed a jagged line against the moonlit sky. (Stoker 15)

Once again Stoker uses "jagged" to describe the concurrence between horizon and sky. Harker has finally arrived at the mouth of the beast.

Prophetic Warnings

In *The Castle of Otranto* there was a direct prophetic warning fueling the progress of the story, and in *Frankenstein* the subtitle link between Prometheus and Victor suggests that Victor was prophesized to be the destroyer of his family and himself. *Dracula*, however, contains no such direct prophetic elements. Instead, there are allusions and warnings, especially in the early journal records of Jonathan Harker as he makes his voyage toward Castle Dracula. The night before

Harker is to leave London for Transylvania he records in his journal, "I did not

sleep well, though my bed was comfortable enough, for I had all sorts of queer

dreams" (Stoker 2). These "queer dreams" are not elaborated on, nothing specific

about them is mentioned by Harker, but in many cultures dreams are considered

prophetic visions; they can foretell the details of future events. The assumption is

that Harker's dreams, terrible enough to disturb his sleep, serve to inform the

reader that something horrible is on the horizon.

While waiting for another coach to continue his trip Harker meets a

hysterical old woman who literally begs him not to go onward with his voyage.

She explains, "'It is the eve of St George's day. Do you know that to-night, when

the clock strikes midnight, all the evil things in the world will have full sway?'"

(Stoker 5). St. George was a celebrated Christian knight who slew dragons, a

symbol for evil and wickedness in Christendom. He was murdered by Pagans for

his beliefs and upon his death there was no one left to slay the dragons, or rid the

land of evil. The allusion here is that in Transylvania evil, impiety, and malice

reign. The mad woman gives a crucifix to Harker—fortunate for him, for it saves

his life.

It would seem that all the people Harker encounters on route to

Transylvania are privy to information he is unaware of. While sitting in his

coach Harker gets the impression that the other passengers are talking about him.

He pulls out his language dictionary and begins to decipher what they are saying:

> I must say they were not cheering to me, for amongst them were
>
> 'ordog'—Satan, 'pokol'—hell, 'stregoica'—witch, 'vorlok' and

vlkoslak'—both of which mean the same thing, one being Slovak

and the other Servian for something that is either were-wolf or

vampire. (Stoker 6)

These conversations do not in the slightest put Harker on edge; he even records a

memo for himself, "I must ask the Count about these superstitions" (Stoker 6). At

this point in the novel when Harker hears words like werewolf and vampire, he

dismisses them as fanciful "superstitions," but to the reader they are the elements

of foreshadowing.

The greatest amount of foreshadowing comes as darkness begins to fall on

the horse-drawn coaches. Harker explains in his journal:

When it grew dark there seemed to be some excitement

amongst the passengers, and they kept speaking to him [the driver],

one after the other, as though urging him to further speed. He

lashed the horses unmercifully with his long whip, and with wild

cries of encouragement urged them on to further exertions. (Stoker

9)

The hysterical woman at the inn had told Harker that at midnight all things evil in

the world will have "full sway." The other passengers also seem to hold this

belief, and as the reader learns later in the novel they are correct, Dracula's evil

powers are at their full potential at night.

These moments of foreshadowing serve as the prophetic elements within

the novel. Harker's dream, the hysterical woman's rants, and the conversations of

the other passengers are all disguised prophecy because they warn Harker and the

reader that something terrible is going to happen; there is an eminent evil waiting for the young lawyer, and if he does not heed the warning signs, disaster will result.

Sexual Aggression

Sexuality has always been a prominent feature of Gothic literature beginning with Manfred's obsession to wed and have sex with Isabella in Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*. *Frankenstein* also contains sexual components such as the relationship of Victor and Elizabeth, and the Creature's longing for a female mate. However, it was *Dracula* that made the Gothic truly sexy.

By today's understanding vampires are usually considered sensual, seductive creatures. Movies, and television shows such as *Twilight, True Blood,* and *The Vampire Diaries* have all cast hip, young, attractive men and women to portray the undead blood drinkers and emphasize the physicality of their roles. The early twenty-first century has witnessed an onslaught of sexy vampires, but before this, in the 1970s, author Anne Rice created a new standard of undead sex appeal with the character Lestat in her series *The Vampire Chronicles*. In two film versions Lestat is played by actors Tom Cruise and Stuart Townsend. The sexual appeal of the vampire owes a debt of gratitude to Stoker's novel.

When the reader first encounters Dracula he is described in Harker's journal as "a tall old man, clean-shaven save for a long white moustache, and clad in black from head to foot, without a single speck of colour about him anywhere" (Stoker 17). The perfect paleness and lack of color of vampires was a facet

invented by Stoker and used by future vampire writers such as Anne Rice,

Stephen King, and Stephanie Meyer. These contemporary authors also copy

another vampire feature from Stoker—Dracula's unnatural levels of strength and

the feel of his flesh. Harker writes in his journal:

> [Dracula] moved impulsively forward, and holding out his hand
>
> grasped mine with a strength which made me wince, an effect
>
> which was not lessened by the fact that is seemed as cold as ice—
>
> more like the hand of a dead than a living man. (Stoker 17)

Dracula's sexiness derives not only from his perfect complexion and masculine

strength, but from his behavior and seductive nature. Recorded in the journal of

Dr. Seward is the encounter with Dracula as the vampire brutally victimizes Mina

Harker. Within a room that the Harkers have taken at Seward's asylum, Dracula

assaults Jonathan Harker, rendering him unconscious, then inflicts a rape-like

assault on Mina. Seward reports:

> With his [Dracula's] left hand he held both Mrs Harker's hands,
>
> keeping them away with her arms at full tension; his right hand
>
> gripped her by the back of the neck, forcing her face down on his
>
> bosom. Her white nightdress was smeared with blood, and a thin
>
> stream trickled down the man's bare breast, which was shown by
>
> his torn-open dress... As we burst into the room, the Count turned
>
> his face, and the hellish look that I had heard described seemed to
>
> leap into it. His eyes flamed red with devilish passion... and the

> white sharp teeth, behind the full lips of the blood-dripping mouth,
>
> champed together like those of a wild beast. (Stoker 311)

This scene is ringing with sexual fervor. Dracula's shirt has been ripped open and he is physically forcing her to drink the blood from a self-inflicted wound on his chest, and Seward describes Dracula as a "wild beast" and having eyes filled with "devilish passion." As Seward and the other would-be-vampire slayers disrupt Dracula's attack, Mina lets out a scream which Seward describes as, "so wild, so ear-piercing, so despairing" (Stoker 311). Mina's scream is the dramatic climax of the spectacular episode and has parallels to a woman's orgasm.

One of the most sexually aggressive scenes comes earlier in the novel when Jonathan Harker is exploring Castle Dracula. He decides he might get a better sleep in another room, one that has more openness and moonlight. When he awakes there are three gorgeous women standing over him. Despite their beauty he feels threatened, almost paralyzed with fear, and at the same time his body tingles with excitement. Harker records in his journal:

> The fair girl went on her knees and bent over me, fairly gloating.
> There was a deliberate voluptuousness which was both thrilling
> and repulsive, and as she arched her neck she actually licked her
> lips like an animal, till I could see in the moonlight the moisture
> shining on the scarlet lips and on the red tongue as it lapped the
> white sharp teeth... Then she paused, and I could hear the churning
> sound of her tongue as it licked her teeth and lips, and could feel
> the hot breath on my neck... I could feel the soft, shivering touch

of the lips on the supersensitive skin of my throat... I closed my

eyes in a languorous ecstasy and waited—waited with beating

heart. (Stoker 42)

The beautiful vampire is about to feed on the blood of Harker. He describes the

vampire's approach as "thrilling," and he is filled with "ecstasy" as he awaits the

unknown climax of the event with a "beating heart." Stoker has taken this

grotesque murderous act and charged it with aggressive sexual zeal.

The entire ingestion of blood ritual contains strong sexual undercurrents.

Mina Harker is a symbol of purity, her virgin status made her a representation of

the standard Victorian woman. She is juxtaposed by the three female vampires in

Castle Dracula whose sexual voluptuousness is evident in their flamboyant

behavior and who embody what was regarded as the New Woman in Victorian

England, a woman with an emancipated sexual identity. Taking Lucy's and

Mina's blood was an act of sexual aggression, as if Dracula was destroying their

purity. Since the first time the reading public was introduced to Count Dracula,

the vampire in fiction has become a sexual icon. In "Fictional Vampires in the

Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," by William Hughes, the author examines

the sexual nature of vampires, "The vampire represents, in this sense, the

liberation of those sexual activities or desires that have been allegedly proscribed

or censored in society or repressed within the self" (145). When Stoker made

Dracula a creature with a sexual appetite he was opening a window for future

writers and readers to live out their sexual fantasies that had been repressed by the

conservative cultural conditions of the time period. In making vampires sexy,

Stoker also raised the expectations for a higher level of extroverted sexuality in the entire Gothic genre.

The Dracula Phenomenon

The villainous Count Dracula stands among a pantheon of famous literary and movie monsters. Like the Creature in *Frankenstein*, thanks to film, he has a likeness that has become an industry of its own, and although the Bela Lugosi image remains the most popular and identifiable portrait, Dracula has undergone distinct changes over time. These changes depend upon a variety of factors, mainly cultural trends, but also the personal vision of whatever creative mind or minds are helming the next installment of a *Dracula* adaptation. These variations on the personage of Dracula are further proof that Bram Stoker created one of the most legendary and venerated figures in all of literature, but also that the Gothic, be it literature or film, is a mode of storytelling that can cross culture and time, and can evolve and adapt itself as necessary to survive and thrive in a world of changing audiences. The Gothic touches a nerve in the human body that stimulates the senses; it is mankind's secret attraction to the dark side of the soul. Count Dracula is the literary embodiment of that dark side. He is a suave, sexy, alluring man who exists within a world of law and rationality, but when darkness falls he becomes the demon king of the night and lives unrestricted to any human condition. No other character in all of literature and film embodies the Gothic like Dracula. He is an ancient creature, he is a supernatural evil, and he is the secret desires of the human subconscious.

IV

<u>Edgar Allan Poe and the American Gothic</u>

In "American Gothic," author Allan Lloyd-Smith comments, "American fiction began in the Gothic mode, because the first substantial American efforts in fiction coincided with the great period of British and European gothic" (267). When the first notable authors in the United States were penning their respected fictional works Great Britain and the rest of Europe were in the midst of their own Gothic period. The American writers were popularizing their work off the Gothic trend that already existed overseas. The most talented American writers created a balanced mixture of original Gothic and the new American Gothic. These American Gothic tales contained elements of the classic, Victorian ghost story, but were intermixed with details exclusive to the United States. By exploring the historical development of the Gothic in the United States and the original American voices of the genre, and examining the works of one of the most prolific American Gothic writers, Edgar Allan Poe, the progression of American Gothic from its European heritage to New World inspirations can be established.

Historical Development

The Gothic in the United States would follow a different evolutionary path than its counterpart across the Atlantic. In Europe the Gothic was a response to the new sciences and philosophies developed during the industrial period. It was dependent upon the historical landscapes of the continent—wars, legends, myths, and traditions. In the United States the Gothic was mostly a reaction to social

institutions and the expansion into the vast American wilderness. In "Nineteenth-Century American Gothic," Lloyd-Smith identifies four attributes in which the nation would construct its own version of the genre:

> [F]our indigenous features were to prove decisive in producing a
>
> powerful and long-lasting American variant of the Gothic: the
>
> frontier, the Puritan legacy, race, and political utopianism. (109)

These four "indigenous features" the United States possessed were distinctive in helping to develop the American Gothic tradition which resembled European Gothic, but contained its own exclusive elements.

The United States may have lacked the dark and boding castles of Europe, but it did have the frontier, a wilderness unrivaled to any landscape in the world. It was a frontier full of mystery and danger, with the constant threat of Indian attack. This unique setting would become inspiration for American Gothic in the same way the castles and historical landscapes of Europe did for Victorian Gothic.

The Puritans were one of the original European settlers that forged a new life in North America, and they left behind a legacy that would amalgamate with many facets of American life including government and literature. They were devoted to education as a means to understand God, and many early works of American literature were reminiscent of the Puritan value system. There was a strict religious code in Puritan society, which included a stern belief in the invisible world. God was real, but so were the Devil and all his unholy minions.

The hysterical witch hunts that occurred in the late seventeenth century would leave a lasting impression on the American literary tradition.

In no other country in the world has race played such a vital role as it has in the United States. The treatment of minority peoples such as blacks and Indians are some of the most horrific and appalling stories in history. Europe may have had the dark ages, but the United States had a period of human suffering that lasted more than a century.

The United States was an experimental government system. Thomas Jefferson and the other framers of the Constitution may have found inspiration in the Greek and Roman republics, but at no point in history had there been a political system quite like that of the United States of America. Its principal design was based on natural rights—the God given liberties of all human beings to be free and pursue individual happiness. The young nation was hailed as a utopian society, but utopia was just an ideal. Like every other society through history, there was and is a ruling class, and beneath this ruling class are layers of oppressed people. There is a secret darkness in every self-proclaimed utopia, and the United States was no exception.

These four features, the frontier, puritan legacy, race, and political utopianism, proved to be the inspiration needed for the United States to create its own Gothic tradition. Whereas Europe had the long established history, the United States had the necessary factors to substitute where history lacked. There were no haunted castles, but there were Puritan courtrooms where people were executed for witchcraft, there were no long-established, monarchal bloodlines, but

there was an aristocracy that controlled the political landscape, there was no history of wars and heroic crusades, but there was a seemingly endless wilderness full of mystery and terror that must always be defended against.

Another feature that contributed to the rise of the Gothic in the United States was one of the fundamental principles of the nation—enlightened thought. The United States was a country founded on ideals that honored and celebrated education, it was regarded as a nation with people who were enlightened and intelligent enough to see past old world beliefs such as the Divine Right of Kings and other nonsensical religious and political customs. As in Europe, there was a void felt as industrialization swept through the nation and modern technologies and reason replaced former traditions and beliefs. Lloyd-Smith suggests:

> The rationalist perspective of the dominant American culture deriving from Locke and the Scottish common sense philosophers… saw tales of specters and superstition as an affront to reason and decency, which no doubt only compounded their attraction for the young writers who were struggling to invent an American literature comparable to that of Europe. ("Nineteenth-Century American Gothic" 109)

The early American writers were non-conformists. They wrote against the grain of the establishment, creating texts that showcased archaic beliefs and supernatural elements, which stood in stark contrast to the sense of reason and rationality that the United States was striving to represent.

Original Voices

No examination of the American Gothic is complete without mention of

Charles Brockden Brown, who some critics view as the founder of the Gothic in

the United States. Brown was writing in the late 1790s when the country was still

in its infancy. Like Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, the works of Brown set a

design for future American Gothic tales. T. J. Lustig observes:

> The United States was uniquely founded on Enlightenment
>
> principles of reason and progress. It is, perhaps, the thoroughgoing
>
> demonstration of the fragility of optimistic rationalism that makes
>
> Brown's American tales distinctively Gothic. (13)

Brown's major works, *Wieland, Ormond, Edgar Huntley,* and *Arthur Mervyn* deal

in the imperfection and selfishness of humanity. There are many parallels

between the conflicts in his stories and the new American government.

Nathaniel Hawthorne was another major contributor to American Gothic.

A decedent of John Hathorne, one of the presiding judges at the infamous Salem

Witch trials of the 1690s in which nineteen innocent women were sentenced to

death, Hawthorne added the "w" to his name in order to implore proper

pronunciation, and perhaps to provide a slight separation from his family's dark,

Puritan history. Hawthorne used the Puritan legacy in several of his stories, most

notably *The Scarlet Letter*, one of the most widely read texts in high schools

across the nation. Puritan history and the firm belief in the never ending struggle

between heaven and hell provided Hawthorne with the material to construct

fictional narratives that combined supernatural elements with the human

experience. Hawthorne wrote about characters conflicted by their internal desires which contradicted Puritan values. He was inspired, and perhaps haunted, by the Puritan legacy and its secret darkness.

Brown was the originator of American Gothic with stories that depicted irrational behaviors in what was supposed to be a rational world, Hawthorne tapped into the Puritan legacy and its lasting impact on culture, but another writer stands out as the most influential American Gothic writer—Edgar Allan Poe.

Edgar Allan Poe

Like Bram Stoker did for Victorian Gothic, Edgar Allan Poe took American Gothic to a new level of literary experience. Poe made American Gothic truly frightening by combining the supernatural with realistic human behavior and psychology. In Poe's collection of works are stories of the fantastic, but included within these are dynamic characters with realistic motivations. Although surrounded by specters and monsters, Poe's characters are fueled by realistic desires familiar to the reading public. In other Poe tales there is a complete absence of the supernatural, but there are monsters, human-monsters. In several of these tales the narrator is this human-monster and the reader becomes privy to the inner-monologue of a psychopathic killer. Poe used the human mind as a playground for his writing.

Aside from the incorporation of intense psychological factors into the Gothic, Poe also extended the genre into new literary realms. He is sometimes credited with being the originator of the short story, but it is the elements within

his short fiction that contributed most to the transformation and growth of American Gothic and the modernization of literature. According to Benjamin F. Fisher, Poe, "[T]ransformed shop-worn Gothic plots, settings and characters into the stuff of modern literature, most notably as it portrays the mind under agonizing pressures" (71). Poe's Gothic makeover gave the world the modern detective story and the new genre of science-fiction. Celestine Pierre Cambiaire states, "In the modern detective story the most important character is the 'intellectual sleuth'... Detective fiction is indebted to Poe for the first introduction of such a character" (45), and Fisher further explains, "[T]he detective story as we now know it, as well as science fiction, are actually results of Poe's experimental Gothicism" (71). These two literary spheres are the direct result of Poe's alterations of American Gothic.

Born in 1809 Poe grew up in a time period when the United States was struggling to adopt its own literary tradition. There remained a heavy influence of British literature in North America and many American publishers favored printing European writers as opposed to taking a chance on unproven Americans. Poe's first love was poetry, but the publishing demands during his core writing years were for fiction. Poe turned his talents toward short fiction in hopes that he could support himself solely through writing; this led to a life of meager wages and possibly his consequent depression.

During Poe's lifetime he turned out a massive collection of Gothic tales, and subsequently he was accused by his critics of being excessively German, meaning he was overly Gothic. Poe countered this charge in the preface of his

first collection of short stories, *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*. He wrote: (transcribed in Fisher's essay):

> If in many of my productions terror has been the thesis, I maintain
> that terror is not of Germany, but of the soul,—that I have deduced
> this terror only from its legitimate sources, and urged it only to its
> legitimate results. (67)

Poe directly linked terror to the Gothic, but argued that Gothic was not a result of a geographic location, but rather was implicit in the human experience. Terror, Poe believed, was inferred within the soul. To inspire readers to terror and fear was not due to the labeling of literary genres, but simply part of his natural story telling abilities.

Poe's fiction demonstrates his unique brand of American Gothic, and the response to the four indigenous features, the frontier, Puritan legacy, race, and political utopianism. It blends together elements of British Gothic with exclusive American details. His work reflects melting of British Gothic with American Gothic.

In "The Masque of the Red Death" a fatal plague that reveals itself in the bleeding pores on the face of its victims has decimated the population of the country. Prince Prospero and a thousand of his friends have found sanctuary within the walls of his immense palace, which has cut off all contact with the outside world, thus becoming a safe, disease-free zone. Prospero and his friends are free from the pestilence that rages beyond the walls of the palace. They turn their backs on the carnage outside while they celebrate their health with a lavish

party. In this story Poe uses what Lloyd-Smith calls "political utopianism" to construct a budding sense of terror. Prospero has built himself a sanctuary, in essence, a utopia of perfect health, free from the Red Death. In his essay, "Symbolism in Poe's Tales," Georges Zayed explains, "The Masque of the Red Death is a parable for the inevitability and universality of death" (88). As Prospero, and the reader, learns it is impossible to cheat death, and there is no such thing as utopia, it is an unattainable idealism. There are lessons to be found in all literature, but Poe used a Gothic setting and the dark side of the human soul to generate grotesque and psychologically disturbing stories with allegorical contexts.

The setting of "The Masque of the Red Death" is strictly Gothic. Within a landscape ravished by death is Prospero's palace, which is described to the reader with vivid details about its many rooms, apartments, halls, and corridors:

> The apartments were so irregularly disposed that the vision
>
> embraced but little more than one at a time. There was a sharp
>
> turn at every twenty or thirty yards, and at each turn a novel effect.
>
> To the right and left, in the middle of each wall, a tall and narrow
>
> Gothic window looked out upon a closed corridor which pursued
>
> the windings of the suite. These windows were of stained glass
>
> whose color varied in accordance with the prevailing hue of the
>
> decorations of the chamber into which it opened. (Poe, "Masque"
>
> 77)

In this excerpt Poe uses the word Gothic to describe the architecture of the palace. He also refers to stained glass windows. This imagery, along with the bizarrely twisted layout of the halls, recreates the castle backdrop that was such a dominating feature of British Gothic.

"The Masque of the Red Death" also contains the supernatural. The Red Death, the disease that has killed nearly half the population of the country, becomes a personified monster, a specter, terrifying and grotesque like the Creature in *Frankenstein*. The narrator uses bold and expressive language to describe it:

> The figure was tall and gaunt, and shrouded from head to foot in the habiliments of the grave. The mask which concealed the visage was made so nearly to resemble the countenance of a stiffened corpse that the closest scrutiny must have had difficulty in detecting the cheat… His vesture was dabbled in *blood*—and his broad brow, with all the features of the face, was be-sprinkled with the scarlet horror. (Poe, "Masque" 81 – 82)

Similar to the living statue in *The Castle of Otranto*, and the Creature in *Frankenstein*, "The Masque of the Red Death" also contains a huge, daunting monster or specter. The Red Death is tall and monstrous, and although it is never directly stated, he must have some sort of vast physical strength in order to kill every last one of the people within the Palace.

Ultimately "The Masque of the Red Death" is a parable for human psychology and behavior. One of the inferred themes is greed. Prospero

permanently seals the gates of his palace and uses his wealth to throw a lavish party instead of helping his fellow man, but despite all his money and preparations Prospero could not avoid death.

Another Poe short story, though lacking in supernatural elements, "The Cask of Amontillado" contains a gripping narrative that puts the reader inside the head of a sociopathic killer. In no other story by Poe is a reader allowed such unrestricted access to the mindscape of a lunatic. There may not be any specters or phantoms, but there certainly is a monster, a human-monster, a man motivated by his greed and lust for vengeance.

In "The Cask of Amontillado," wine connoisseur Montresor has been gravely offended by fellow wine expert, Fortunato. The specific offence is never detailed; it is only alluded to as an "insult" that complied on a "thousand injuries." The reader is forever left wondering what the insult might have been; what could Fortunato have done that would drive Montresor to murder? Montresor hates Fortunato for an unspecified reason; perhaps there are valid grounds for such aggression, but not mentioning it specifically leaves the reader believing it is more than likely something trivial. Whatever the reason, Montresor vows revenge and lures Fortunato into the wine cellar vaults of his palace home in order to taste the very rare Amontillado. It is a trap, and Montresor plans to entomb Fortunato within a recess of the cellar walls forever.

Like "The Masque of the Red Death," the setting is strictly Gothic. The exact location is even specified, Italy. The story takes place in the past, exactly when is uncertain, but it was a time of proud royal families, a time before

electricity, when people used torches or a flambeaux to see in the dark, and a time when fine wine and liquors were stored in underground catacombs. While finding their way toward the amontillado Montresor and Fortunato discuss his family history:

> "These vaults," he said, "are extensive."
>
> "The Montresors," I replied, "were a great and numerous family."
>
> "I forget your arms."
>
> "A huge human foot d'or, in a field azure; the foot crushes a serpent rampant whose fangs are imbedded in the heel."
>
> "And the motto?"
>
> "*Nemo me impune lacessit.*" [Latin, "No one attacks me with impunity."] (Poe, "Cask" 88)

The discussion of Montresor's family past firmly grounds the story within history, a central factor in Gothic literature, and the symbolism of the coat of arms and the family motto add to the dark and brooding atmosphere.

The backdrop is the winding cellar corridors of Montressor's palace or castle, another key feature of Gothic literature. Poe spends a great deal of time describing the wine vaults, emphasizing the size, structure, and imminent danger. While descending farther into the cellar Montresor narrates:

> We had passed through walls of piled bones, with casks and puncheons intermingling, into the inmost recesses of the

> catacombs. I paused again, and this time I made bold to seize
>
> Fortunato by an arm above the elbow.
>
> "The nitre!" I said; "see, it increases. It hangs like moss
>
> upon the vaults. We are below the river's bed. The drops of
>
> moisture trickle among the bones." (Poe, "Cask" 88)

Poe's focus on "catacombs" and "bones" reminds the reader he or she is literally within a cemetery, or crypt, that has been transformed into a wine cellar. This atmosphere of death adds to the ominous setting and creates the potential for disaster. Nitre is a crystallized mineral that forms in large encrustations commonly on cavern walls or ceilings. It can be dangerous for someone to breathe in, especially if there is no exposure to fresh ventilation. Nitre is growing down the walls of Montresor's wine cellar, it surrounds Fortunato, threatening his health, as if it might aid in his demise. The dramatic irony is that Fortunato is surrounded by death, he is proceeding deeper and deeper into an underground labyrinth, and he has no idea that soon he will become a permanent fixture of the tomb.

The psychology of "The Cask of Amontillado" represents Poe's modernization of the Gothic. Montresor, the story's narrator, is the killer, and the reader spends a good deal of time exposed to his inner thoughts. He operates as a normal, sane citizen within society, no one, including Fortunato, is aware that behind his smile is the mind of a madman. Montressor informs the reader:

> It must be understood, that neither by word nor deed had I given
>
> Fortunato cause to doubt my good-will. I continued, as was my

wont, to smile in his face, and he did not perceive that my smile

now was at the thought of his immolation. (Poe, "Cask" 84)

He is a calculated killer, who takes painstaking and carefully premeditated

measures to lure Fortunato to his death. He uses reverse psychology to further

tempt Fortunato into the wine cellar, and then supplies him with alcohol until he

is too intoxicated to recognize the imminent danger he is in.

In a story telling genre that sketches such a stark division between good

and evil, Montresor is the clear and present evil; however, his character is not

typical because there is no heroic figure to combat him, there is only his victim.

Killer and victim, the story is hero-less; it is without goodness and righteousness.

"The Cask of Amontillado" leaves the reader with an air of hopelessness; evil

dominates.

"The Fall of the House of Usher" is Poe's most Gothic work. It is a story

that creates a perfect union of traditional, British Gothic and new American

Gothic. Benjamin J. Fisher argues, "'The Fall of the House of Usher' stands out

as Poe's most significant creation in Gothicism" (72). The story contains the

quintessential elements of classic Gothic tales—a decrepit house, perhaps

haunted, maybe not with ghosts, but with tortured memories; an ominous,

threatening landscape; and the possibility of the supernatural. With "The Fall of

the House of Usher," Poe might have been tapping into the Puritan legacy

explained by Lloyd-Smith. With his twin sister about to die, Roderick is the last

of the Usher bloodline, which is described as being an ancient clan. Also,

Roderick slowly loses control of himself as he grows more hysterical, losing the

ability to distinguish fantasy from reality, similar to Puritan society losing control during the witch trials where extreme spiritual belief blinded people from reality and resulted with the executions of several innocent women.

The unnamed narrator in the story does not waste any time in describing the Gothic setting and establishing a dreary mood that prevails for the duration of the text. The story opens with:

> During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn
> of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens,
> I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary
> tract of country, and at length found myself, as the shakes of the
> evening drew on, with view of the melancholy House of Usher...
> [W]ith the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable
> gloom pervaded my spirit. (Poe, "Fall" 15)

The narrator continues and in future passages the House of Usher is described as having "bleak walls" and windows like vacant eyes. There are "decayed trees" that cause an "utter depression of the soul," and the entire home is referred to as a "mansion of gloom" (Poe, "Fall" 16 – 17). The House of Usher is the American version of Victorian Gothic's decrepit castle. It is exactly the type of place a reader expects to encounter a specter or other phantasms.

As the story progresses, Roderick worries about his twin sister Madeline's health; she is dying of a rare, unexplainable disease. The mystery of the unknown disease can be considered a supernatural element to the tale, but even more so is the reappearance of Madeline after her supposed death. Though she was buried

alive, not entirely uncommon in 1839, the year of the story's publication, her physical description rings with supernatural essentials. Taphephobia was a real fear in the ninteenth century, but what separated it from other phobias is that it was a universal fear among all the socio-economic classes. Poe used the universality of this fear to keep his readers engaged and full of terror.

As Usher becomes hysterical with the belief that his dead sister is just outside his chamber, the doors suddenly burst open and the narrator explains:

> [T]here *did* stand the lofty and enshrouded figure of the lady Madeline of usher. There was blood upon her white robes, and the evidence of some bitter struggle upon every portion of her emaciated frame. For a moment she remained trembling and reeling to and fro upon the threshold—then, with a low moaning cry, fell heavily inward upon the person of her brother, and in her violent and now final death-agonies, bore him to the floor a corpse, and a victim to the terrors had had anticipated. (Poe, "Fall" 37 – 38)

Madeline's appearance at the end of the novel was not literally supernatural; however, her image and actions are described as that of the Gothic specter—dark, bloody, ghoulish; she lets out a soft cry like the moan of a ghost, and then seizes her victim, causing his demise.

"The Fall of the House of Usher" creates a balanced mixture of original Victorian Gothic and the new American Gothic. There are all the elements of the Victorian ghost story, but intermixed are exclusive American details. The Usher

mansion represents the haunted castle, but its sits amongst a vast, desolate wilderness, symbolic of the great American frontier. The prophecy is morphed into Madeline's inevitable death and Roderick being the last carrier of the Usher bloodline. The specter is Madeline after she claws her way out of the tomb. Poe also blends in psychological elements with Roderick's inescapable and incurable depression after he thinks his sister has died and when he believes they buried her alive.

Poe's Legacy

The life of Edgar Allan Poe can be read like one of his short stories. He was a haunted man whose life choices and subsequent failures left him in a state of deep and permanent depression. This dejection found its way onto the page as Poe approached much of his fiction from a disturbed psychological viewpoint. With pen, paper, and his own despair, Poe explored the darkness that exists within the soul; he sought to discover and express what humanity was truly capable of. Certain stories of his have been entrenched into American fiction and lore. "The Tell Tale Heart" has become a term meaning a guilty conscious, and "The Raven" is a symbol of madness and remorse. But even more so than his works, Poe the man has become an iconic figure of the Gothic genre. Similar to Dracula or the Frankenstein monster, his image and his name are readily identifiable even to those unfamiliar with his fiction or poetry. Edgar Allan Poe's popularity and recognizable status make him like the specter of Gothic fiction; he is a haunting

image that towers over people. His writings not only helped create American

Gothic, they also forged the new literary tradition of the United States.

V

Stephen King and the Future of the Gothic

In the mid ninteenth century Edgar Allan Poe Americanized the Gothic.

He incorporated American features into the classic style of Victorian literature,

producing a hybrid creation—traditional Gothic elements with modernized

American features. Since Poe the Gothic in the United States has undergone even

more change. These alterations are due in part to the creative minds behind the

work, but also the fluctuation of varrying cultural conditions.

This chapter will mark the changes that took place in the Gothic from the

post-World War II period through the turn of the twenty-first century, with special

focus on the world's leading voice of horror/Gothic fiction, Stephen King. King's

fiction creates a perfect union of the Gothic past, present and future. Like Poe, he

incorporates many classic elements, but also brands his writing with unique,

modern details that reflect the cultural trends of the broader world, making his

writing a composite of classic Gothic, contemporary Gothic, science-fiction, and

Magical Realism.

Post-War and the Rise of Science-Fiction

Between 1939 and 1945 the world witnessed an amount of horror

incomparable to any other period in human history. World War II officially

began with the Nazi invasion of Poland in 1939 and ended with the Japanese

surrender in 1945. Between these two marks were untold amounts of misery and

destruction. When the war was over the world began a long process of

reconstruction. With the decimation of the European landscape and the overthrow of many governments, nothing would ever be the same. Politics, business, industry, and even art were changed forever. No facet of life was able to escape the war unaffected.

Literature was no exception. When the dust settled there emerged two superpowers, the United States of America and the Soviet Union. Allied during the war through a common enemy, these two nations now faced off in a forty year period of global dominion. Author Howard Zinn contends that the conflict between the US and the USSR began the second the United States dropped the Hiroshima bomb on August 6, 1945. He calls it the first strategically organized maneuver of the Cold War, arguing that the primary goal was not to swiftly end the war in the Pacific, but to intimidate the Soviet empire (Zinn 423). The use of atomic weapons created a perpetual state of fear for the entire world. Both the United States and the Soviet Union began massive nuclear proliferation programs. The Soviets would successfully test their first atomic bomb in 1949, and both nations would acquire the even more destructive hydrogen bomb by 1953; the threat of an atomic holocaust held the world in constant terror. This fear bled its way onto the pages of fiction literature. The continuous panic and anxiety over the prospect of a nuclear showdown changed the landscape of Gothic literature, and paved the way for future Gothic writers to explore real world scenarios within the fantastic worlds of the Gothic.

In "Contemporary Gothic," Ann B. Tracy notes, "Not until the 1960s did the twentieth century see a burgeoning of Gothic fiction comparable to the one

that began in the 1790s and swept through the first three decades of the nineteenth century" (109). What was this "burgeoning of Gothic fiction" and where did it come from? According to Tracy, the late eighteenth through the end of the nineteenth century saw the rise and apex of Gothic fiction, but from the early twentieth century until the 1960s there was a long stagnant period within the genre. However, from the 1960s to the present there has been a dramatic revival of Gothic fiction (109 – 10).

This revitalization is due to the Cold War climate of fear that began at the end of WWII. Gothic fiction before this time was mostly pure fantasy; it was a throwback to the past, a nod to ancient beliefs and old world traditions. Ghosts and other specters were the subjects of mythology. They were pure fantasy; but through the Cold War the monsters of Gothic fiction became *real*. They represented the fears, the anxieties, and the horrors that could happen in *real life*. During this time period science-fiction grew in popularity. Science-fiction, an enormous industry in the story-telling universe, has roots in Gothic fiction. It was born from the Gothic tradition with the works of Edgar Allan Poe in the mid nineteenth century; however, during the Cold War era a separation occurred between the two because science-fiction shifted focus from the past to the future. Where as pure Gothic found its inspiration from the archaic past, science-fiction depended on the future, and all the unknown possibilities of the future—*what could happen, what might happen, what will happen if...* Science-fiction focused on the potential fear born of an unstable future whereas Gothic brought its terror out of the past—legends, myths, and history. Science-fiction is essentially Gothic

redirected from the past to the future, but it will always be inherently linked to the original Gothic tradition.

Several works of literature and films produced in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s hold obvious parallels and allusions to the climate of fear that gripped the nation. Robert Heinlein published *The Puppet Masters* in 1951. In this science-fiction novel agents of the US government battle alien parasites that can control the minds of human beings. Your friend, your neighbor, your boss might be one of them, but you would never know until it was too late. The novel's premise was turned into a film in 1956, *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. The plots for both the novel and the film mimicked the red scare, or the fear of unknown communist secretly operating within the United States, sabotaging the American way of life, and brainwashing the population.

In 1954 Richard Matheson released *I am Legend*, which chronicled the story of the last survivor of a devastating plague that has wiped out mankind and turned people into vampires. Several film versions have been released including *The Last Man on Earth* in 1964, *The Omega Man* in 1972, and the blockbuster *I am Legend* in 2007. All adaptations deal with the fear of unrestricted technological development like the arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union. The original novel *I am Legend* and its cinematic copies showed the world what could happen if something like a nuclear war were to come to fruition. Despite the science-fiction label of *I am Legend*, Matheson categorizes his own work as Gothic, believing that the genre need not be limited by ancient castles and crypts (Oakes 63). *I am Legend* takes place in present-day Los

Angeles, under towering skyscrapers and above miles of subway tunnels; the setting is modern, there are no castles or haunted forests, but there are hungry monsters, a destroyed civilization, a penitent hero, and a great deal of terror. It is a novel that subsides in two worlds; it encapsulates the individuality of both the Gothic and science-fiction and demonstrates the connection that exists between the two genres.

With the rise of science-fiction in the mid to late twentieth century no longer were the monsters and specters of the Gothic held strictly to the antediluvian world, they now could be creatures from the future—robots, aliens, androids, or out-of-control technologies. The plots within Gothic and science-fiction stories of the 1950s and 1960s focused on real-world scenarios that could possibly lead to the destabilization of society. These more *realistic* Gothic tales would become the model for contemporary Gothic literature and yet another extension of the Gothic, Magical Realism.

Magical Realism and Contemporary Gothic

The term Magical Realism appears oxymoronic. How can the roots of each word, *magic* and *real*, be genially joined? Lucie Armitt defines the term as "a disruptive, foreign, fantastic narrative style that fractures the flow of an otherwise seamlessly realist text" (306). The literature of Magical Realism has realistic settings, often direct to page copies of real life, with recognizable places, people, histories, and culture, but there are also magical or fantastic elements— monsters, ghosts, and aliens. Although it seems like a bizarre combination or

even a contradiction, Magical Realism shows the reader what could happen if magical elements invaded reality, and because the literature of Magical Realism is set in the real world, it often carries a political or social agenda.

Magical Realism can be considered another word for contemporary Gothic literature; however, Magical Realism can drift into other literary realms. In other words: contemporary Gothic is Magical Realism, but Magical Realism is not necessarily Gothic. According to Armitt the difference lays in the context, and how the fantastic elements of the story are used: She explains:

> In magic realism ghosts are simply 'there', usually giving
>
> testimony to the voices of those whom society has silenced or
>
> rendered 'disappeared', but rarely the primary focus of the mystery
>
> of a text. In the Gothic the phantom *is* that central source,
>
> manifesting a secret that disturbs, even chills. (315)

Although the Gothic and Magical Realism share in their use of specters, they differ in the use of the specter. In the Gothic the specter maintains a primary role; it is a direct source of conflict, whereas in Magical Realism it serves a symbol or metaphor for a larger, more realistic focus.

Stephen King's *The Stand*, originally published in 1978, is the perfect example of a Gothic and a Magical Realism text. In this 1,000-plus page novel a man-made plague has wiped out the majority of the world's population. The immune survivors are pitted against each other in an epic good versus evil scenario with depictions of God and the Devil directing their respected sides. The novel portrays classic Cold War fears. It is also set in real life locations all across

the United States—Ogunquit, Maine; Las Vegas, Nevada; and Boulder, Colorado. The characters and their reactions to the magic or fantastic features is especially what consign the novel into the realm of Magical Realism. As of 2010 no man-made plague has decimated the population, and God and the Devil have not drafted citizen-soldiers in the End-of-Days war, but if this were to happen it is easy to imagine it unfolding precisely as Stephen King has depicted it. His style of prose perfectly blends the fantastic and the authentic together in a happy amalgam of Magical Realism.

In *The Stand,* shortly after the man-made plague, referred to as the superflu, has decimated most of the world's population, Frannie Goldsmith finds herself digging a grave for her father in her home's backyard. In this scene Stephen King has woven together a very realistic reaction to a very fantastic situation:

> The unreality was trying to creep back in again, and she found herself wondering just how much the human brain could be expected to stand before snapping like an overtaxed rubber band. My parents are dead, but I can take it. Some weird disease seems to have spread across the entire country, maybe the entire *world,* mowing down the righteous and the unrighteous alike—I can take it. I'm digging a hole in the garden my father was weeding only last week, and when it's deep enough I guess I'm going to put him in it—I *think* I can take it. (*The Stand* 241)

There are several magically real elements within this short excerpt. Frannie Goldsmith, whose inner-monologue serves as a shared consciousness with the reader, attempts to sort out the madness and give herself the strength necessary to survive, or to "take it." She is burying her dead father because that is the natural, or real, thing to do when someone dies, put them in the ground. The impromptu grave is in the family garden, a place her father was "weeding only last week." In this paragraph there is a powerful mixture of real and everyday actions and reactions intermixed with the fantastic existence of the superflu. Aside from this marriage between magic and real is Frannie's social observation about the disease. She mentions that it is "mowing down the righteous and the unrighteous alike." Good or evil, rich or poor, no one, except for a handful of immune people, can escape the plague. The very existence of the superflu is a critique of humanities inherent need to control and subsequently destroy its environment. It was developed as a biological weapon, and it was released as a result of one man's desperate attempt to save his family. A noble move, but the man's desperation blinded him to the greater consequences of his actions.

The Stand is not King's only work that can fit into the realms of the Gothic, science-fiction, and Magical Realism. The prolific American writer has a library of over three hundred novels, novellas, short stories, and original screenplays and teleplays. With a unique blend of classic Gothic, contemporary Gothic, science-fiction, and Magical Realism, Stephen King has taken the overall, encompassing genre of Gothic literature into entirely new directions never imagined by his predecessors.

Stephen King and the Gothic Future

The name Stephen King has become synonymous with modern horror, but horror fiction drastically differs from the Gothic. Unlike the Gothic, science-fiction, and Magical Realism, horror fiction's main goal is to stimulate terror and fear in its readers, there is no broader purpose. Stephen King has been inspiring terror and fear in his readers for over 30 years. Ever since the publication of his first novel, *Carrie*, in 1974, King has breathed life into a variety of monsters that have terrorized the imaginations of the reading public. He has worked within all the classic arenas—ghostly hauntings (*The Shining*), Zombies (*Cell*), vampires (*'Salem's Lot*), werewolves (*Cycle of the Werewolf*), evil doppelgangers (*The Dark Half*), and shape-shifting monsters (*It*), but he has also concocted purely original harbingers of terror. His imagination seems endless, yet the adored writer is first to admit that he is not a literary genius, despite his monetary success, King does not regard himself as a top-tier writer. In several interviews, and even in his own memoires, King identifies who he believes are the literary greats: Shakespeare, Faulkner, Yeats, Shaw, Weltys (King, *On Writing* 136). He has also paid homage, in his opinion, to the true masters of terror, Bram Stoker, Mary Shelly, Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Richard Matheson. King is quoted on the back cover of the 1999, Tom Doherty Associates Books publication of Matheson's *Hell House*, "Hell House is the scariest haunted house novel ever written. It looms over the rest the way the mountains loom over foothills." Pretty bold words from the author of *The Shining*, a novel that has also been dubbed the

scariest haunted house story ever. King is not just a pop-writer who feeds the public with mindless thrillers in order to earn a living; he is a student of the craft and understands the intricacies of true literature and its many genres. King graduate from the University of Main with a B.A. in English and then taught at the High School level for several years. Although he does not identify himself as a Gothic writer, the majority of his fiction falls into this category. His writing is full of specters, ominous landscapes, maiden pursuits, and depictions of destabilization. King's approach to fiction is a direct result of nearly a two and a half century literary evolution that began with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764.

Although Gothic fiction has changed, the lure of the genre remains the same. People crave terror; on some unconscious, primordial level, mankind yearns for the heart pounding, blood pumping adrenaline that is produced when they come face to face with a manifestation of absolute horror and malevolence. King has been providing this outlet for readers for over three decades, but any competent writer can create stories of angry, telekinetic teens, vampires, and haunted hotels; King has become such a staple of contemporary American literature because his stories are not simply horror fiction. He reaches far beyond the standard slasher tale, weaving together intricate stories of dynamic characters complete with tragic flaws, and settings ripe with social problems and political agendas. Then he tosses in a handful of vampires, or an evil shape-shifting monster. According to David A. Oakes:

> King's Gothic fiction captures the uncertainties and fears of the
> last decades of the twentieth century, a time when the world
> changes everyday due to new technological innovations; where the
> boarders between human and machine shrink more every year;
> where human civilization stands on the brink of falling into chaos
> and institutions people trust become sources of fright; where
> science appears to be taking an ever increasing role in controlling
> human lives. In this era of rapid change, King reflects the
> apprehensions of his readers. (92)

King's fiction not only follows a similar design laid out by Walpole; it also reveals the realistic fears and apprehensions of society.

King's *'Salem's Lot* is a modern day retelling of *Dracula*, and it keeps good pace with Bram Stoker's original tale. In the introduction to the novel King mentions his inspiration to write *'Salem's Lot* while rereading *Dracula*, one of his favorite novels:

> One night, the second time through the adventures of the
> sanguinary Count, I wondered out loud to my wife what might
> have happened if Drac had appeared not in the turn-of-the-century
> London but in the America of the 1970s. (xix)

King's wife then mentions to him that perhaps the good count would show up in Maine, in some small town. King adds:

> That was really all it took. My mind lit up with
> possibilities, some hilarious, some horrible. I saw how such a

> man—such a thing—could operate with lethal ease in a small
>
> town; the locals would be very similar to the peasants he had
>
> known and rules back home, and with the help of a couple of
>
> greedy Kiwanis types like real estate agent Larry Crockett, he
>
> would soon become what he had always been: the *boyar*, the
>
> master. (xix – xx)

King has taken the literary elements of *Dracula* and transported them forward in time to a small town in Maine called Jerusalem's Lot, known to the locals as 'Salem's Lot, or just The Lot. Jonathan Harker is transformed into Ben Mears; Min Murray is Susan Norton; Dr. Seward – Dr. Cody; Van Helsing – Matt Burke; and Count Dracula – the mysterious and dangerous Barlow.

Aside from *'Salem's Lot* being the modern-day *Dracula*, the novel can also stand alone as a respected fixture of contemporary American Gothic. There are supernatural elements—the vampires, but there is also the setting. The town of Jerusalem's Lot contains an old, rundown mansion where Barlow (the new Dracula) will make his home. Its descriptions are very similar to the classic castle of Victorian Gothic:

> The house itself looked toward town. It was huge and
>
> rambling and sagging, its windows haphazardly boarded shut,
>
> giving it that sinister look of all old houses that have been empty
>
> for a long time. The paint had been weathered away, giving the
>
> house a uniform gray look. Windstorms had ripped many of the
>
> shingles off, and a heavy snowfall had punched in the west corner

of the main roof, giving it a slumped, hunched took. (King,

'Salem's Lot 21 – 22).

The Marsten House, as it is referred to in the novel, is as decrepit, massive, and looming as any haunted castle that dots the landscape of Europe, but separating it from the classic castle setting are its contemporary details. It is identified as a rambling house with boarded up windows, weathered paint, and missing shingles. These are not the descriptions of a castle, but of an old house constructed during the mid twentieth century in the United States. The Marsten House is a dark and dreary location where one just expects to encounter a ghost or two.

The narrative style within *'Salem's Lot* resembles that of *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*. Though the vast majority of the novel is standard third-person narration, the epilogue contains a series of newspaper articles which step outside the customary mode of storytelling and provide the reader with a new perspective. After the novel's protagonist, Ben Mears, kills Barlow and escapes from town, he makes a habit of checking the newspapers in search of further insights about Jerusalem's Lot when he comes across this article:

> PORTLAND—Cumberland country game wardens have been instructed by the Maine State Wildlife Service to be on the lookout for a wild dog pack that may be running in the Jerusalem's Lot—Cumberland—Falmouth area. During the last month, several sheep have been found dead with their throats and bellies mangled. In some cases, sheep have been disemboweled. (King, *'Salem's Lot* 623)

The reader can easily connect the dots. Vampires are still roaming Jerusalem's Lot, hunting victims, drinking the blood of livestock. This narrative switch echoes the letters in *Frankenstein* and the variety of journals and news articles in *Dracula*. In classic Gothic tradition, it adds mystery, suspense, and realism to the story.

'Salem's Lot can be considered the ultimate throwback to the origins of the Gothic; however, in one major regard it is also a prime example of contemporary American Gothic. The novel is an examination of the destabilizing forces within society. It urges the reader to think about the nature of evil, the evil that potentially is within the hearts of everyone, and how this evil, whether it is in the form of greed, fear, or immorality, can poison and corrupt what was thought to be a well balanced and stable way of life. Even before the appearance of the head vampire, Barlow, and his wicked acolyte, Straker, there are men and women and children living in Jerusalem's Lot that embody the differing varieties of evil that make up humanity—the town gossip, the schoolyard bully, the adulteress spouse, the abusive parent, the alcoholic priest who lost his faith, the greedy landowner, and the prodigal son. These elements already existed before the vampires showed up; versions of this type of evil exist in every town across America. In the novel, through the inclusion of the specters (the vampires) they become more defined and recognizable. *'Salem's Lot* is about the unspoken, ignored darkness that is waiting within the shadows to secretly poison and destroy the established norms of life. Oakes states:

The works of Stephen King demonstrate the continuing
vitality of gothic fiction at the end of the twentieth century... He
exposes the dark sides of American culture to his readers, warning
of terrible consequences if changes do not come to pass. In a
world that seems to be growing ever more complex, the gothic
fiction of Stephen King continues to destabilize readers by asking
questions that reveal sinister elements in individuals, American
society, and the cosmos. (119)

Many critics and fans consider *The Shining* Stephen King's greatest
masterpiece. It certainly stands out as an adored novel, a New York Times Best
Seller and the premise for a blockbuster and cult sensation directed by Stanley
Kubrick and starring Jack Nicholson. King even identifies the work as his
personal "crossroads novel" where he challenged himself to "reach a little
higher," meaning to go beyond what himself and other writers have done before
(King, *The Shining* xv). *The Shining* is a classic haunted house story, except in
this version the house is a massive resort, the Overlook Hotel, nestled in the
Colorado wilderness. The Gothic elements include a plethora of evil spirits, the
mad pursuit as the character Jack Torrance stalks his wife and son through the
twisting hallways and corridors of the hotel, an ominous setting, especially as a
snowstorm traps the heroes within the haunted walls of the hotel, cutting them off
from the outside world, and prophetic visions. When the reader first encounters
the Overlook hotel the characters in the novel describe it as "gorgeous," and "the

single most beautiful location in America" (King, *The Shining* 92), but very

quickly its sinister nature is unveiled as Danny, the novel's psychic kid realizes:

> It was the place he had seen in the midst of the blizzard [in his
>
> nightmares], the dark and booming place where some hideously
>
> familiar figure sought him down long corridors carpeted with
>
> jungle. The place Tony had warned him against. It was here. It
>
> was here. Whatever Redrum was, it was here. (King *The Shining*
>
> 93)

Danny can sense the hidden evil within the Overlook. It is the place that contains

"Redrum," a warning that came to Danny in a dream. Redrum is murder spelled

backwards. The overlook is the place of murder.

Jack Torrance is the tragically flawed hero of the novel; he slowly loses

his mind due to the evil spirits and becomes a raving, murderous lunatic. In the

introduction to the Pocket Books, 2001 publication of *The Shining* King

addresses the progress of Jack from a normal, sane person, into the novel's crazed

villain:

> Instead of changing from a relatively nice guy into a two-
>
> dimensional villain driven by supernatural forces to kill his wife
>
> and son, jack Torance became a more realistic (and therefore more
>
> frightening) figure. A killer motivated to his crimes by
>
> supernatural forces was, it seemed to me, almost comforting... A
>
> killer that might be doing it because of childhood abuse *as well as*
>
> those ghostly forces... ah, that seemed genuinely disturbing. (xvi)

Jack epitomizes *real evil* in that his psychosis is not only driven by supernatural forces, but his own tortured past. According to King this is what separates *The Shining* from being a simple horror novel. It is not just a story about a haunted house and a man made insane by evil spirits, it is a tale of human madness, of the visible and invisible scars left behind after a tortured youth.

Stephen King is the most marketable writer of all time. His vast library is constantly in print. Dubbed "The King of Horror," Stephen King, like Edgar Allan Poe, Dracula, and the Frankenstein monster has become a recognizable image around the world. The man and his writing are its own industry, mass producing millions of Gothic pages that are gobbled up by a consumer driven populace constantly hungry for the next big scare. King's popularity and marketability may turn off many literary critics, as it is sometimes believed that once something becomes marketable it loses its artistic integrity, but it is due to his marketability that millions of readers have been exposed to honest Gothic literature. With Stephen King and other contemporary Gothic writers, the Gothic has become more and more real with each passing decade. The evil becomes less specter-like and more representative of realistic fears. The future of the Gothic lay in the hands of society because what society fears ends up becoming the vampires, ghosts, monsters, and other hungry creatures within Gothic literature.

VI

Gothic Film

About an hour and a half into the movie *Jaws* Chief Brody, played by Roy

Scheider, is laying a chum line out the back of the *Orca*, a deep sea fishing vessel

he has chartered in hopes of tracking down and killing the great white shark that

has been terrorizing the small coastal island of Amity. As he blindly scoops the

bloody slop over the stern, the star of the show makes his first appearance.

Gliding smoothly out of the choppy water, the massive head of the shark emerges,

rears its razor sharp teeth, glares at the camera with demon-like black eyes, and

swiftly disappears back into the depths. Brody, in a state of calm shock, slowly

backs into the pilot house of the boat, cigarette dangling from an agape mouth,

and mutters to no one, "We're gonna need a bigger boat." Brody did not believe

the *Orca* could land and contain the massive beast.

At the turn of the twentieth century there was another monster that could

not be contained. With the invention of motion picture technology in 1889, and

its improved design in 1895, Gothic fiction was no longer restricted to the black

and white page. Now, the terrifying images produced in a person's imagination

while reading Gothic literature could be unleashed on the public as a visual

nightmare. Motion picture technology gave the Gothic a whole new world to

terrorize.

Similar to Gothic literature, Gothic film would evolve and change with

time. Every couple of decades would produce a movie that embodied the

significant and dynamic changes within Gothic film. *The Wolfman* (1941),

Psycho (1960), *Jaws* (1975), and *The Sixth Sense* (1999) were all major box office

successes, promoted and publicized around the world, but they are also precious

movie gems because they reflect the evolution of Gothic film that occurred

between the 1930s and the turn of the twenty-first century.

Transferring the Gothic from Literature to Film

George Milford's *Dracula* and James Whale's *Frankenstein* are

masterpieces of the Gothic film genre. These two films, released in 1931, gave

the world the most adored, feared, and celebrated horror icons of all-time. Based

on Gothic novels, the cinematic versions of *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* represent

the official transformation of Gothic fiction. By the turn of the twentieth century

Gothic literature had already undergone radical changes from its European birth

to the American Gothic tradition, and with the development of motion picture

technology there was a brand new medium in which the Gothic could thrive;

however, the 1931 *Dracula* was not the first attempt to transfer Gothic literature

into Gothic film.

In 1922 German film director F. W. Murnau released *Nosferatu*, a blatant

rip-off of Bram Stoker's novel, *Dracula*. Murnau wanted to make a film version

of Stoker's novel, but was unable to obtain the artistic rights, so he disguised the

basic premise of the novel and altered character names. Stoker's estate would

successfully sue the production studio that released the film and many copies of

Nosferatu would be confiscated and destroyed. Regardless of copyright

infringement, and despite several claims from other French and German

expressionist directors, Murnau was the man responsible for unleashing Gothic

fiction onto film. Following Murnau's example Hollywood movie studios

released other Gothic films such as *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* in 1923 and

The Phantom of the Opera in 1925. Then, Nine years after *Nosferatu* the world

would meet the official and legal adaptation of Stoker's novel with George

Milford's *Dracula* in 1931. With the release of this film, popularized off the

success of the novel, the lure and macabre attraction to Gothic film began.

According to Ian Conrich, "[A] generic identity for the Gothic film was not to be

established until the early 1930s, with the production of the Hollywood monster

movies" (136). With *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*, followed by *The Mummy* in

1932, Universal Pictures unleashed Gothic film on the world.

Film offered something to the world that literature could not. It was easier

for the public to appreciate, thus becoming accessible to everyone. People

without formal educations or the ability to grasp the language used in literature

could be exposed to the world of Gothic fiction. Film also has tools at its disposal

that literature lacks—music, infinite perspective, and visual imagery. The

director has a three hundred sixty degree world in which to present the story, he or

she can carefully select from a variety of lenses and camera angles depending on

how/where he or she wants to draw the viewer's focus. Music is used to establish

tone and mood. It can serve as an element of foreshadowing, it can be used to

charge the story with extra energy and excitement as well as to stabilize and relax

the scene, and it can add to the drama of a climactic event. Visual imagery is

more than what a viewer sees in the film, sometimes it is what he or she does *not*

see. A good director vigilantly coordinates every single last item in his or her shot to reveal a definitive image to the audience; however, sometimes the most revealing images are actually suggested to the viewer and left to their interpretation. Alfred Hitchcock used this technique frequently. During the infamous shower-murder scene in *Psycho* there is not a single millimeter of film that shows a knife penetrating human flesh, but through the use of sharp, piercing violin chords, and quick jump-cuts from the opposing perspectives of killer and victim, the audience is able to infer the gruesome reality of the scene.

The imagery of Gothic film reveals with moving pictures similar tropes as Gothic literature. The settings are dark, shot with lowlight. The ominous mood is established by the musical score as well as carefully manipulated elements of the shot—shadow, lighting, camera movement, and certain wipes or fades as scenes change. Early Gothic films frequently changed scenes by slowly fading the entire shot into complete blackness, then reopening with a contrasting bright, white-washed scene. This manner of filming gave rise to film noir, which became a popular cinematic style of the 1940s and 1950s where low key lighting was used to emphasize ominous moods.

Because so many Gothic films are based on works of Gothic literature they obviously contain similar plot elements, but even the original works of Gothic film follow a parallel design to their literary cousins. There is the presence, or the potential presence of the supernatural; backdrops of haunted, or possibly haunted locations—castles, houses, mansions, hospitals; characters doing battle against the prime antagonist, usually the supernatural element, but also

fighting some arbitrary, yet restraining aspect of society. There are maidens who need saving; heroes who rise from obscurity; chases and pursuits through tight, menacing enclosures; repressed sexuality; and a revelation of hidden and disguised elements of life that could cause the destabilization and collapse of society. The first work of Gothic literature and the first work of Gothic film are separate by more than 150 years so the original features of Gothic fiction have been adjusted and adapted to fit the time period and setting, for example the haunted castle can be a haunted hospital or perhaps an isolated island, and the ghostly specter can be a demented mad man, or even a massive great white shark.

The Wolf Man

Directed by George Waggner and released in 1941, *The Wolf Man* piggy-backed off the success of Universal Stuido's long line of monster movies that began in 1931 with the release of *Dracula, Frankenstein, The Mummy* and all their subsequent sequels. But unlike *Dracula* and *Frankenstein, The Wolf Man* was an original conception of screenwriter Curt Siodmak, there was no novel that was adapted for the silver screen; however, what the film lacked in literary inspiration was made up for in mythological lore and history. Similar to *The Mummy* and *Dracula, The Wolf Man* had a regional history on which to base its premise. Many provinces of Eastern Europe, as well as Native American legend, have tales of men and women that can shape-shift into animals. Sometimes these stories contain demonic elements that have been the cause of panic and fear for

centuries. Several ancient peoples have legends of werewolves or other were-creatures. Thus *The Wolf Man* was born out of pure cultural history.

Although a tale of original fiction, *The Wolf Man* shadowed many of the Gothic features that originated in Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*. As the movie opens the audience is introduced to the principal actors amongst the sound of romantic, yet ominous violin music periodically interrupted by an explosion of brass wind instruments. After the introduction of Lon Chaney as "The Wolf Man," the scene fades into a slow, sweeping shot of a dark and foggy woods at night beneath a glowing full moon. All within the first ninety seconds the mood and setting have been established. The audience is made aware that the film will be romantic yet violent, frightening, and disturbing.

After the credits an unknown human hand pulls a large, leather-bound encyclopedia from a shelf and opens to the following section:

> LYCANTHROPY (Werewolfism). A disease of the mind in which human beings imagine they are wolf-men. According to an old LEGEND which persists in certain localities, the victims actually assume the physical characteristics of the animal. There is a small village near TALBOT CASTLE which still claims to have had gruesome experiences with this supernatural creature.

Opening the film with an encyclopedia entry provides a pragmatic explanation of werewolfism, and its allusion to the exact story which is about to be told gives the film a place in history, as if the happenings within the movie are what lends itself to any reference book's definition of lycanthropy. This mimics Horace Walpole's

The Castle of Otranto and his preface claiming that the text was discovered in an old Italian church and transcribed for the public.

The scene then dissolves into a shot of Larry Talbot, the prodigal son of the Talbot family, being chauffeured toward the castle-home of his namesake. He finally arrives at Castle Talbot, with its towering peaks and ivy covered stone walls. He has been called home due to his brother's mysterious death which his father refers to as a "hunting accident." The senior Talbot is a doctor, a man of science and medicine, his career and devoted belief in reason and rationality create an interesting juxtaposition to Larry when he becomes a werewolf and seeks his father's assistance. This scenario reflects the melting of modern sciences and ancient traditions that appear in many Gothic texts, most notably *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*.

Larry has been away from his home for eighteen years; as he slowly becomes reacquainted with his surroundings he meets the beautiful Gwen Conliffe and is immediately smitten. Gwen becomes the maiden of classic Gothic fiction, at different moments in the film she is helplessly pursued by evil forces, including Larry after he is transformed into the Wolf Man.

Upon the meeting of Gwen and Larry at her father's antique store, the film's creators set up a great deal of foreshadowing as Larry attempts to flirt. He purchases a cane with a silver head molded in the shape of a ferocious wolf atop a pentagram. Gwen explains the mythology of the werewolf and Larry jokingly refers to the story of Little Red Riding Hood and the Big Bad Wolf. Their playful banter is interrupted by the noisy arrival of the gypsies, who come to town every

autumn to tell fortunes. The gypsies fulfill yet another Gothic element, the existence of prophecies. Larry and Gwen go on a date and decide to have their fortunes read, they walk among the gypsies cavalcade, through the foggy woods, amongst black caldrons hanging over burning fires. During this date Larry is attacked by a wolf and survives, he takes ill but quickly recovers, and later one of the gypsy women informs him of his fate, "Whoever is bitten by the werewolf and lives, becomes a werewolf."

As the film progresses Larry struggles with his transformations and the horror he unwillingly commits. The scenes are constantly shifting from Castle Talbot to the foggy woods; there are shots within graveyards and crypts with burning torches hung on the wall, every landscape and backdrop of the entire film are the same settings of classic Gothic literature.

Many works of Gothic fiction are about exposing the hidden evils of humanity and society. These unseen evils are represented as the villain or the anti-hero of the story. Like the Creature in *Frankenstein*, Larry is the anti-hero—victim and victimizer rolled into one. His character is an examination of the veiled impiety that is buried within everyone. Gwen and the senior Talbot say the exact same thing to Larry when explaining werewolf legend, "Even a man who is pure in heart and says his prayers by night may become a wolf when the wolf's bane blooms and the autumn moon is bright." The expression is supposed to be a metaphor but is ironically accurate. It means that given the right conditions even the most righteous man will fall from grace. Larry is that righteous man. He has traveled all the way from the United State to help his family upon the death of his

brother, he has nothing but good intentions; nonetheless, he falls victim to the wolf and becomes an animal—a relentless and evil predator.

In many ways *The Wolf Man* is a direct copy of earlier monster movies like *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*. The settings are basically the same, castles, woods, graveyards, but instead of a vampire or reanimated corpse there is a werewolf. *The Wolf Man*, however, is not based on any other previous work of fiction. The film is entirely original; it was merely inspired by the historical legends of many ancient cultures. *The Wolf Man* is an original Gothic film which follows a design established by early Gothic literature and earlier Gothic films, but it also contains its own imaginative and unique story.

Psycho

Directed by Alfred Hitchcock, *Psycho* is one of the most celebrated films of all-time. It has been the subject of numerous books, essays, and scholarly analysis for decades; not a single student of film is able to escape his or her curriculum without coming across an in-depth, analytical discussion of the film and its director. *Psycho* has been examined by students, scrutinized by critics, and parodied in popular culture since its release in 1960.

The film's legendary status took time; it had to simmer for a few decades before reaching its iconic status. According to Kendall R. Phillips, author of *Projected Fears*, "[M]any of its contemporary critics dismissed it as 'low culture'" (61). Upon the film's release in 1960 the United States was celebrating a period of steady prosperity. WWII was long over, the country was winning the

Cold War and the arms/space race against the Soviet Union, and the economy seemed to be in a state of permanent good health. The United States, at least middle-class America, was completely stabilized. Then suddenly here comes a film that showcases antisocial behavior, sexual aggression, thievery, manipulation, and to top it all off, a psychotic transvestite. Robert Genter argues that *Psycho* portrayed the fear of destabilization based on repressed sexuality and over control of authoritative institutions. He states, "As a mixture of images of the sexual psychopath and the authoritarian personality, Norman Bates represents the culmination of this panic over deviant behaviour in the early Cold War" (155). At the height of the Cold War the United States government and a variety of other social institutions held an authoritative grip over the citizens of the nation. This watchful authority forced people to repress many aspects of their life. *Psycho,* according to Genter, is about the reaction to that authority, represented in the relationship between Norman Bates and his mother. The open sexuality of the film did not sit well with the nuclear family unit; however, in due time *Psycho* would finally be recognized as the masterpiece that it is.

The early monster movies and hammer films of the 1930s and 1940s like *The Wolf Man* held stories within fantastic worlds with supernatural elements, similar to the early works of Victorian Gothic, but as time progressed Gothic film turned toward the real world, much in the same way Gothic literature did during the Post WWII era. *Psycho* takes place entirely in the same world as the audience that views it, and there are zero supernatural elements, but through clever photography and set design Hitchcock allows for the possibility of the

supernatural. The real horror of *Psycho* comes from the demented mind of Norman Bates, wonderfully portrayed by Anthony Perkins, and albeit set in the real world, the film contains numerous landscapes and other features straight out of classic Gothic fiction.

As the opening credits roll sharp and quick violin chords combine with moving black and white geometric lines to create an erratic and frightful mood, then, as a panoramic establishing shot spans across the city of Phoenix, subtitles appear on the screen announcing the exact date and time, "Friday, December 11, Two Forty-three p.m." This precise time placement reminds the viewer that the film takes place in the real world, but also provides for a journal or diary-like feeling similar to early Gothic literature like *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*. The first characters met are Marion Crane and Same Loomis, two lovers having a sexual rendezvous at a hotel in the middle of the afternoon. Marion, played by Janet Leigh, parades around the hotel room in her bra, exposing more skin and sexuality than any previous mainstream film. She informs Sam of her desire to have a traditional relationship, but Sam's financial troubles prevent such a union. This establishes Marion's motive to steal the real-estate money from her employer. She is motivated by love, and perhaps even by sexual desire.

A real-estate deal lands forty thousand dollars cash in Marion's hands and she is assigned by her employer to place the money into a safe-deposit box, but immediately Marion decides to steal it and run away, believing it will help her and Sam start a new life. Marion's theft of the money represents the secret evils within society that Gothic literature and film expose. She is just an unsuspecting

secretary, adorable and seemingly trustworthy, but as the film reveals even the most innocent looking people can have dark secrets and desires. Who would have ever suspected the pretty blond secretary? This begins the classic Gothic pursuit of the helpless maiden, but in this case there is a twist, the maiden is being righteously pursued because she is a criminal. She does not need saving, she needs capturing.

When Marion arrives at the Bates Motel it is night and there is a soft rain. The home of Norman and his mother looms in the background atop a tall hill like a giant specter looking down at the string of cabins and any possible tenants. The windows are like the eyes of a beast, its pupil, the silhouette of an old woman sitting in a chair. Bates' home and the motel have replaced the classic European castle of early Gothic literature.

Norman Bates, the motel manager and proprietor, seems perfectly normal. He is boyishly handsome, polite, and pleasant to speak with, but slowly his true psychosis is revealed. During his dinner conversation with Marion, who could not help to overhear a heated exchange between him and his mother, two now-famous lines are spoken by Norman. 1.) "A boy's best friend is his mother" – this carries odd, incestuous undertones, and 2.) "We all go a little mad sometimes" – spoken just above a whisper as he glares at Marion, this statement foreshadows the coming insanity about to take place.

Marion then goes to her room to retire for the night. Norman proceeds to peer through a secret hole in the wall he created for his sick, voyeuristic pleasure. He watches Marion undress and get into her shower robe with twisted lust in his

eyes, adding to the overall sexuality of the film. This is followed by the infamous shower scene where Marion is stabbed to death by Norman's mother. This scene essentially ends the first half of the film; the second half begins with the investigation into the disappearance of Marion Crane.

A private investigator hired to track down Marion and the stolen money also falls victim to Norman, but the real pursuit of Marion begins with Marion's sister, Lila Crane, and Sam. The two know there is something Norman is hiding, they try to get the local law department involved but the sheriff refuses to help. Despite all the evidence, the sheriff does not believe Norman is hiding anything; he thinks Marion simply disappeared with the stolen money. This scenario represents the battle against controlling social institutions. The police have the power to thwart Norman, but they are a political machine more concerned with appearances rather than taking important and decisive action. This satirical observation toward a social institution like the police is a Gothic element that became popular in the literature produced during the post WWII years in the United States.

The ending of the film may be the most Gothic element of the entire film. After Norman has been apprehended, outside his prison cell a group of police officers listen to a doctor's explanation of Norman's psychosis. The doctor states:

> Now he was already dangerously disturbed, had been ever
> since his father died. His mother was a clinging, demanding
> woman, and for years the two of them lived as if there was no one
> else in the world. Then she met a man, and it seemed to Norman

that she threw him over for this man. Now that pushed him over the line and he killed them both.

Matricide is probably the most unbearable crime of all, most unbearable to the son who commits it. So he had to erase the crime, at least in his own mind. He stole her corpse, a weighted coffin was buried. He hid the body in the fruit cellar. He even tried to keep it as well as it would be kept. And that still wasn't enough. She was there, but she was a corpse.

So he began to think and speak with her, give her half his life, so to speak. At times he could be both personalities, carry on conversations. At other times, the mother half took over completely...

And because he was so pathologically jealous of her, he assumed she was jealous of him. Therefore if he felt a strong attraction to any other woman, the mother side of him would go wild. [To Lila] When he met your sister, he was touched by her, aroused by her. He wanted her. This set off the jealous mother, and mother killed the girl.

This explanation provides for a real and authentic rationale for Norman Bates' criminal behavior. Norman is not an undead creature that was dug up and set free to terrorize the public. He was born a normal child and through a series of events slowly grew into his psychotic adulthood. Killers like Norman exist in real life;

his villain status in the film paralleled the emerging Magical Realism of

contemporary Gothic literature in the 1960s through the present day.

The film ends with a long shot of Marion's car being dragged out of a

murky swamp. The water is dark and muddy, and has ruined the pristine car. It is

a slow process as the automobile emerges from the water, but the black sludge

still clings to the back and sides of the vehicle, ultimately reminding the audience

that the world, or society, is unclean; there is evil hiding everywhere: fueled by

greed, love, lust, and jealousy, society is racked with malevolent forces.

Jaws

Jaws, directed by Stephen Spielberg, was released to theaters June of 1975

and it was the first time the term "blockbuster" was used to describe a movie.

While at the box office the film grossed 471 million dollars, it won three academy

awards including Best Sound, Best Editing, and Best Music/Original Score, and

was nominated for Best Picture. The movie was clearly well received by the

public and critics. It contained something for everyone—good acting, brilliant

directing, a quality screenplay co-written by Peter Benchley, the author of the

novel which the movie is based, gore, action, and superior special effects (for

1975)—all these things combined to create a dazzling film that now has a place

amongst the most cherished films in cinematic history.

But *Jaws* delivered something else to the public that at the time was

indescribable. It touched a nerve in the unconscious mind. While on the surface

the film is a standard monster-movie, a throwback to the Universal horror pictures

of the 1930s, but beneath the waves it is a story of biblical proportion—the ultimate David versus Goliath scenario. *Jaws* left people terrified of the water. During its original box office run attendance at public beaches across the nation dropped, even at freshwater lakes. The water became the breeding ground for monsters—sharks—it was a dark abyss where nightmares were born. *Jaws* made its viewers afraid of monsters, but the film is so much more than a horror movie, it is an artistic creation that perfectly embodies the tradition of American Gothic films.

The film opens through the eyes of the shark, swimming through a dark ocean, past clusters of seaweed and coral reefs. With lowlight and an obstructed view this opening sequence provides a feeling of claustrophobia. The shark is in pursuit of something, but what? What is its prey? Where is it headed? The quick turns and sharp angles reflect the classic chase of Gothic literature as some helpless maiden is pursued through the dark and winding corridors in the bowels of some decrepit and haunted castle. Meanwhile credits are rolling and low, staccato chords played on base fiddles become the primary foreshadowing feature of the shark's arrival, and the impending doom of its prospective victims.

The setting of the film, Amity Island in the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of New York, also contains many Gothic parallels. According to Chief Brody, "It's only an island if you look at it from the water." But Brody is wrong, Amity *is* an island no matter how you look at it, and an island has many connotations. It is almost like a prison, there is no way on or off an island except through the water, and the water is where the monsters live. An island is isolated from society, cut

off from the rest of the world. The entire island in the film is like the haunted castle of classic Gothic lore, surrounded by a moat that keeps people trapped inside.

It is nearly an hour and a half into the film before the audience gets a good view of the shark other than a gray fin, and by this time it has already claimed four victims. The arrival of the beast does more than stir fright and terror into the local population, it exposes the hidden evils within society. Like contemporary Gothic literature, *Jaws* also reveals the sinful nature of humanity. There is a power struggle on the island between Chief Brody and the local politicians. Brody wants to close the beaches, cut off the shark's food supply and force it to move on, but the mayor knows this is bad for business, to him the entire island is a business that thrives on tourist dollars. Closing the beaches would hurt, maybe completely destroy business, and he will not allow that to happen. Even after a little boy is killed, and a shark expert, Matt Hooper, played by Richard Dreyfuss, reveals irrefutable evidence that not just any shark, but a great white shark, is terrorizing Amity's surrounding waters, the mayor still will not budge. The beaches remain open, and more people are killed. The mayor is motivated by one of the unforgivable sins of The Bible, greed.

The film also has a prophetic element. While Brody and Hooper argue with the mayor to close the beaches, Hooper boldly declares, "What we are dealing with here is a perfect engine, an eating machine. It's really a miracle of evolution. All this machine does is swim and eat and make little sharks, and that's all." Hooper is describing the perfect killer, whose sole function in life is to

hunt and feed. It is biologically programmed to kill and almost nothing can stop it. Again, the mayor ignores the warnings, and immediately following this scene the next shot reveals a large ferry entering the island's harbor carrying hundreds of tourist with their pockets full of cash, ready to spend big money, and because of the mayor, perhaps be killed.

Besides the mayor, the shark also brings out the worst in everyone. During one scene bathers are enjoying a fine day of sun and swimming when the peaceful water suddenly explodes into a frothy mixture of blood and flesh as a young boy is ravished by the shark. The swimmers begin racing toward the beach, full grown adults are knocking each other over, blindly charging through the crowd in a vain attempt to save themsevles. One man even knocks a child off a raft and uses it for himself.

One of the most memorable characters is Sam Quint, the modern day Captain Ahab hired to hunt and kill the shark. Quint is an old sea-dog who has spent his life on the water, and although a great white shark is a real creature, Quint infuses it with supernatural abilities. While aboard the *Orca* with Brody and Hooper, Quint relates his story as a survivor of the *USS Indianapolis* which was torpedoed by a Japanese sub during WWII. 880 sailors survived the attack and became stranded at sea. Only 316 of them would survive, the rest died from exposure or were taken away by sharks. A viewer that is familiar with WWII naval history will remember that this event was real. The reality of Quint's story reminds the audience they are watching a film that takes place within the same

world in which they live. Quint explains what it is like to come face to face with a hungry shark:

> Sometimes that shark, he looks right into you, right into your eyes. You know the thing about a shark, he's got lifeless eyes, black eyes, like a doll's eyes. When he comes at you he doesn't seem to be living, until he bites you and those black eyes roll over white, and then you hear a terrible high-pitched screaming, and the ocean turns red.

Quint's descriptions make the shark seem supernatural, as if it truly is some sort of mythical beast, or undead creature. The shark in *Jaws* is the specter in Gothic fiction.

Although Quint might regard all sharks as supreme, supernatural beings, the fact is sharks are real, and the proportions of the shark in *Jaws* are not as unbelievable as a person might think—twenty-five feet in length, three tons in weight. While the average great white shark grows between fifteen and seventeen feet and weighs around two thousand to 2,400 hundred pounds, there have been specimens documented at twenty-three feet and 5,500 pounds. So the shark in Jaws could, and most likely does exist in real life. Similar to *Psycho* and the Gothic fiction of the post WWII era, *Jaws* operates within reality. The most frightening aspects of the film are that it could happen, and actually has happened. The movie was based on Peter Benchley's novel, which was inspired by the 1916 shark attacks on the shores of Matawan Creek, New Jersey where for over a

twelve day period six people fell victim to an unidentified shark. The incident is even referenced in the film.

Jaws contains all the standard Gothic ingredients, albeit disguised or adapted for the time period. It has all the classic features: haunted castle – terrorized island; supernatural specter – unreal shark; helpless maidens – helpless swimmers/boaters; obscure heroes – a shy police chief and geeky ocean scientist. It also represents the world of contemporary Gothic and Magical Realism with its examination of societal evils and unchecked political powers. *Jaws* entertained millions of viewers and still does today because it is simply a well-told story, but it is also pure Gothic, classic and contemporary.

The Sixth Sense

Released in 1999, *The Sixth Sense*, directed by M. Night Shyamalan gave the world one of the most recognizable and parodied movie quotes ever, "I see dead people," spoken by Cole Sear (Haley Joel Osment) as he confesses his unnatural ability to see and communicate with ghosts. The film was a box office smash, grossing over 600 million dollars worldwide and was nominated for six academy awards. It could not have come a minute too soon. At the end of the twentieth century Gothic film was nearly a dead genre, humiliated by twenty years of ridiculous, low-budget slasher movies.

The first Gothic films were strictly supernatural—the monster movies of the 1930s and the hammer films of the 1940s. Then during the Cold War, similar to Gothic literature, Gothic film spawned a succession of movies that reflected

elements of Magical Realism literature. These were the science fiction pictures depicting WWIII and apocalyptic scenarios. Slowly the industry turned contemporary, and Gothic film became much more real, many of them dropping supernatural factors all together. Set in the same world as its viewers, Gothic film spawned some of the most commercially successful movies of all time, but around the early 1980s the Gothic lost its artistic edge, driven by a capitalistic engine, profit and monetary gain became the fuel of the entire industry. There was a long progression of terrible horror movies that nearly destroyed the genre. True Gothic was replaced by slap-stick, slasher horror—scantily clad teenagers being chased through the woods by chainsaw wielding maniacs in hockey masks who seem to never die. *The Sixth Sense* saved the life of the genre. It was the first truly authentic (and good) Gothic film since Ridley Scott's *Alien* in 1979. When the genre was collapsing and essentially becoming a laughing stock, *The Sixth Sense* revitalized it, bringing the Gothic back to film. Kendall Phillips claims:

> A very traditional form of Gothic horror emerged into American theaters at the end of the twentieth century, in part as a reaction to the tongue-in-cheek, postmodern version of the genre, and in part as a reflection of the millennial anxiety that permeated American culture. (181)

He is referring to *The Sixth Sense,* which certainly is traditional, and at the same time exceedingly original.

In the film a young boy, Cole Sears, is haunted by his curse/gift, the ability to see dead people. They terrorize him, sometimes inflicting physical abuse. With the help of his psychiatrist, Malcolm Crowe (Bruce Willis), Cole learns to deal with the angry spirits, and even helps them come to peace with being dead. But aside from the appearance of ghosts there are several other Gothic elements.

The movie takes place in Philadelphia, one of the oldest, most historic cities in the United States. Classic, Victorian Gothic drew some of its supernatural power from the past, *The Sixth Sense* does the same. The city of Philadelphia is ripe with old, crumbling churches and government buildings that have the potential to be haunted by ghosts, even Cole's elementary school, which was converted from an old court house where, according to Cole, "They used to hang people."

The film also has prophetic ingredients. At the beginning Malcolm Crowe is celebrating his recognition as a renowned and highly respected child psychiatrist when a former patient, now a young man, breaks into his home and shoots him in the stomach, then commits suicide. Crowe recovers from his wounds and becomes haunted by the episode. He views his attacker as a personal failure. He was not able to help this child, who grew up deranged enough to attempt murder and take his own life. Later, when he meets Cole, he recognizes similar symptoms within his new patient and he vows to do everything in his power to help the tortured child. Also, Cole Sears is forever charged with the task of helping angry and confused spirits move on to whatever is awaiting them in the

next world. He must commit to this charge or risk being malevolently haunted for the rest of his life.

There are many contemporary Gothic components of the film represented in the wide variety of ghosts that Cole encounters. There is an abused housewife, mostly likely murdered by her husband or lover; a boy who accidently shot himself in the back of the head with his father's shot gun which was *not* locked away safely; and a young girl who was murdered by her step-mother. These spirits all died in grotesque fashions, but they are also the unavoidable, horrible realities of life—women are abused, parents are negligent, and children are subjected to violence. *The Sixth Sense* exposes these ugly realities to its viewers and makes them aware that although you might not believe in ghost, you must believe in these horrible, real life atrocities.

Aside from elements of the storyline, the cinematography contains many aspects of Gothic fiction. There are several interceded shots of old churches, close-ups of statues and stained glass windows, and the color red, being a symbol of death and evil, dominates in almost every single frame. If the film is examined closely the viewer realizes its abundance, from the never-ending chain of red brick buildings to the ruby red doorknob of Crowe's basement door, from nondescript background elements like a glowing exit sign to a frame's main focus like the red balloon that mysteriously floats up the stairway; red rules the film.

The Sixth Sense brought the supernatural—the truly terrifying supernatural—back into Gothic film. It maintained an authentic Gothic heritage while incorporating components of a contemporary setting. It also made people

afraid of the dark, it made them marvel at the invisible world and think about all the things that might be possible, albeit invisible. But most importantly, its twisted ending shocked audiences and served as a simple reminder as to the joy of good story telling.

CONCLUSION

A man tilts back in his favorite reading chair, feet up, and a pair of small glasses resting on the tip of his nose. A paperback novel lay open on his stomach and he reads silently and alone. Minutes become hours as the man is lost in the fictional reality of the novel. Soon he beings to hear noises. A street dog howls, tree branches scrap against a nearby window, and outside the wind screams like a banshee. The shadows in the room have suddenly become darker. The man closes the book. Someone, or *something*, is watching him; he can *feel* it, a pair of malevolent eyes locked on him from the darkness. The man tries to rub away the goose bumps that crawl across his skin. *Childish fears*, he tells himself. As an adult he no longer believes in monsters. The Boogeyman died about the same time as Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny. There are no more hungry monsters lurking in the shadows, these are the irrational nightmares of childhood; however, the time in which he spends reading the novel, and similar novels, the childish fears return, the monsters come back to life. The man laughs away the last of his goose flesh. He places the novel face up on the end table. The shiny paperback cover shimmers under the light—STEPHEN KING—in bold letters, and below that, *'SALEM'S LOT*.

Stephen King is one of the most popular writers of all time. He has been making his readers afraid of the dark since the 1970s. But his literature is about more than fear. It is Gothic, and King is continuing a literary tradition over 240-years-old.

The term *Gothic* as it is applied to literature was ripped out of historical context for the sole purpose of creating a unique appeal to a work of literature. This work of literature was *The Castle of Otranto*, and the author, Horace Walpole, was afraid the elements of the novel were too new to be accepted by the reading public. He identified his novel as Gothic, giving it the subtitle, "A Gothic Story," hoping to popularize his novel off the historic Goths, a people whose history had crept into English nationalism. Essentially, this means that Gothic literature was artificially created.

It was already a term that was used to group the Goths in history, and their influence on culture. But the historic Goths did not have a written language so the very people from which the term is derived did not produce any Gothic literature. Horace Walpole's original claim to the Gothic created a design that would become a blueprint for the future of the genre. In his story there are specters, pursuits, helpless maidens, repressed sexuality, ominous settings, prophetic warnings, and destabilizing factors. These elements became the standard for which future Gothic literary works would be measured against.

The most basic reading of Walpole's novel reveals it as a simple ghost story—a haunted castle where supernatural forces are working to correct a past wrong, but the Gothic goes far beyond the supernatural. Gothic fiction is an evolving genre. It adapts with the changes in time and culture. From the mid eighteenth century till the present day Gothic fiction has been in a mode of constant shift. The core elements remain the same, however, during certain time periods they may be disguised and rather than being a true, original feature they

become metaphoric. *Jaws* is a Gothic film, but there are no ghosts or haunted

castles, but there is a massive great white shark which stands in for the specter,

and there is an isolated island which represents the castle setting.

Gothic fiction serves the public as a magnifying glass in which society can

be observed and scrutinized. The supernatural creatures in many Gothic tales are

not necessarily the personifications of pure evil, but rather a tool in which evil—

real evil—is exposed. In *The Sixth Sense* the ghosts are frightening, but the real

evil is what the ghosts represent. They are victims of violence—an abused wife, a

murdered child, a murdered man. In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* the line

between hero and villain is permanently blurred. Who is the real monster? Victor

Frankenstein or the Creature? The Creature is the specter, but his very existence

reminds the audience how cruel and shortsighted mankind can be.

In simple terms, Gothic fiction makes people afraid. But what is it that

creates the fear? The monsters? The boogeymen? Or is it a deeper, unconscious

fear? Through all the monsters and the ominous settings of Gothic fiction, the

real fear comes out of the portrayal of destabilizing factors, things that will cause

the collapse of social norms and customs. Gothic fiction uses specters to reveal

the true evils secretly at work that could potentially cause the destabilization of

society. The sexually deviant behavior of the female vampires in *Dracula*

threatened the stability of the standard Victorian women. The results of Victor's

bizarre experiments in *Frankenstein* represented the anxiety that came with swift

technological growth during industrialization.

The progress of Gothic fiction is ongoing. As society changes, so will the genre. Every society and culture through history has feared its demise. Gothic fiction preys off this fear, and as life goes on so does the threat of destabilization and its exposure in Gothic fiction.

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