

**GOthic FICTION THEN AND NOW: A STUDY OF THE
VARIATIONS BETWEEN THE EARLY AND THE
MODERN GOTHICS**

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GOTHIC FICTION THEN AND NOW:
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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a Thesis written by Chaddra Ann Moore entitled "Gothic Fiction Then And Now: A Study of The Variations Between The Early and The Modern Gothics." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

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Dedicated

to

My Mother, May Dee Moore

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ABSTRACT

This thesis deals with the contrast of styles between early gothic fiction (1760-1820) and modern gothic fiction (1860-1973). Middle gothic fiction has been excluded from this thesis because it is so closely related to early gothic fiction that there isn't enough significant difference to warrant comparison.

Some of the works to be compared in early gothic fiction are Walpole's The Castle of Otranto (1764) and Ann Radcliffe's The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794). Some modern works of gothic fiction to be considered are Ira Levin's Rosemary's Baby (1967) and Bram Stoker's Dracula (1897).

The thesis is in three parts. The first part defines the classic gothic tale, its creators, and their contributions to the gothic traditions. The second and third parts identify and illustrate the major elements that distinguish modern gothic fiction from early gothic fiction.

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INTRODUCTION

Between early gothic fiction (1760-1820) and modern gothic fiction (1860-1973) there is a marked contrast of styles. Most notably, the differences are in the treatment of good and evil and in the nature of the horrifying (or gothic) elements themselves. Typical works of early gothic romance are Horace Walpole's The Castle of Otranto (1764) and Ann Radcliffe's The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794). Their immediate descendents were novels which could have been called "Ladies' Gothics" or middle gothics (between the early and late), but which have been excluded from this study because they adhere so closely to the early gothic standards that there is little room for an interesting comparison. In addition, most of them were poor imitations of those earlier stories of supernatural horror, some examples of this middle period being Bulwer Lytton's Zanoni (1842) and his novella The Haunted and the Haunters, or The House and the Brain (1859). As popular as some of these gothic romances might have been, the focus of study will remain on the significant differences between the early and the modern gothic.

The modern gothic is often referred to as the horror story. Good examples of this type are Ira Levin's Rosemary's Baby (1967) and Bram Stoker's Dracula (1897). The term "horror story" should not lead one to believe that there is a difference between the

old and the new at their most basic level. Most early and modern gothics are horror tales, revolving around a natural or supernatural evil that must be explained, conquered, or dealt with in some manner. In early gothic fiction, good was always the victor. Also, the division between good and evil was always clear, and in most instances the evil was external to man. In the modern gothic, however, good sometimes loses, or at best achieves only an uneasy truce with evil. In addition, the evil is often as likely to come from within man as from without him, and the division between good and evil is frequently vague, uncertain, or otherwise more realistic than in the early pieces.

Both early and modern gothics have the purpose of entertaining the reader by chilling his spine. Sadly, both early and modern gothics have received little serious appraisal, perhaps because of their status as light entertainment. Nevertheless, it takes as much skill to produce an honest shudder as it does to produce other honest reactions. Ideally all of them should arise because the author's writing touches a chord of the human experience.

The horror tale has been with us for a long time. It has its beginning, as all literature does, in the oral tradition. It began in a time when man believed in the malignant forces that peopled his stories. Perhaps it remains because man clings, knowingly or unknowingly, to a remnant of that belief. Perhaps it reflects an antagonism toward the recent trend of an increasingly materialistic society. Or it may simply provide for many of us the fun of being frightened out of our wits, a pleasure that we

can enjoy as long as there is a safe distance between ourselves and the monster.

This study of the gothic tale of terror will be in three parts. The first part will define the classic gothic tale and discuss its creators and their contributions to what is referred to collectively as the gothic tradition. The second and third parts deal with the major elements that sharply distinguish the modern gothic from its ancestor. The first of these is the blurring line between good and evil, which is clearly reflected in much of today's literature and films. The second is the nature of the horrifying elements, in the presentation of which there has been a movement away from the purely mechanistic, externally caused horror to the psychologically, internally based horror. These changes have led to some remarkable works in the subgenre that would not have been possible otherwise, works that have further enhanced gothic fiction's status as one of the most consistently popular types of literature.

PART I

THE BEGINNINGS OF GOTHIC FICTION

In its classic sense, the gothic novel, as defined by C. Hugh Holman, is ". . . a novel in which magic, mystery, and chivalry are the chief characteristics."¹ Designed to appeal to the imagination, early gothic novels were usually set in the medieval era in distant lands. Ancient castles and bleak landscapes were staples of their gothic environment. Other conventions not solely confined to the gothic romance were the endangered, virginal heroine, the manly hero, and the monstrous villain. Modernized versions of such settings and characters are recognizable in contemporary gothic novels as this study will demonstrate.

Equally important to any definition of the gothic novel is the element of the supernatural. This element may appear in the form of ghosts, witchcraft, or portents of things to come that seem to reflect the presence of some kind of mystical influence. By modern standards these elements, as they were used in eighteenth century gothic fiction, seem very crude in nature. They seem to be false mechanisms, intended solely to frighten the reader. In the process they go through what the

¹A Handbook to Literature, 3rd ed. (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1972), p. 244.

modern reader might consider "paces," routinized steps that have since lost whatever power they had to terrify. But the continued appearance of gothics throughout the development of English and American literature suggests a popularity maintained by a steady audience of readers through rapidly changing generations.

The first gothic romance was Horace Walpole's The Castle of Otranto, published in 1764. Otranto was the work responsible for the flood of gothic novels that followed. Although the book itself was a popular success, as Montague Summers tells us,² The flood of imitations was of generally poor quality. Roughly thirty years passed before the appearance of another work influential enough to be called its successor.

The Castle of Otranto had a genesis as unusual as the story that it told. Its author, Walpole, was the Earl of Oxford. His wealth freed him from the necessity to work so he was able to throw himself into outside interests with great passion. He had a deep admiration for gothic architecture, which led to his building a miniature castle at Strawberry Hill fourteen years before he wrote his famous book. In fact, it is possible that this castle strongly influenced the appearance of the literary one. In her book, The Tale of Terror, Edith Birkhead suggests that the castle's stairway and hall, of which Walpole was immensely fond, may have served as the background for the dream that partly in-

²The Gothic Quest: A History of the Gothic Novel (1938; rpt. New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1964), p. 218.

spired the novel. (The dream was of a giant armored hand on the staircase of an old castle.)

The first edition of The Castle of Otranto was published anonymously, under the guise of being an old manuscript that had been hidden away in the library of an ancient Catholic family from northern England. Martin Kallich, one of Walpole's biographers, explains that Walpole used this ploy because at the time he lacked confidence in his writing abilities, and was uncertain about the book's reception in the rationalistic climate of his day. Kallich goes on to say that when public response proved to be favorable Walpole acknowledged his authorship.³

The Castle of Otranto is a rather tedious story by today's standards of quality in fiction. Manfred, the prince of Otranto, plans to marry his son to Isabella, daughter of the Marquis of Vicenza. The marriage never takes place because the son is found crushed to death beneath a gigantic black plumed helmet. Theodore, a young peasant, notices that the helmet is like that worn by the statue of Prince Alfonso the Good, which stands in the chapel. When the helmet is found to be missing from the statue, Theodore is arrested as a magician and charged with murder. In an effort to preserve his line Manfred tries to divorce his wife so that he may marry Isabella and father a male heir. Isabella flees, finds Theodore, and escapes with him through an underground passage. Harrowing ad-

³Horace Walpole. Twayne's English Authors Series. (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1971), p. 92.

ventures follow, but Manfred is ultimately defeated. Theodore, revealed as the rightful prince of Otranto, weds Isabella. Manfred and his wife enter neighboring convents. The spirit of Prince Alfonso, which has harrassed Manfred throughout the book, triumphantly ascends to Heaven.

It is difficult for the modern reader to see what caused the excitement when Otranto first appeared. The horrors of the book are crude at best. The armored ghost of Alfonso, which persists in materializing piecemeal, is practically ludicrous. Walpole furthermore fails to establish any sort of suspense, at least not the sort that sophisticated modern audiences are accustomed to. The book's most suspenseful scenes involved the lovers' flight through the underground passages, where they risk discovery or danger from some other source. Unfortunately, this type of sequence became a staple of the gothic romance, and is now a cliché to the modern reader. And clichéd situations are seldom as exciting as originality, no matter how well done they may be. The reader is not convinced of the characters' reality, let alone of their peril. As a whole, the book's primary value is historical. Its most enduring attribute may well be the castle itself, which became a common setting for the early gothic romance.

Much more readable than Walpole's book is Mrs. Ann Radcliffe's The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794). A long and rather confusing work, it centers mainly on the efforts of

the heroine, Emily St. Aubert, to escape the power of Signor Montoni and be reunited with her lover. After the death of her father, Emily goes to live with her aunt who is about to marry Signor Montoni. Montoni forbids Emily to marry Valancourt, her sweetheart, and takes her and her aunt to his mansion in Venice, and finally to his castle, Udolpho, in the Apennines. There he tries to force Emily to marry a Count Morano, and her aunt to sign over all of her estates to himself. The castle is full of strange lights and sounds, and Montoni leads a gang of brigands who pillage nearby towns. Finally Emily manages to escape (the aunt has died of mistreatment), while Montoni and his men are punished by the authorities. After a small misunderstanding with her lover and several events not central to the basic plot, Emily and Valancourt are reunited, and the story ends happily.

Unlike her predecessor, Mrs. Radcliffe is adept at developing and maintaining suspense. Her technique in Udolpho is to move from one unexpected and unexplained occurrence to another, thus maintaining a certain level of suspense throughout. These occurrences, however, are usually irrelevant to the plot and are inserted merely to keep our attention. For example, shortly after her father's death Emily is requested to destroy a bundle of letters that belonged to him. It was her father's wish that she never read these letters. Being a dutiful daughter and less curious than the reader, Emily obeys her instructions. But Mrs. Radcliffe has aroused our curiosity, and from that point on we read in hopes of learning more

about the contents of these mysterious letters. Towards the end of the book the mystery of the letters is clarified. They were merely some of her father's old love letters, connected with an incident in no way pivotal to the novel's plot. Their main function has been to hold the reader's interest.

Also unlike Walpole, Mrs. Radcliffe provides a rational explanation for all happenings that could seem even remotely supernatural. But some of her explanations, though possible, seem clumsy and forced. A particularly striking example of this quality is found in the scene in which Emily accidentally discovers a rotten, worm-eaten corpse, and runs from it in a panic. It is not long before we learn that had she looked closer she would have seen that the figure was made of wax. In the past, the Udolpho family had offended the Church, and for punishment was obliged to procure the image as a reminder of man's mortality. This is the entire history of the image. Like the aforementioned letters, it was a suspense creating device with no real part in the plot.

Mrs. Radcliffe's explanations may come early, as is the case with the waxen figure, or very late in the book as the revelation of the letters does. In any event, a style like Mrs. Radcliffe's has the advantage of permitting the reader a shiver together with the reassurance that all of nature's laws are still firmly in place. Unfortunately this style also has its drawbacks. Irrelevant events inserted purely for suspense become unsatisfying. The repeated explanations become boring.

We cease to get excited over what seems supernatural because we know that it will be explained rationally.

The settings that Mrs. Radcliffe chose for her novels became as much a part of the gothic world as Walpole's castle. They are always of stern beauty, but lonely and oppressive, fitting backgrounds for the events that she has planned. Such settings appear later in many gothic romances and in other books showing their influence, such as Wuthering Heights in the nineteenth century, and The Haunting of Hill House in the twentieth.

The next major gothic novel was Matthew Lewis' The Monk, first published in 1795. It is the story of Ambrosio, a young Capuchin monk who is drawn into rape, incest, and murder by the enticements of a beautiful, demonic woman named Matilda. When she grows tired of him Matilda uses her enchantments to turn Ambrosio's passion towards Antonia, the daughter of a poor widow. When the widow, who is actually Ambrosio's mother, thwarts his intentions she is murdered by him. Ambrosio later rapes Antonia and then murders her. He has unwittingly become the slayer of both his mother and sister. Captured by the Inquisition, Matilda and Ambrosio are tortured into confessing. Using her powers as a demon, Matilda easily frees herself. Afterwards she enters Ambrosio's cell and tells him that he can also gain freedom by selling his soul to Satan. Ambrosio follows her advice and makes the fatal bargain. Satan appears and carries him away to a place

of safety. Then, having promised to do no more than this, he slays the monk.

The Monk is in a much different vein from previous gothics. Its crude horrors won it the deserved reputation of revolting, and gave its author the undeserved reputation of being a human monster. Eino Railo, author of The Haunted Castle, describes Lewis as a bright, talkative individual who was admired greatly by his acquaintances, among whom were Sir Walter Scott, Lord Byron, Shelley, and Thomas Moore. This admiration was not shared by some critics. The Monk received mixed reviews, some of which roundly condemned it for indecency. For example, Mr. Railo quotes The Critical Review as saying: ". . . though the tale is indeed a tale of horror, yet the most painful impression which the work left on our minds was that of great acquirements and splendid genius employed to furnish a mormo for children, poison for youth, and a provocative for the debauchee."⁴ He also tells us that The Monthly Review considered the book so obscene that it would destroy the author's chances of ever having a respectable reputation in the literary field. However extreme this view might have been it is true that Lewis was so thoroughly identified with his book that he was nicknamed "Monk."

The Monk is not a piece of skillful writing. The plot shows discrepancies, most notably Ambrosio's too swift dete-

⁴The Haunted Castle: A Study of the Elements of English Romanticism (1927; rpt. New York: Humanities Press, 1964), p. 218.

rioration. Also, as is the case with so many gothic novels, the characters are not drawn realistically. The book's greatest fault rests in the qualities that made it infamous: the procession of horrors. Lewis made the same mistake that many horror films and books do today. In his desire to frighten the reader, he brought on more and bigger terrors, all graphically described, but forgot that the most frightening things occur in the imagination. The terror that we must guess at is worse than the terror that we know.

The next great gothic tale is Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus, which first saw publication in 1817. Although the name has become familiar the world over, the book itself is seldom read. Most people know Mrs. Shelley's monster only through films in which he is usually portrayed as a mindless, homicidal brute. Only Boris Karloff's portrayal and two recent movies made for television have attempted to present the creature with any kind of sensitivity. For this reason a brief summary of Mary Shelley's story would be helpful.

The story is told to a listener by a dying man whom a ship has picked up in the Arctic. The man identifies himself as Dr. Frankenstein, and tells how he created life from the dead. He assembled a body from the parts of corpses and brought it to life through scientific means. Frankenstein intended his new man to be beautiful, but it was so hideous that when it came to life Frankenstein fled in revulsion, hoping his creature would soon die. Weakened by shock and overwork, Frankenstein suffered

a breakdown. Much later, after he had recovered, his monster returned. It had survived in the forest, and had learned speech from some of the peasants who lived there. It had learned also that because of its appearance normal human beings hated and feared it when all it desired was friendship. It had come to Frankenstein to ask him to build a mate for it, created as it had been created. Afterwards the two of them would go away together, never to be seen again. Frankenstein agreed. It seemed a small price to pay for peace of conscience. But when the woman was completed, Frankenstein was assailed by new fears. What if these creatures could procreate? What if they birthed a new race superior to man, capable of driving man off the face of the earth? With these thoughts in his mind, Frankenstein destroyed the woman. The monster, watching from a window, determined to see its creator and tormentor as lonely as it was. To this end it murdered Frankenstein's close friends and family, even the doctor's new bride. Vowing revenge, Frankenstein pursued his creation to the Arctic.

Having told his story, Frankenstein dies. Afterwards the monster comes to the dead man's cabin on board the ship. It considers Frankenstein's crime worse than its own. Frankenstein created a man, then cut that man off from love, from friendship, from every human decency. So saying, the monster departs on an ice floe. It resolves to build a funeral pyre and immolate itself. As the novel ends the waves carry the ice floe, with the monster aboard, away into the mist and distance.

The tale of Frankenstein is in many ways a more mature work than the earlier gothics that have been discussed. The characterizations are not deep, but they are sufficient to prevent the primary figures from becoming flat stereotypes acting out roles of good and evil. Even though it is frequently the modern tendency to regard both monster and creator as fiends, if one reads the novel one sees that this is not the case. Frankenstein is overly ambitious, obsessed with a goal that some might consider unholy, but he is a human being with the capacity to give and receive love. The creature is not "born" evil, but is turned against humanity by man's rejection of it. In fact, some readers may identify more readily with the monster than with Frankenstein himself. The monster's need for love and companionship is part of the human experience, as is its pain when it is denied these things. Frankenstein is a shadow by comparison. He lacks the dimension to make his sufferings real for the audience.

The novel, Frankenstein, is subtitled The Modern Prometheus. In mythology, Prometheus was the god who gave fire to man against the wishes of his fellows, and was punished for the transgression. Like Prometheus, Frankenstein steps beyond the set limits and dares to attempt the forbidden. By creating life he usurps the role of God, and he is punished with the deaths of his loved ones, and finally his own death. The instrument of his punishment is the being that he sinned to create.

The last major gothic novel of this early period is Melmoth, the Wanderer, by Charles Maturin (1820). Maturin's Wanderer is a man who has bartered his soul in return for an abnormally long life span in which to gain knowledge. Satan gives him one hundred and fifty years in which to find someone willing to make the same bargain, and take his place. During this period the Wanderer does not age, but roams the world over soliciting men of all types and circumstances. At the book's close the Wanderer's century and a half of grace has run out, and he has found no man willing to sacrifice his soul. When the last moments of his span are over the Wanderer leaps, or is thrown, into the sea. The only trace of him left upon earth is his scarf hanging on a branch.

Melmoth, the Wanderer may be the most mature of all the early gothics. It contains scathing remarks about human nature and human society that are not to be found in previous gothics. Its central character is a more powerful individual than either heroes or villains of gothic fiction had been before. He is the ultimate outsider, a modern Faust who embodies both of the main figures of the Faustian legend. Like Faust, Melmoth's craving for knowledge has led him down unholy paths to a blasphemous deal. Later he takes on the role of Mephistopheles, seeking to drag another soul to damnation; the world in which he travels is nightmarish. Maturin depicts vivid sufferings because the people whom Melmoth solicits must be so desperate that they would do anything to escape further

pain. Chief among these scenes is the instance in which Melmoth tries to persuade Stanford, an imprisoned Englishman, to accept his offer by describing to him the "pleasures" of being a sane man in a madhouse.

Like other gothic fiction, Maturin's novel has its faults. It is told in rather clumsy fashion, with many digressions and narratives within narratives. The book is also quite long, and such excessive length is deadly to the tale of terror because the necessary mood of fear and suspense is difficult to maintain over a great span of pages. Melmoth also has typically gothic touches in its bleak landscapes, dark old houses, and supernatural portents, such as a seemingly living portrait, and young Melmoth's strange dream in which he is visited by the Wanderer. But the thread that binds the story together is the sheer force of Melmoth's personality. The Wanderer is a haunted man who has seen too much of life. His failure to find a substitute for himself may seem unrealistic to a cynical modern reader, but there may be a message in that failure. In his final speech Melmoth says:

"I have been on earth a terror, but not an evil to its inhabitants. None can participate in my destiny but with his own consent--none have consented--none can be involved in its tremendous penalties but by participation. I alone must sustain the penalty. . . ." ⁵

Perhaps no man can truly damn another, but each man can damn himself.

⁵Charles Robert Maturin, Melmoth, the Wanderer (1820; rpt. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), p. 408.

With Melmoth, the Wanderer the early gothics waned in popularity, but they never faded from existence. The gothic influence was visible in many English and American books written afterwards, and occasionally gothic romances still appeared. By this time the medieval trappings had been sacrificed, but the fear inspiring atmosphere remained. It was increased, in fact, by a more realistic treatment of characters. Some well known examples are Sheridan Le Fanu's Carmilla, Edgar Allan Poe's short stories, Henry James' The Turn of the Screw, and Bram Stoker's Dracula.

From Otranto through Melmoth gothic fiction became more complex in its structure and characterizations, and more realistic in its view of the human dilemma. It moved from simple, flat stereotypes of good and evil to complicated portrayals of goodness which sinks into evil, as in the case of Lewis's monk, and then to Maturin's condemned man who fails to condemn others. As characterizations became deeper, gothic fiction began to take a closer look at man's inner self, his inborn goodness and inborn evil. Later gothics, concentrating upon this evil, used as their villains the beast that lives in all of us.

PART II

THE DEMON WITHIN

All of the characters that we have studied so far exhibit a moral lesson by their fates: Evil does not prosper. Montoni and Manfred are defeated by the forces of good. Ambrosio and Melmoth are destroyed by the very evil that they embrace. Frankenstein may not be an evil man, but he has committed a mortal sin for which retribution is demanded. Reduced to their basic archetypes, these characters are not men undermined by human frailties, but creatures tainted by some power outside of themselves. These villains are not simply twisted people. They are Evil. The heroes and heroines who oppose them are not simply decent individuals. They are Goodness. The struggle between good and evil that is waged within each person, and consequently within society itself, is simplified and externalized in the antagonist and protagonist. Both are larger than life, and as such they are not realistic. In fact, they may strike the modern reader as being closer to automatons than to people. This is understandable since they are not so much people as they are symbols of an endless cosmic struggle.

Later, more complex gothics have focussed upon this conflict as it takes place in the human soul. This has resulted

in a deepening of the antagonist-protagonist system since each individual carries both roles within himself.

One of the best known popular works on the theme of man's dual nature was written by Robert Louis Stevenson: The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Published for the first time in 1886, the story's basic theme has become known the world over. Kind Dr. Jekyll succeeds in creating a potion that distills the evil in a man's personality, actually giving it physical being. At first Jekyll is pleased with the results. We learn that his gentility and discretion are a mask, and that he practices strange vices in secret. In the guise of Hyde he no longer needs to fear recognition. But eventually Jekyll, like so many before him, learns that evil is not to be toyed with. Hyde gradually becomes the stronger personality, overpowering Jekyll at any time without warning. As Hyde becomes crueller Jekyll becomes kinder and gentler. Desperately Jekyll tries to cast Hyde out, but to no avail. The transformations continue to occur. Hyde emerges whenever he chooses, committing more and more vicious crimes. In addition the serum that once returned Hyde to Jekyll's form loses its efficacy through overuse. Finally, wanted for murder and with discovery imminent, Jekyll, in the form of Mr. Hyde, takes poison.

If one wishes to classify Stevenson's novel by subgenre it is probably related more closely to science fiction than to the

gothic. The celebrated transformation is brought about through misused science rather than a supernatural agent. The mystery of Hyde and his puzzling influence over Dr. Jekyll is treated quite matter-of-factly, without an automatic recourse to some unnatural solution. But from the gothic standpoint Hyde himself is reminiscent of the early gothic villain. He is mysterious and savage-tempered. His very presence hints of an evil beyond normal man's capacity to understand. By contrast, before the reader learns of Jekyll's hidden nature, the doctor seems to be a paragon of decency. Indeed Jekyll's better nature strengthens as Hyde grows stronger, thus sharpening the distinction between the two and making them appear almost stereotype. In fact, regardless of how one chooses to classify the book, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde represents a maturing of popular fiction's outlook on good and evil.

Stevenson's novel may be read as an externalized view of the moral struggle as it is embodied in one man. Good and evil are inextricably linked in a single individual, just as they are linked in all of us. We measure good by those things that we have deemed evil and vice versa, and without some standard of comparison neither could exist for us. Jekyll's experiment failed because it attempted to separate the inseparable. Pure goodness or pure evil cannot exist in man because good and evil cannot exist as nonrelated entities. Hyde's death means Jekyll's death as well. Good and evil are

both cancelled out.

When discussing Stevenson's book one notices certain parallels between its techniques and that of another, more recent book: Thomas Tryon's The Other (1971). Tryon gives us identical twins with extremely divergent natures. One of the twins, Niles Perry, has a warm generous personality. The other twin, Holland, can be charming at times but is also withdrawn and secretive with a streak of hidden violence. The basic plot revolves around these two children, their Russian grandmother, Ada Vadrenya, and a game that she has taught them. The game involves establishing an almost mystic rapport with whoever or whatever the player chooses, trying to think like it, feel like it, become it without losing his own identity. The quiet town of Pequot Landing, where the novel is set, finds itself stunned by a pair of strange deaths. The violence culminates in the kidnapping and murder of a newborn infant. Tryon leads us to believe that Holland is the culprit, and knowing what we do about his nature we find this possibility easy to accept. The true revelation comes when we learn that Holland is already dead, has been dead throughout all of the primary action covered in the book. He killed himself accidentally while hanging his grandmother's cat in the well. Niles' love for his brother would not let him accept his death. Determined that his brother should not be dead, Niles began to play the game.

He became his brother, thinking and behaving as he would have thought and behaved. All of the "accidents" that have taken place were really murders committed by Niles. When Ada learns the truth she realizes that Niles is insane. Unable to bear the idea of the child's being institutionalized, she tries to kill both herself and the boy. At the novel's close we learn that Ada has been only partially successful. She is dead, but her intended victim has survived. We learn, also, that the game has been played out to its frightening end. Holland's personality has completely usurped Niles' personality, and cast it out permanently.

As a novel The Other makes almost no concessions to the classic gothic. It comes closest to making such a concession in one of its settings: the apple bin, reminiscent of a castle dungeon, where the twins like to play. In other respects it is a modern version of its type.

The modern gothic is, like its ancestor, a horror story. It plays upon the nerves of its reader with the intention of creating fear. Unlike the early gothics which often favored a medieval setting, the modern gothic is usually contemporary. The protagonists are generally ordinary (though not necessarily admirable people) who willingly enter or are thrust into frightening circumstances. Like its earlier version, the modern gothic makes free use of the supernatural. Depraved but human villains of Manfred's ilk are rare, however, and when they do appear they are often allied with the genuinely unnatural. In

addition, the modern gothic generally places more emphasis on characterization than its earlier counterpart. This study concerns itself with the most noteworthy differences between the modern and early gothics: the loss of a sharp distinction between good and evil, and the advent of psychological terror.

When we apply these criteria to The Other, it emerges as an excellent representative of its kind. The characterizations are finely drawn. There is a slow build up of terror, beginning with the first "accident," and rising to a peak with the knowledge of Holland's death. After this point the novel's focus changes entirely. The primary action becomes centered on the struggle between Ada and her grandson's delusion, a struggle that both Ada and Niles lose.

Whether the supernatural is involved or not is left to the reader's determination. It is made clear, however, that Niles possesses a strange psychic gift which Holland seems to lack. (After Holland has taken permanent possession of Niles he finds that he cannot summon his twin as he was summoned.) We know also that Niles tends to become too absorbed in the game, too willing to submerge himself in another's identity. These facts might well have laid the groundwork for the tragedy that followed.

Symbolically speaking, the roles of the twins are a variation upon the Jekyll and Hyde theme. While Holland lives he represents evil, and Niles represents goodness. After

Holland's death Niles takes on his traits as well as keeping his own. As is the case with Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, good and evil are embodied in a single person. Moreover, because the boys are twins, good and evil wear the same face; they are superficially indistinguishable from one another. (Although the two shared the same body, Hyde's physical appearance was much different from that of Jekyll's.) In both stories evil holds a certain fascination for its opposite. Jekyll finds Hyde attractive because he offers a disguise for his unsavory activities. Niles is inordinately fond of his brother, even though Holland seems incapable of returning his affection. Finally, in both novels evil becomes the stronger and supplants the positive nature altogether. But even this does not mean that it triumphs. Hyde and Jekyll perish together. In The Other, Holland is the victor in the war of personalities, but he has won at a great loss to himself:

"I think it was then that I began to miss him, felt the lack of him, began to seek him out. . . But he was gone, of course, he who I had been, the Other; and I became aware then of how really alone I was."⁶

At the end, Niles-Holland's crimes have been discovered, and he is committed to an asylum. Tryon's twins are irrevocably joined like the good and evil that they symbolize. When one is nullified, no matter which one it may be, the balance is upset, and without balance there can only be chaos and madness.

⁶Thomas Tryon, The Other (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), p. 179.

The juxtaposition of innocence and evil has always been a favorite ploy of the gothic romance. This is because such a situation raises two tantalizing questions: "Will the protagonist survive?" and "Will the protagonist be corrupted?" Moral degeneration presents a fascinating picture from a literary standpoint. Gothic fiction is rife with endangered young ladies who barely manage to preserve their virtue. More interesting reading is provided, however, by those who do not get away. Probably the most famous modern gothic to deal with the corruption of innocents is Henry James' The Turn of the Screw (1898). Here the vulnerability of innocence is enhanced by the fact that the victims are children. A governess comes to an English estate to take charge of two children named Miles and Sarah. In time she becomes convinced that the children are possessed by the spirits of two dead servants who are using them to further their own immorality. Certain that only she can save the youngsters, the governess sends the little girl (who seems to be the one least influenced) away from the house, and in a grim battle exhorts Miles to resist the ghost. The governess wins her battle, but Miles collapses, dead. The phantom's influence was so powerful that he was able to take the boy into death with him.

The Turn of the Screw is one of Henry James' best known works, and one of the best ghost stories ever written. Much of its power lies in the fact that it can be read as a conventional tale of spirits, or as an account of a repressed spin-

ster's delusion and the tragedy that it causes. The story is so skillfully constructed that both viewpoints are possible. When the governess first sees Peter Quint, one of the spirits, he is wearing one of his former master's suits. Ironically it is the same suit that the children's uncle was wearing when she first spoke to him, and she was romantically impressed with the man at the time. Yet we learn from Mrs. Grose, the housekeeper, that Quint was fond of wearing his master's clothes when his master was absent. In light of this fact it is not unusual that he would appear in them as a ghost. Throughout the book the governess is the only person who sees the ghosts. The children do not admit to seeing them, and neither does Mrs. Grose. But if the children were possessed they would hardly admit to it, and Mrs. Grose is depicted as an insensitive individual who could not be expected to see anything as ephemeral as a ghost no matter what the circumstances. The governess may be hallucinating or highly psychic. James gives us the opportunity to make of her what we will.

Aside from its psychological ramifications, Screw owes a great deal to the conventional gothic. The setting is a lonely house in the English countryside. The actual revelation of the ghosts is foreshadowed by the secretive behavior of the children, by Mrs. Grose's oblique references to a previous tragedy, and by the governess' sighting of a strange man who she knows should not be on the grounds. But James departs from convention while keeping his ghosts a viable part of the story. The actual terror

does not lie in the onstage action, but in the subtle implications of actions left unseen, of evil almost too great to believe. In the conventional gothic the governess would probably have defeated Peter Quint and married the children's uncle, Miles would have survived, and everyone would have lived happily from then on. Instead the half victory ends the story with a muted shock.

The children of The Turn of the Screw adhere to the classic mode in that they, the innocents, are the victims of evil. While this is often true of the modern gothic, it is also true that some notable works of recent years have tended to look askance at the purported innocence of childhood. In such short stories and novels, children are not victimized by evil, but are shown as possessing an evil all their own. Being new to life and civilization they are savages at heart, with a terrible affinity for the primitive forces of violence. A good example is Tryon's Holland Perry. Other splendid examples are William March's homicidal Rhoda in The Bad Seed, Taylor Caldwell's handsome and vicious Angelo Saint, from her book Wicked Angel, and Jane Rice's Pruitt, from the short story "The Idol of the Flies." Even more disturbing than these youngsters is Ray Bradbury's "The Small Assassin," a six months old baby who deliberately murders his parents before he is executed in turn by the family doctor.

In Henry Kuttner's short story, "Call Him Demon," the very young child is presented as an amoral being, who functions in a world so different from that of the adult that

adult standards of morality cannot be applied to it. The story is told through the mouth of an older child who is already well indoctrinated into the grown-up world. Briefly, a demon has made its home at the house of her grandparents. It has disguised itself as a human being. The children recognize it for what it is, but know that they could never make the adults understand. They serve the creature, thinking of this service as a kind of game, until the youngest child, Billy, tires of the sport. Then he ends the game by making his grandmother prey for the hungry monster. Trapped in its human form after the murder, the creature is imprisoned by the authorities who never dream that it is anything other than human. Unable to obtain the raw flesh that it needs to survive, the demon starves to death. Billy never realizes the horror of what he has done. A child's mind cannot conceive the permanence of death. It works in patterns that an adult mind could never understand, patterns that make the human child as alien a species as any demon.

Whether child or adult, young or old, each of us has his beast. Perhaps it is our saving grace that we cannot see too deeply into our natures, or those of our fellow men. If we could we might find more truth than we ever believed possible in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Man of the Crowd," a short story about the terrible burden of unspoken and unspeakable sin. In Poe's words:

"The worse heart in the world is a grosser book than Gruninger's Ortulus Animo, and perhaps it is but one of the great mercies of God that 'er lasst sich nicht lesen'." *7

Regarding the nature of evil in the modern gothic, it is important to remember that there are no strict rules concerning its presentation. Not all modern gothics portray the innocent as a monster in disguise. In some gothics, such as Stoker's Dracula, the victory over evil is clear and decisive. The more current gothics' victories are less final; perhaps this reflects a trend towards reality. Real life evils are too pervasive to be wiped out with one blow. Often the best that we can do is keep our guard up so that they cannot take us unawares.

At the same time, psychology has made us increasingly conscious of the workings of the human mind. In particular we have learned about the subconscious jungle that seems to be responsible for so much bizarre behavior. This knowledge has given our old monsters bright new coverings and new ways to terrify us.

*Translation: "...it does not permit itself to be read'." Translated by Edgar Allan Poe.

⁷"The Man of the Crowd," Terror, ed. Larry T. Shaw (New York Lancer Books, 1966), p. 48.

PART III
PSYCHOLOGICAL HORROR

The modern gothics have not really given us any new terrors. They still rely upon witches, ghosts, vampires, werewolves, and more obscure creatures for their supernatural thrills. The modern gothics generally treat them in one of two ways: as the products of insanity, or as real beings. The first is somewhat Radcliffian, but Mrs. Radcliffe's "spooks" are natural events misconstrued by a normal (if over-imaginative) brain, rather than a sick one. The second is reminiscent of Walpole, Lewis, Maturin, and scores of others in that the supernatural phenomena are treated as facts of existence, even if some people do choose not to believe in them.

The modern gothic's contribution to its subgenre, then, has not been made so much in terrors as in the way in which those terrors are presented. The haunts of the early gothic romances are frequently crude, evoking no fear of the unknown, but their "ghosts" are always explained in ways that show them to be quite earthly. At no time do we feel that we are among the characters, involved with their fears; and it is important that this involvement exist. Real horror is difficult to evoke, and easily destroyed. It does not reside

in severed limbs, buckets of gore, and other things that revolt rather than frighten. Real horror is a thing of the mind, and must be treated as such. This is what Howard P. Lovecraft, one of the most renowned of all horror story writers, and the author of Supernatural Horror in Literature (1927), one of the finest essays ever written on the subject of supernatural fiction, realized when he wrote:

. . .The true weird tale has something more than secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted figure clanking chains according to rule. A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain--a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space.⁸

These few lines sum up the essence of psychological horror: the intrusion of the ever-threatening unknown, overturning our cozy universe, and bringing unguessable chaos. Lovecraft's own writings are woven about this idea. His favorite theme is that of the unspeakable horror that lies just beyond man's feeble reality. Ancient forces of evil, cast out of our universe eons ago by powers of good, are merely waiting their chance to break through into our world again, and they do break through at times when man's foolish prying allows it. Lovecraft created a universe of his own: the cursed towns of Innsmouth and Dunwich, old families not to-

⁸Supernatural Horror in Literature (1927; rpt. New York: Dover, 1973), p. 15.

tally human, volumes of magic lore best left unread, and a pantheon of hellish deities. This gave his works a certain degree of sameness and predictability which was complicated by his failings in the realistic rendering of people and speech. However, once one becomes accustomed to his style of writing, his universe takes on a reality and depth that is seldom equalled in supernatural fiction. In his better stories the horror is built up gradually, perhaps with strange objects, warnings from rustics, and other odd happenings. The monsters themselves are suggested rather than graphically depicted. In the few instances in which Lovecraft does attempt a more thorough description the effect is quite disappointing. A good example of this sort of failure is found in his novella, The Dunwich Horror, which is an otherwise fine story. One of the monsters, Wilbur Whately by name, appears much like a cross between a man, a goat, and an octopus, while his brother is composed of squirming ropes and sucking mouths, and has half a face on top of his egg-like form. Conversely, one of Lovecraft's more successful monsters is the thing in the short story, "The Hunter of the Dark," whose appearance is left to the reader's imagination. Even more effective is the force in "The Colour Out of Space," which might best be described as some form of life devouring radiation. Lovecraft's most effective humanly oriented story is "The Thing on the Doorstep," about a man whose sorceress wife trades bodies with him against his will, and finally

traps him in her rotting corpse after he murders her. In this story the eldritch horrors familiar to Lovecraft's readers are kept at a distance, viewed second hand through the fevered memory of the doomed husband whose friends believe him insane. Lovecraft succeeds in striking at his readers' core of identity, and creates in them a very personal sort of fear.

To understand how psychological horror works it is important to take into consideration one of the quirks of human nature. Most of us are creatures of habit, if not in our personal lives then in our conception of the universe. We like to believe that nature's laws are fixed and immutable, and we accept them unthinkingly. It is only when something alters or seems to alter these patterns, or destroys them altogether that we realize how dependent we are upon a cozy, well ordered universe. We see the known being replaced by the unknown, and the unknown is always threatening. When this technique is used in a horror story the result is an off-key effect which grows and finally climaxes in some hideous revelation. Rosemary's Baby, by Ira Levin, is an example. We experience our first hint of foreboding when a friend tries to dissuade Rosemary and her husband from moving into the Bramford, an apartment house with a history of murders. But like the characters we forget our misgivings when we meet the friendly people who take the couple in their charge. Then Rosemary has a dream in which she is raped by

someone or something. During her pregnancy her solicitous friends are always bringing her strange drinks. Rosemary begins to distrust them, and her distrust increases when she learns that one of these "friends" has a last name which is an anagram of the name of a famous modern sorcerer. A last message from a dying friend convinces Rosemary that she is surrounded by witches who want her unborn child for use in a sacrifice. After the child is born Rosemary is told that it was born dead, but the sound of an infant crying leads her (and us) to the still living baby. In a circle of witches and warlocks she receives her revelation: her baby is Satan's son.

While some modern gothics have dispensed with almost all remnants of the earlier form, Levin has preserved some and added interesting reversals. The most obvious gothic element is the Bramwell itself, which is a typical gothic mansion of evil repute. Rosemary is a Radcliffian heroine. Imaginative, but also level headed and courageous, she is her audience as that audience imagines itself to be. Like Radcliffe's Emily, she hears strange noises that seem unaccountable. Her journey through the hidden passageway that separates her apartment from that of the witches is unadulterated early gothic, recalling to memory every heroine and hero who ever had cause to prowl through a hidden corridor or an underground passage. But Rosemary is not as helpless as others of her ilk have been. She does not wait for her prince

to come, but sets out to find her missing baby, armed with a knife from the kitchen. It is fortunate that she possesses such initiative for Levin does not allow her any heroes. Rosemary's husband, Guy, to whom tradition might have given the role, is himself a member of the witches' coven. Hutch, the friend whose warnings Rosemary did not heed, is killed by the witches. Rosemary is entirely on her own.

An interesting reversal of tradition takes place with the witches. Instead of reeking of the esoteric, Levin's witches are extremely prosaic. Even when Rosemary surprises them at their ceremony they dress and speak no differently from ordinary people, and therein lies the book's more terrifying quality. There is no noticeable outward difference between the good and the evil. Witches and warlocks do not walk the earth dressed in black robes and black pointed hats, or live in secluded castles in backward areas of the world. Levin's witches wear the clothing of the normal human being, and are quite at home in a modern apartment in the middle of New York City, one of the most sophisticated spots on the map. Their master, Satan, manifests himself in the guise of a baby, the traditional symbol of innocence. Levin carefully avoids the sharp distinction between good and evil that characterized the early gothics, and in so doing he also robs his readers of their security, for man cannot protect himself against his enemies if he cannot tell them from his friends. With Levin's treatment, witchcraft becomes a be-

lievable threat in mid-twentieth century Manhattan.

Less known but equally masterful is Fritz Leiber's Conjure Wife (1953), from which the movie "Burn, Witch, Burn" was adapted. Like Levin's novel, this book is concerned with witches who operate in an unlikely setting. Leiber's witches are the wives of college faculty members, using their mystic wiles to further their husbands' careers. Norman Saylor, a young college professor, discovers that his wife, Tansy, practices witchcraft in the belief that she is protecting him from other witches who would destroy him if they could. Being a rational man, Norman makes his wife dispose of all of her charms and spells. Shortly afterwards, he becomes the victim of some highly suspicious mishaps. These accidents culminate in an attack upon his home by an animated stone gargoyle, and Norman must admit that forces unknown to science are at work. The wives of his fellow faculty members hate him because he is undermining their husbands' influence at the school with his fresh, revolutionary ideas. His wife had been protecting him until he made her stop. Now they are striking back, and the once unbelieving husband must find a way to retrieve his wife's soul from a witch who has snatched it.

Leiber's novel does not borrow as heavily from early gothic literature as Levin's does. In spite of its ample thrills much of the book's thrust lies in the conflict that it sets up between the rational and what seems to be irrational,

i.e. the supernatural. The university, dispenser of all of the accepted truths about reality, provides a rather unnerving background, for living in its shadow are people who represent a different sort of reality. Furthermore, theirs is the true reality of the world: witchcraft. Norman Saylor is the rationalist seeing this other face for the first time. Leiber skillfully carries him (and the reader) from doubt, to uncertainty, to belief. Throughout the novel all of the characters behave realistically. Their actions are honest to human nature which makes the entire story all the more real and immediate.

The plights of Norman, Tansy, and Rosemary grip the reader powerfully because of the reality of the people, and of the world that they inhabit. We can believe in their fear because we can believe in them. The hoariest figures in horror literature can be given new faces if these faces are painted convincingly enough. For example, Leslie H. Whitten has written two magnificent horror novels using the familiar threats of the vampire and the werewolf. The first, Progeny of the Adder, deals with police efforts to capture a vampire who is terrorizing Washington, D.C. The second, Moon of the Wolf, is a story of lycanthropy set in the Mississippi of 1938. The lycanthrope, Andrew Rodanthe, is the last male member of the powerful and cultured Rodanthe clan. His bestial transformation emphasizes the animal that lurks in the most refined of us, and the brutality that often exists side

by side with culture in our society. Bram Stoker's Dracula also fits the mold of realistic horror, even though many of its situations have since become cliché. For obvious reasons the modern reader regards Dracula as a period piece, but Stoker was writing for his time and place. By removing his vampire man from Transylvania and placing him in what was then contemporary London, Stoker was making the vampire an immediate threat, one who can walk among us without our knowledge. The enemy among us is much more dangerous than the enemy somewhere out there.

At the other end of the scale lie the specters and monsters that are at least partly psychological, or use human weaknesses as a weapon. Perhaps the most famous work to utilize the premise of the psychological ghost is Henry James' The Turn of the Screw, whose psychological implications have been pointed out earlier. The idea of spirits as outgrowths of a twisted psyche is given increased power in Shirley Jackson's The Haunting of Hill House (1959). This book is a thorough revamping of the traditional haunted house tale. As part of an experiment attempting to prove the existence of psychic phenomena, a small group of people is brought to infamous Hill House. The psychic phenomena take the form of some invisible force that reveals itself through violent action. One of the characters, a neurotic spinster named Eleanor, feels a strange kinship for the house, and becomes convinced that it wants her to remain there with it. In the end she commits suicide by

crashing her car into a tree. But her final thoughts show that she realizes that she has been manipulated. The house found her weakness in her alienation and desire to belong, and played upon that weakness until it destroyed her.

The Haunting of Hill House is conventionally gothic. We have the gloomy mansion, suitably nervous guests, and an invisible monster. As is common in modern works of the subgenre, we learn about the psychologies of the individual characters. We learn a great deal about Eleanor in particular, as she is the pivotal character who will fall under the house's influence. Hill House itself is a character in this novel. The title describes not only the haunted nature of the house, but its haunting nature, the fact that it possesses and controls people. Hill House is repeatedly termed insane and diseased, and so it is. But we must wonder whether it possesses an insanity of its own, or whether it distorts and reflects the fears and desires to any who come within range of its power.

For those who prefer their spirits to be the returned dead, Haunting may be a disappointment. In this case, Richard Matheson's Hell House may offer more satisfaction. This ghost is quite genuine, but he manifests himself through well-planned psychological assaults. It is fitting that he is defeated psychologically, by being made to face the inferiority complex that dogged him all through his life. Similar warfare takes place in E. R. Wakefield's short story, "The Red Lodge," in which the narrator must wage a mental battle against malevolent invisible creatures that want to destroy him and his

family. Rather conventional in other ways, this story also raises the idea that ghosts are at least partially subjective phenomena. Whoever sees one has in some way willed it to appear. Be that as it may the spirits are no less genuine for needing their audience's cooperation.

In addition to its use in fiction, psychic phenomena have become the subject of scientific study. It is interesting to speculate on what might happen to the face of supernatural literature if evidence were to appear tomorrow that proved, beyond any possible doubt, the existence of ghosts. We might find that much of their popularity was due to the fact that we believed just as strongly that they did not exist as that they did. When monsters become fact they tend to lose much of their value as entertainment. It is one thing to think that dear late Uncle Sydney, whom we never treated well, might be able to come back, and quite another thing to know that he can. If too many of today's haunts were discovered to have their feet planted too firmly in reality (and not insanity), tomorrow's writers of gothic fiction might be hard pressed to find successors for them.

CONCLUSION

In the long run, whatever their differences in treatment, the early and the modern gothics share one thing in common: they are the literary embodiments of our fears. Through them we can relive at a distance terrors that were very real to our forefathers, and terrors that are still very real to us today. The most frequently used embodiment of such terrors in horror fiction today is that of ghostly or demonic possession. The first, spirit possession, seems to appear most often of the two, in the pages of such books as Ramona Stewart's The Possession of Joel Delaney, and Dragon Under the Hill by Gordon Honeycombe. The current literary epitome of demonic possession is William Blatty's The Exorcist. The popularity of this brand of gothic terror may lie in society's new interest in the fundamentals of religion, in the spiritual aspects of good and evil. For the modern reader, the possibilities of such an invasion of personality are novel, frightening, exciting. Living in a world that seems determined to make a digit out of him, the reader finds such possession a particularly intimate threat to his identity, much more so than the machine because it is an intangible threat. By contrast, werewolves, vampires, and

similar creatures are much safer, much more removed from us.

Whatever the forms, real or imagined, the threat that they signify remains the same: the unknown. Beneath all of his civilization, man still clings to his primitive fear of whatever he does not understand, and the effective tale of terror works upon this fear. H. P. Lovecraft's most successful monsters, for example, are successful because they are so difficult to imagine, to translate into normal terms. They ring of the incontrovertibly alien, the half-heard sounds in the darkness, the presences that we feel but never see. They are nightmares at the most basic level. And it is this evocation of the unknown that real horror is dependent upon, and not gallons of spilled blood which is revolting at best. The good horror tale inspires fear, not revulsion. Our reaction should be like that of the frightened child who covers his eyes, but then peeps through the spread fingers. We are afraid, but fascinated.

That is the effect that the monsters seem to have upon us: a combination of repulsion and attraction. Men and monsters seem to go together. We need them. We need the delicious fear that they give us. If science were to do away with all of the old terrors we would probably be forced to invent new ones to fill the gap, for it is a sad world that has no tinge of the mysterious, that is completely mundane and commonplace. Perhaps we should be thankful that we still have use for that old Cornish prayer:

"From ghosties and ghoulies and long-leggety beasties,
From things that go bump in the night,
Good Lord deliver us!"

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