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**The Dynamics of Terror:
or, The Grotesque Character of Gothic Fiction**

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of
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ABSTRACT

The Dynamics of Terror: or, The Grotesque Character of Gothic Fiction

David Dalgleish

This essay examines the use of the grotesque to create terror in Gothic fiction in the late 18th century and throughout the 19th century. After using Mervyn Peake's Titus Groan and Gormenghast to establish the central role of the grotesque in fully successful Gothic texts, the focus then shifts to a survey of Gothic's early period and its 19th century refinements, demonstrating the role of the grotesque in various key works. In the earlier texts, underdeveloped grotesque characters are crucial to the manufacture of terrifying moments; in the later texts, fully developed grotesques create an ongoing mood of terror. In either case, an emphasis on the grotesque nature of Gothic fiction enables a better understanding of how these works generate their emotional impact in the reader.

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1. Perceptions of Gothic

"With Melmoth we walk the corridors of Otranto," writes Neil Gaiman in his comic book The Sandman (Doll's House: Part Six 6). The Sandman is probably the most highly acclaimed comic book of the 1990s, or, for that matter, of any other decade. The quote is taken from a dream sequence in issue 15; the dreamer is named Zelda. She lives with her lover, Chantal, in a house featuring a number of odd individuals (a yuppie couple called Barbie and Ken; a drag queen; and a man named Gilbert who is also a Dream realm called Fiddler's Green and/or G. K. Chesterton). Chantal and Zelda wear wedding dresses à la Miss Havisham and, in very Gothic fashion, collect dead spiders--indeed, they "possess the largest collection of stuffed spiders in private hands on the Eastern seaboard" (Part Two 2). The Sandman is often concerned with Dreams (always capitalized, of course), stories and storytelling, myths, history, and the other things which shape human consciousness, which affect our perceptions of who we are. Zelda's dream is one in a sequence--glimpses into the dreams of all the house's inhabitants. With his usual acumen, Gaiman obliquely reveals truths about his characters through these glimpses of dreaming. Zelda's dreamscape features graveyards and skulls and faded wedding dresses and spiders. Among these images, her dreaming mind thinks (rather ungrammatically) of her relationship with Chantal: "Chantal comes along and shows me she's my soul sister me and her true Gothic heroines secret brides of the faceless slaves of the forbidden house of the nameless night of the castle of dread desire" (6). And then: "With Melmoth we walk the corridors of Otranto . . ."

I think that little eight-word phrase can tell us all sorts of interesting things about Gothic fiction, if we extrapolate a little. Melmoth and Otranto refer to Charles Maturin's Melmoth the Wanderer and Horace Walpole's The Castle of Otranto--the generally accepted endpoint and starting point, respectively, of classic Gothic fiction. Melmoth never walked the corridors of Otranto; they are two separate novels. Gaiman is collapsing the first phase of the Gothic genre into one phrase, the implicit idea being that Otranto and Melmoth were

both part of the same literary space, both inhabited the same set of Gothic parameters, and that, in a figurative sense, Melmoth does "walk the corridors of Otranto," if we take "the corridors of Otranto" to be representative of the conventions of Gothic, established by Walpole in 1764. This seems a reasonable assertion: had there been no Otranto, it is doubtful that Melmoth would ever have walked at all. Furthermore, Melmoth who walks is opposed to the static castle corridors: walking suggests the range and movement offered by Gothic, while the corridors suggest that this movement has circumscribed limits. One can wander through many rooms of the mind within the Gothic confines, but one can never go beyond those particular rooms--one can never escape the limits of the castle.

Gaiman has managed to suggest many aspects of the entire Gothic genre--at least, for those familiar with its history--in just a few words. Why? Why does a reclusive lesbian living in Florida in 1990 say that she--not to mention "we"--walks with a relatively unknown literary character, over 150 years out of date, through a slightly less unknown literary castle, over 200 years out of date? With one throwaway phrase, Gaiman brings a dated set of conventions deep into the consciousness of a thoroughly modern character. The point is, as it often is in The Sandman, that old and half-forgotten stories still shape who we are today; they are still relevant. Melmoth and Otranto still have something to say. They are not, Gaiman seems to be saying, trivial works of marginal interest to literary scholars, but works which on a profound level of the human mind--the level of dreams, desire, the subconscious--are still alive and meaningful for Zelda, and not just Zelda, for it is "we" who "with Melmoth walk the corridors of Otranto."

I have chosen this quotation to begin this essay, then, because it raises a number of related points which I want to explore at length: 1) classic works of Gothic fiction utilize a coherent, stable set of conventions which allow us to conflate the first and last novels of Gothic's heyday because both are built on the same fundamental principles, 2) Gothic fiction still has something to say to us about human character, something which keeps it interesting to us 200 years later, and, 3) Gothic's fictional methodology has been adapted

by contemporary authors, and is a significant aspect of important twentieth century works. Aside from alluding to Gothic fiction, Gaiman also uses some of its fictional tools: the story of The Sandman is woven, quite deliberately, from many strands of literary history: myth, fairy tale, Shakespearean drama, realism, Gothic, ghost story, horror fiction, urban fantasy, and others. I would not go so far as to say that The Sandman is a Gothic work, but Gothic is one of the constituent elements, and I would go so far as to say that it is an important twentieth century work. More than any other work I have read, it qualifies as a mythology for the twentieth century. The presence of Gothic can also be found in the writings of those more widely acknowledged as significant twentieth century authors: Shirley Jackson, Isak Dinesen, Umberto Eco, Salman Rushdie, Iain Banks, Angela Carter. There are others, but the point is that Gothic is still alive and kicking and screaming in the pages of contemporary literature.

Aside from its influence on, and continuing utility for, today's authors, the relevance of Gothic is also apparent in the ever-growing body of critical work surrounding the genre. Gothic is as hot a topic for critical discussion today as it has ever been. Circular though it may be, we can say that it's important to talk about Gothic in 1997 because people are talking about in 1997.

Critical discussion of Gothic seems divided into two camps. The first, much larger, group is composed of those critics who look at Gothic for what could be called its 'external' merits; the second group discusses its 'internal' merits. It is this division that Manuel Aguirre has in mind when he says: "While it is beyond dispute that social factors are necessary to an understanding of the horror (or any other) genre, they help only in so far as they constitute aspects, not causes of the phenomenon" (84; Aguirre's emphasis). Aguirre makes a point crucial to the way I want to look at Gothic:

Unquestionably, all around the literature of terror there is a background--historical, social, cultural, psychological, religious--which is a sine qua non condition for understanding the genre; but conditions alone do not explain. If we seek that which constitutes the central theme, the essence of horror fiction [or Gothic], we must rely on parameters intrinsic to the genre (2; Aguirre's emphasis; my parentheses).

Critics, thus far, have--possibly due to the current prevalence of New Historicist criticism--thoroughly and efficiently analyzed the external aspects of Gothic, the cultural background that shaped it. Thus we have critics like E. J. Clery giving a persuasive Marxist/historicist analysis of The Castle of Otranto--"the supernatural in [the novel] figures [a] . . . contradiction between the traditional claims of landed property and the new claims of the private family" (77)--and Fred Botting interpreting Dracula's wanton vampires "as a particularly modern sexual threat to cultural mores and taboos: they are modern visions of epidemic contagions from the past" (148). Both Clery and Botting are persuasive, and at its best--i.e. Terry Castle on the spectralization of the Other in The Mysteries of Udolpho--this 'external' criticism is enjoyable and illuminating. But it doesn't tell us why we would want to read Gothic novels (assuming that we do want to read them). I am convinced by Castle's argument that Udolpho expresses a shift in Western attitudes towards death, and that, in its time, Udolpho was so widely read in part because it was a paradigmatic expression of the changing attitudes. But those are, as Aguirre would say, "aspects" or "background" to the novel; Castle's essay, excellent as it is, doesn't tell us what is inherently interesting about Radcliffe's novel.

Likewise, recent critics who have taken a more textual (rather than historical) approach to Gothic, often pass over the question of what is inherently interesting about Gothic novels, and proceed right away to poststructural analysis. Thus we have Maggie Kilgour showing the ways in which authors like Matthew Lewis and Mary Shelley write themselves into The Monk and Frankenstein, and how they lose control of their narratives, and we have Vijay Mishra trying to show that Gothic and postmodernism share similar concerns: "the manner in which [Gothic] is being read now . . . arises out of a [deep] sense of recognition between the problematic of representation in the postmodern and its prior expression in the Gothic" (256-7). These two critics typify the way deconstructive critics approach Gothic fiction: Kilgour deconstructs novels to show us the hidden authorial presence, Mishra sees an early deconstructive impulse at work in Gothic texts. Either way,

these approaches, however accurate their arguments may be (I have my doubts about both), fail to tell us what is intrinsically valuable in the Gothic texts. Again, we have critical discussion that is based on extra-textual factors--Kilgour 'finds' Mary Shelley in the text of Frankenstein based on our knowledge of her life, while Mishra's observations have more to do with the development of the history of ideas rather than why a reader might find Frankenstein an exciting, gripping story.

The bulk of Gothic criticism, then, has focused on all the important elements surrounding the creation of these texts--but what is important about the creations themselves? One might argue that the lack of emphasis on the intrinsic merits of Gothic fiction indicates that it has little or no intrinsic merit. But would there be any critical discussion of Gothic if this were the case? Would anyone bother wading through these long novels simply to explore the socio-political-economic-psychosexual-historical factors that shape them? I don't think so. On the other hand, it is readily apparent upon surveying Gothic criticism that while certain works have received the stamp of approval as 'still worth reading,' others are considered simply as tedious research material. There is a hierarchy of Gothic texts. General critical consensus has established certain works as worth discussion, while others are mentioned only occasionally. The Gothic A-list is: The Castle of Otranto, Beckford's Vathek, Radcliffe's The Mysteries of Udolpho and The Italian, William Godwin's Caleb Williams, Matthew Lewis's The Monk, Frankenstein, Melmoth the Wanderer, and Poe's best-known Gothic stories. The B-list includes: Godwin's St Leon, Radcliffe's A Sicilian Romance and The Romance of the Forest, Percy Shelley's St Irvyne and Zastrozzi, Charlotte 'Rosa Matilda' Dacre's Zofloya, or The Moor, Clara Reeve's The Old English Baron, Charles Brockden Brown's Wieland, or The Transformation, John Polidori's "The Vampyre."

The Castle of Otranto receives so much attention because it founded the genre; most critics who discuss it acknowledge that it is hardly an excellent novel. As for the others, why do we discuss those particular novels? Why The Monk and not Zofloya? Many of the

external aspects of Gothic could be discussed with reference to either. Zofloya, for example, is an example of the increasing pessimism evident in Gothic fiction, and while Christian theology is present as a moral framework, it often comes across as superfluous. Another way in which Zofloya is a representative Gothic text is its ambivalent attitude toward marriage--perhaps a corollary of the growing religious doubt. Almost every married couple in the novel is a poor match; if one partner is good, the other is evil, or both are evil and at odds with one another. The one successful marriage in the novel is utterly ruined by other characters. A New Historicist could make as much of this novel as of Frankenstein or The Monk, but just about no one discusses Zofloya. There is a reason for this--it's not a good novel. It's not the worst Gothic novel (that honour, at least among the above-listed works, belongs to Shelley's St Irvyne), but it is still poor fiction. And that's why critics discuss Frankenstein and The Monk instead. They are the better novels. This is a tacit assumption in Gothic criticism, but few critics have really explored why certain works have endured better than others. Some Gothic novels are superior examples of the genre, and, more importantly, some Gothic novels are inherently interesting works of fiction, regardless of genre. There must be reasons why readers and critics gravitate toward certain Gothic works but discard others. But as Mishra himself remarks, "the category reader has been curiously missing from most of the major studies of the Gothic" (12); it is also absent from his study. Edwin F. Block, Jr. pinpoints the basic problem:

Although Gothic and related forms have been anatomized or classified numerous times in recent years, there remains the need to consider the phenomenon from the dual perspective of its psychological motive and its literary convention. What identifies the Gothic and its various offshoots as a coherent set of conventions? What in the attraction of the mode or the challenge of its conventions makes the Gothic capable of perennially generating new and often exciting subspecies and individual texts? (xi).

These are indeed the questions which require further exploration. What is it about certain Gothic novels that makes them superior? What does Matthew Lewis do with the conventions, making The Monk a classic of its kind, that Percy Shelley does not, making Zastrozzi the epitome of bad Gothic?

As the foundation on which I want to build, I would like to briefly summarize the two works of criticism most germane to my argument, that seem to successfully identify some of the strengths and weaknesses of Gothic. The first is Elizabeth Napier's The Failure of Gothic. Napier argues that Gothic is a failed genre, inherently flawed, and the critics who like to make so much of its contradictions are ignoring the fact that those contradictions are simply the result of bad writing. In many ways, Napier's argument is incontrovertible. Regarding characterization in Gothic fiction, she writes:

The helmet and the sword of The Castle of Otranto, because of a reduction of meaning in other parts of the narrative, do not function as true symbols; they are "not phallic symbols because the characters have no lives to which they can refer" (Kiely 41). The Gothic, indeed, repeatedly fails to operate on this more complex double level of significance. Symbolic equivalents or parallels are discouraged because they are supported on no other plane of narrative (37).

While much has been made about the symbolic psycho-sexual meanings of Gothic fiction, with its dark and damp dungeons, its gigantic swords, its sadistic villains, its images of repression and confinement, Napier highlights the important point: whatever symbolism may be theoretically present is not actually present in the texts because they generally fail to create any sort of symbolic resonance. Again, the psychoanalytic approach is an approach that fails to explain what makes the works interesting for the reader, rather than the critic well-versed in current literary theory. It is because of such disjunctures--symbolic intent vs. flat affect--that Napier pronounces the Gothic 'failed:' "rent by conflicting intentions, attracted to the disparities it creates, it straddles--usually unsuccessfully, because it fails to confront the significance of its own position--two essentially juxtaposed ways of narrating and characterizing" (72).

I think Napier is right to call Gothic a failed genre. Unlike other literary fields--i.e. nineteenth century women's writing, twentieth century fantasy--Gothic is not a treasure-trove of forgotten masterpieces waiting to be plundered and brought to light by the diligent scholar. The obsolete Gothic works are obsolete with good reason--not because of the politics of canon-formation. It was a genre of limited potential; most of it is formulaic and unengaging. But it did have some potential. Even Napier will admit that it was "usually

unsuccessful," which is of course a reluctant admission that it was 'occasionally successful.' Some works did manage, however tenuously, to bridge the two "juxtaposed ways of narrating and characterizing;" it is because they bridge those juxtapositions that the best Gothic works can still be read for pleasure today, and not simply as homework.

George Haggerty's Gothic Fiction/Gothic Form accounts for certain Gothic works' ability to solve the problem of contradictory ways of narrating. Haggerty outlines the goal of his book thus: "Only by examining the fundamental formal challenge of Gothic fiction and the manner in which it is answered by a variety of Gothic writers can we begin to establish its generic identity and to approach its true nature" (10). The formal challenge of Gothic fiction was to unite the 'objective' realism of the novel with the 'subjective' fantasy of the tale. Gothic authors had to address the problem of combining the lengthy form of novelists like Fielding and Richardson, where the standard was realism, with the shorter form of myth/folklore/fairy tale, where people can sell their souls to the Devil, meet the Wandering Jew, be scared out of remote castles by Bleeding Nuns--a form where anything goes. Haggerty concludes that the best works of Gothic solve this challenge by finding a form of the novel that incorporates the tale into its structure:

Walpole attested to the limitations of the novel because he felt the need to subvert our naturalistic expectations. Maturin accomplishes this, as Lewis attempted to, by attending to subjective horror so closely that it starts to attain a kind of objective force of its own. The tale thus offers an alternative to the conventions Walpole decried and acts as a necessary reminder that Gothic experience and the novel form were not automatically incompatible. Once novelistic techniques were shaped to the affective intentions of Gothic writers, however, a new range of expressive possibilities emerged. It is almost as if in liberating Maturin from the strictures of the novel, the tale releases him from the confines of objective reality as well. This release is of crucial importance to Gothic fiction. For only when Gothic writers have a clear sense of the formal properties most suited to their affective intention as separate from the conventions of the early novel, can they achieve the range of expressivity they seek (33).

Haggerty seems to me to have put his finger on the formal methods by which Gothic can be successful--of particular importance to later writers like James in The Turn of the Screw.

Haggerty addresses Napier's concerns about Gothic's problems in narrating. I would like to deal specifically with the issue of characterizing in Gothic fiction: how it

succeeds, how it fails, how it is used by later writers. This essentially involves a generic study of major Gothic studies in terms of characterization, in much the same way that Haggerty undertakes a generic study in terms of form. In discussing his approach, he remarks, "more important at the moment than the question of evaluation, it seems to me, are ways of coming to understand difference and similarity in Gothic works, of perceiving for instance, why certain Gothic devices 'work' and why others do not" (11). I fully share this sentiment, except that to show how certain devices work and others do not, is in effect to evaluate them, at least if we consider devices like form and character to be important qualities in fiction. The task that will be undertaken here is to explain why character 'works' in certain Gothic texts, but does not in others. As Tzvetan Todorov remarks, "when we examine works of literature from the perspective of genre, we engage in a very particular enterprise: we discover a principle operative in a number of texts, rather than what is specific about each of them" (3). Such is my goal.

But before entering upon a generic survey, it is important to establish the qualities, or as Darko Suvin might say, "the necessary and sufficient conditions" (7), that make a work Gothic. That Gothic exists as a genre is pretty much self-evident. We recognize it when we see it; we can even spot a Gothic 'moment' in otherwise non-Gothic texts. Gothic writing has a distinctive atmosphere that makes it readily identifiable. Of course, there will always be debate about certain marginal works which may or may not be Gothic, the overlapping boundaries of different genres being an inevitable obstacle to attempts at generic classification. But we can, I think, identify certain hallmarks of pure Gothic writing, by looking at two examples of Gothic 'moments' in otherwise non-Gothic works.

First, Mary Wollstonecraft's The Wrongs of Woman; or, Maria. This uncompleted work, is for the most part, a proto-feminist Sentimental novel located in an asylum. We hear the stories of how two inmates, and one nurse, ended up in the dismal place, and romance blooms between the two inmates. This is Sentimental fiction, albeit dark Sentimental fiction. This is made apparent because there is one rather Gothic event in the

novel; its marked contrast with the rest of the novel shows us just how much the rest of the novel isn't very Gothic. The narrator has been drugged, her baby kidnapped, and she is being removed by chaise to the asylum in which the frame narrative takes place:

How long I slept I know not I was probably roused to recollection by some one thundering at a huge, unwieldy gate. Attempting to ask where I was, my voice died away, and I tried to raise it in vain, as I have done in a dream. I looked for my babe with affright

The gates opened heavily, and the sullen sound of many locks and bolts drawn back, grated on my very soul, before I was appalled by the creaking of the dismal hinges, as they closed after me. The gloomy pile was before me, half in ruins; some of the aged trees of the avenue were cut down, and left to rot where they fell; and as we approached some mouldering steps, a monstrous dog darted forwards to the length of his chain, and barked and growled infernally.

The door was opened slowly, and a murderous visage peeped out, with a lantern The door of the chaise flew back, the stranger put down his lantern, and clasped his dreadful arms around me I was carried up the steps into a close-shut hall. A candle flaring in the socket, scarcely dispersed the darkness, though it displayed to me the ferocious countenance of the wretch who held me (183-4).

There are three noteworthy differences between this and the bulk of the novel--three differences which tell us we have, however briefly, departed the world of the Sentimental and entered the realm of the Gothic.

First, the intensification of language to the borderline of hysteria. Sentimental fiction is usually characterized by emotive writing, but Gothic goes to the extreme; Robert F. Geary aptly points out that "the Gothic--in its most savage--does not intrude on the sentimental: it overwhelms it" (61). As usual, this overwhelming, this intensification, is largely achieved through the adjectives: "sullen sound," "dismal hinges," "gloomy pile," "monstrous dog," "barked and growled infernally," "murderous visage," "dreadful arms," "ferocious countenance." The cumulative effect is to show us a character in the throes of extreme sensation. This extreme language is a very Gothic quality, as has been noted en passant by a number of critics, but has perhaps not been given as much recognition as it deserves. Napier, for one, says of Maturin that his "urge to represent extremes dominates his writing, and is accomplished . . . by a fairly simple additive method: Maturin reiterates with a second adjective, noun, or verb a condition or quality of the first word that is close enough to give the reader the effect not of differentiation but of sameness, of intensification

of a single quality" (63). And Mishra remarks of Percy Shelley's awful Gothic: "the feverish language is pure Gothic" (242). Wollstonecraft's method is similar: she piles on near-synonymous adjectives, as Maturin would later do, to create a feverish atmosphere that is indeed "pure Gothic," quite unlike the rest of the work, well-represented by the following excerpt:

Pity, and the forlorn seriousness of adversity, have both been considered as dispositions favourable to love, while satirical writers have attributed the propensity to the relaxing effect of idleness; what chance then had Maria of escaping, when pity, sorrow, and solitude all conspired to soften her mind, and nourish romantic wishes, and, from a natural progress, romantic expectations? (98).

The conventional images and props are the second recognizably Gothic quality of the first passage: a candle flaring in darkness, a gloomy keep, mouldering steps and aged trees, a hideous and infernal dog, a stranger with a murderous visage. Appearing in close proximity to one another as they do, these items signal our arrival into the Gothic universe. Critics are fond of pointing out that it is superficial to identify a genre by its stock elements, and that it is necessary to explain it on some deeper level. David Punter, for one, says, "When thinking of the Gothic novel, a set of characteristics springs readily to mind And indeed, if this were the only literary meaning of Gothic, the term would be reasonably easy to describe and define" (1-2); in other words, Gothic is not easy to define because the characteristics that spring immediately to mind are insufficient for purposes of definition. This is true, but nonetheless, those characteristics are not irrelevant. After all, if there were no stock devices used by a group of authors, there wouldn't be any genres at all. We can generally tag a work as heroic fantasy if it has any four of the following six devices: dragons, elves, wizards, pseudo-feudal social system, prophecies, or a Dark Lord. Similarly superficial tests could be designed for science fiction, detective stories, Victorian ghost stories, etc. Stock elements should not be the only criteria by which we decide upon a work's generic status, but they are certainly important, and are the acid test used by most readers.

The third Gothic quality is Wollstonecraft's attempt to make us feel the character's plight, to make us share her terror. Haggerty claims that "the most obvious yet most profound fact about Gothic fiction [is that] its primary formal aim is the emotional and psychological involvement of the reader" (11). Haggerty has introduced the category reader into his argument, and his statement is, I think, essential to an understanding of Gothic. Gothic does indeed try to involve us emotionally and psychologically. Indeed, it desires to elicit a specific response, which the authors themselves had a name for: "terror." Naturally, you won't feel this while reading the passage from Wollstonecraft because it is taken out of context, but I think the intent is obvious. We are supposed to empathize with Maria; she is the reader's entry point into the text, and the text functions in such a way that we should ideally share in her emotions. In the above passage she is terrified—ergo, we are supposed to feel terrified.

What makes a work (or part of a work) Gothic, then, is the attempt to make the reader feel terror through the manipulation of a set of recognizable conventions articulated in extreme prose. A second example, from Sheridan Le Fanu's "Carmilla," demonstrates these same qualities. As with The Wrongs of Woman, most of "Carmilla" is distinct from its occasional Gothic episodes. The tale is mostly written in Le Fanu's customary style: an even-handed, detailed, naturalistic prose. The contrast between this prose and the nature of the events being described is one of his many strengths: "in the case of Le Fanu . . . it is the naturalistic fidelity with which [he] describe[s] the physical contexts of the other-worldly intrusions which makes those intrusions so effective" (Cavaliero 55). But in "Carmilla," the contrast is not just a discrepancy between realistic description and non-realistic events, but rather a contrast between two distinct writing styles. For all that the story is set in a remote European castle, or "schloss," and narrated by a young virginal heroine, it is not Gothic. The conventions are in place, certainly, in the scenery and the character types, but our heroine, Laura, is quite boring, and her narration lacks the fevered melodrama typical of the Gothic heroine. The Gothic-ness in this story belongs to

Carmilla; her actions, and her 'voice'--meaning both her actual words and the narrative's tone when she is present--is extreme and feverish. à la Maturin, à la Percy Shelley.

Consider this:

She used to place her pretty arms around my neck, draw me to her, and laying her cheek to mine. murmur with her lips near my ear. "Dearest, your little heart is wounded; think me not cruel because I obey the irresistible law of my strength and weakness; if your dear heart is wounded, my wild heart bleeds with yours. In the rapture of my enormous humiliation I live in your warm life, and you shall die--die, sweetly die--into mine. I cannot help it; as I draw near you, you, in your turn, will draw near to others, and learn the rapture of that cruelty, which yet is love; so, for a while, seek to know no more of me and mine, but trust me with all your living spirit

Sometime after an hour of apathy, my strange and beautiful companion would take my hand and hold it with a fond pressure, renewed again and again: blushing softly, gazing in my face with languid and burning eyes, and breathing so fast that her dress rose and fell with a tumultuous respiration it was hateful and yet overpowering; and with gloating eyes she drew me to her, and her hot lips travelled along my cheeks in kisses; and she would whisper, almost in sobs, "You are mine. you shall be mine, you and I are one for ever" (263-4).

Le Fanu is a writer who usually exhibits considerable restraint in his prose; these luridly emotional passages are quite incongruous. Carmilla, the vampiress, is the intrusion of the supernatural; her difference is emphasized by her wildly emotional behaviour, and the transferral of that wild emotion onto Laura's usually dry narrative tone. From what had previously been a typical Le Fanu ghost story narrative, despite its Gothic setting, we have suddenly moved into the Gothic realm. It is in the experience of the characters and the language that the Gothic potential of a setting becomes actualized. It is not enough simply to toss in a remote castle here and a remote father there: the Gothic language and character-experience are required.

As in The Wrongs of Woman, we can see that Gothic language is achieved by an intensification of language based on melodramatic adjectives and general hyperbole: "irresistible law of my strength and weakness," "wild heart," "enormous humiliation," "gloating eyes," "tumultuous respiration." And Carmilla's frantic musings on love/death, and her sudden shift from languorous apathy to lover's ardour, move the tone even further toward the level of hysteria.

Apart from the intensified, melodramatic language, there is the issue of the character's experience. As with Maria in the passage from Wollstonecraft, it is with Laura that our sympathies lie--it is with our heroine and narrator that we are supposed to empathize. As she is caressed and kissed by her 'friend' Carmilla, Laura feels "a strange tumultuous excitement that was pleasurable, ever and anon, mixed with a vague sense of fear and disgust" (264). This is Laura's mixed response to the lesbian overtones of Carmilla's 'friendship.' We, as readers, are probably expected to share that response, at once repelled by the idea, but strangely attracted to it. Naturally, we as late twentieth century readers are not repelled by the idea of lesbianism, so Le Fanu's shock tactics are no longer particularly shocking. When the story was written, the use of lesbianism as a metaphor for the sexual perversion of the vampire may have unsettled readers; today we are more likely to be interested in trying to discover some sort of pro-lesbian subtext--which one can do, but I would not want to make any claims for Le Fanu's intentions.

What does seem evident about his intentions--or, if one wants to be critically correct about these things, the "text's" intentions--is that Le Fanu is trying to implicate us in Laura's response. It is difficult to build much in the way of suspense, terror, horror, sympathy, revulsion, fear, if we are not involved as readers with the character's emotions. But what emotion is it that Laura is experiencing? What emotion does "Carmilla" elicit in the reader (for it is that category of 'reader' with which I am concerned)? In a word: "terror." The same emotion that Wollstonecraft's Maria feels, and which we as readers ideally feel, in our limited identification with the character. But what is terror? What does it mean to feel terrified?

Terror is an emotion which has been important to Gothic authors from the outset: Walpole invokes it in the first preface to *Otranto*: "Terror, the author's principal engine, prevents the story from ever languishing; and it so often contrasted by pity, that the mind is kept up in a constant vicissitude of interesting passions" (8; my emphasis). My recollection of reading the novel is that my mind was kept up in a more or less constant state of

boredom, but the point is that Walpole wants to make us feel terrified. It is not horror, not fear, but "terror" that is the goal. If Walpole alone had made this claim, we might justly pass over it as incidental. But Ann Radcliffe revisited the same theme in the well-known essay "On the Supernatural in Poetry:" "Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them" (qtd Williams 72). Terror is opposed to horror--a useful critical distinction, and one to which critics have returned, although with little consistency. Terror is what the Gothic novelists aimed to evoke--and as Robert Kiely points out, "to know what writers thought they were doing is helpful in determining, with historical hindsight, what they actually seem to have done" (3), while Williams tells us that "Radcliffe's intuitive grasp of qualitative differences between horror and terror is supported by psychoanalytic investigation of these two feelings" (74)--so it is worth examining this idea of terror further.

Aguirre and James Twitchell, both shrewd critics of the horror genre, have come to the same conclusion, inverting Radcliffe's claim that Gothic fiction evokes terror. For them, it is horror fiction that evokes the more 'sublime' emotion; Aguirre writes:

'Horror' bears on the experience itself of facing the undesirable, the shocking, the revolting: a confrontation with evil. 'Terror,' on the other hand, compounds the two, and designates the experience of facing evil plus the 'surmise' of something more not directly perceived, a threat. The thing that terrifies us has a depth that the horrible lacks; 'horror' involves a recognition, 'terror' expresses that and, additionally, an ignorance (86; Aguirre's emphasis).

That element of "depth" highlights, I think, the crucial difference between terror and horror: it is terror that becomes internalized, that lingers with us, that resonates, while horror provides a brief thrill, a shiver runs down our spine, and then is gone. But Aguirre goes on to say that "our genre has undergone an evolution [i.e. from Gothic to horror] in the course of which it has moved from a concern with, largely, horror, to a preoccupation with terror" (86). Here, he seems to agree with Twitchell, who writes, "Terror is external and short-lived; horror is more internal and long-lasting This is why, I think, horror novels, horror movies, horror myths are never really satisfying intellectually, for we never

get them under control" (16). Twitchell has switched the terms around, but in essence he and Aguirre say the same thing: the contemporary horror genre achieves an affect that is more powerful and long-lasting than the more trivial affect of the older fiction--namely, Gothic.

I disagree in two crucial respects: 1) horror is not inherently more powerful or enduring than terror, and vice versa; they are simply different, and, 2) it is the older Gothic fiction that achieves resonance and depth, while the power of contemporary horror is achieved in another way. This is the difference between Ridley Scott's Alien and The Monk, William Friedkin's The Exorcist and Frankenstein. Noël Carroll, another excellent horror critic, has, for me, explained the exact nature of contemporary horror's effect. He says, first, that "the horror genre . . . is essentially linked with a specific affect--specifically, that from which it takes its name" (15). I agree, and will argue that Gothic is linked with an affect--specifically, terror--which its early authors claimed for it. Carroll argues that horror is about the monster, the Other, the unknown, the alien--that which is external to our understanding, and from which we shrink in disgust and horror and total fear: "Within the context of the horror narrative, the monsters are identified as impure and unclean. They are putrid or moldering things, or they hail from oozing places, or they are made of dead flesh or rotting flesh, or chemical waste, or are associated with vermin, disease, or crawling things. They are not only quite dangerous, but they also make one's skin creep" (23). What is horrifying is that the object of horror is completely outside our own experience; it is a thing apart; it is the unknowable Other. One may argue that horror may be inspired by such creatures as Jaws or Norman Bates--the former part of the world of nature, the latter a human being--and therefore not unknowable Others, but Carroll's counter-argument is convincing: "their presentation in the fictions they inhabit turn them effectively into fantastical beings" (37). This is precisely the point: horror renders the object of horror, regardless of what it may be under normal circumstances, into something alien to the human mind. Horror is created by an object, not a subject. Terror, on the

contrary, is subjective; it is created within a human mind. It is so disturbing because it is, in some sense, known and familiar. Alien and The Exorcist are horrifying because they successfully create antagonists that are thoroughly Other: one a mindless, ravenous alien creature with acid for blood and an incomprehensible biological system; the other a Mesopotamian demon which incarnates Christian evil. You don't encounter them while walking down the street, nor can you empathize with them by thinking, "But for the Grace of God, there go I." There is an essential difference between me and the alien, between you and Regan's demon, or, for that matter, between us and Norman Bates.

Carroll's definition of horror, I think, will (unlike most definitions) hold up when tested against a wide range of twentieth century horror. To return to the question at hand, what then is terror? Terror has Aguirre's depth, terror has Twitchell's internal and long-lasting affect, and when Carroll speaks of tales of dread, his words are an apt description of terror:

I do think there is an important distinction between th[e] type of story . . . which I want to call tales of dread [and which I want to call Gothic] . . . and horror stories. Specifically, the emotional response they elicit seems to be quite different from that engendered by art-horror. The uncanny event which tops off such stories causes a sense of unease and awe, perhaps of momentary anxiety and foreboding. These events are constructed to move the audience rhetorically to the point that one entertains the idea that unavowed, unknown, and perhaps concealed and inexplicable forces rule the universe (42).

Call it dread, call it terror--what it does is make us fear, however briefly, that the universe is ruled by the dark, Uncanny forces of our subconscious. As William Patrick Day says, "the terrible, pervasive absence in the Gothic world is the absence of pleasure: the wasteland of the Gothic is a world in which cruelty, violence, and conflict are the only principles upon which the characters can act, only to destroy themselves" (85). Terror makes us see our familiar desires as somehow part of a dark, absurd, destructive world; at its most affective, it makes us see in those familiar desires, desires we all share, the potential for violent Gothic excess.

The complete requirements for a Gothic work that I want to establish, then, are these: the fiction utilizes some or all of a number of conventions recognizable as Gothic, the

language is consistently excessive and the characters generally subjected to extreme emotion (terror), and the text attempts to implicate the reader in the character's emotional state and therefore to make us share the feeling of terror. Both The Wrongs of Woman and "Carmilla" lapse into Gothic at specific points in the narrative, as we have seen. We are supposed to feel, with Maria, a sense of terror at a world where an innocent woman can have her baby stolen from her and she herself be kidnapped in the night and imprisoned in an asylum. We don't really feel terror as readers because the work is not sufficiently convincing about the human motivations of Maria's captors. The captors remain faceless, but not alien. They are neither terrifying nor horrifying, but inhabit some ineffective middle ground. What The Wrongs of Woman does do well is make us share Maria's feminist anger as a woman wronged--but that is not Gothic. "Carmilla" attempts to make us feel terrified by the vampire's unrestrained sexuality, which violates convention. Because it is something taboo, we should fear it, but because it is sexual love, and therefore human, it is also alluring. If this actually worked in "Carmilla," it would make for a great Gothic moment. Unfortunately, the scene loses its terror because lesbianism, or, indeed, overt sexuality, is no longer threatening. What "Carmilla" does well is create narrative suspense, making us eager to know what will happen to Laura, how will Carmilla be thwarted. etc.--but that's not Gothic.

Having established a few parameters for Gothic fiction, and shown what isn't Gothic, and what is failed Gothic, let us turn now to some successful Gothic, and, having created a framework for the discussion, look at how Gothic texts manipulate character in such a way that we become terrified.

2. The Apotheosis of Gothic

If I have come to believe that an important point about Gothic fiction has been mostly overlooked so far, it is mostly because of one singularly startling fact: the absence, in Gothic criticism, of any treatment of Mervyn Peake's novels Titus Groan and Gormenghast. In over 30 book-length studies, I have seen Peake's masterpieces mentioned only three times--twice it is mentioned in passing, and in Punter's The Literature of Terror it actually warrants some discussion. That's the sum total of Gothic criticism's interest in Peake's novels. Admittedly, the novels were published in 1946 and 1950, respectively (hardly the heyday of Gothic fiction), but they are nonetheless thoroughly Gothic. That in itself is not all that significant; St Irvyne is thoroughly Gothic, but that doesn't mean we would want to discuss it, much less read it. What is significant is this: the best prose work based on the principles of Gothic fiction ever written is Titus Groan, with Gormenghast a close second. Running a distant third might be The Monk or Frankenstein or Melmoth the Wanderer or Dracula, which all have plenty to recommend them to the reader, but are not in the same league as Peake's novels. Use whatever criterion of judgement you want--originality, narrative skill, characterization, style, emotional power, symbolic resonance--Titus Groan and Gormenghast are superior to any other 'pure' Gothic novel. Frankenstein may be its equal in symbolic resonance, but is inferior in narrative skill, level of characterization, and quality of prose. Of course, there is no such thing as objectivity in these matters, but if there is any common critical ground by which we can evaluate the relative accomplishments of different works, then Titus Groan and Gormenghast are the definitive Gothic works. As David Pringle says, "once experienced, the world and the characters of Titus Groan cannot be forgotten" (28), and Michael Moorcock adds, "the Gormenghast trilogy is the apotheosis of that romantic form which had its crude beginnings with The Castle of Otranto" (272).

So why have they not been generally understood as the definitive Gothic works? Chronologically, they are outside the 1764-1820 timeframe of 'Golden Age' Gothic fiction.

but Poe writes his Gothic 20-30 years later, while Dracula comes almost 80 years later, and critics have had no problem calling them Gothic and discussing them in genre surveys. A more likely reason is that Peake's works, being set in a fantastic world, don't provide much fodder for extra-textual critics, who want to discuss "aspects" and "background" to the fiction. As the fiction is entirely self-contained, and very difficult to interpret as a specific response to, or expression of, real-world events, one is forced to look at the "causes," the internal factors, of the fiction--and Gothic critics have generally been reluctant to take this approach. But the most likely reason for the absence of critical reaction among Gothic critics is also the simplest: due to some inexplicable quirk of critical history, Titus Groan and Gormenghast have never been widely recognized as works of pure Gothic. But they most definitely are; as Punter comments, Peake created "a fantasy world entirely out of the elements of early Gothic fiction" (4).

All of the stock Gothic elements can be found, although sometimes as rather unexpected variants, in these novels. Williams tells us that "the prototypical Gothic setting [is] the haunted castle" (71), and Gormenghast Castle is the ultimate haunted castle: a labyrinthine mass of ponderous architecture; a nightmarish place of dim dusty corridors, vast empty galleries, mysterious secret chambers; a bewildering complex of "time-eaten buttresses, of broken and lofty turrets, and . . . the Tower of Flints. . . . patched unevenly with black ivy, [rising] like a mutilated finger from among the fists of knuckled masonry" (Peake 7). It is, as Punter explains, "the final Gothic castle, an edifice without historical or physical limits As in the early Gothic, the image of the Castle is multi-faceted: it is the established world conceived as enclosure and bondage, it is the retreat of the mind tortured by chaos, it is the sign of the failure of human aspiration, and it is the locale for the persistence of primal fear" (376). Like the characters, the castle is Gothic taken to the extreme. Gothic castles are notable for their isolation, and here again Gormenghast is archetypal. The castle is not even in our own world; furthermore, it is utterly cut off from its own world, which we know nothing about until Titus departs in the non-Gothic third

novel, Titus Alone, and as he never returns to Gormenghast, its inhabitants remain in isolation. The castle, then, is Gothic; it is isolated; and, finally, it is haunted:

[Titus] has learned an alphabet of arch and aisle: the language of dim stairs and moth-hung rafters

And he has learned that there are always eyes. Eyes that watch
The characters.

The quick and the dead. The shapes, the voices that throng his mind, for there are days when the living have no substance and the dead are active.

Who are these dead--these victims of violence who no longer influence the tenor of Gormenghast save by a deathless repercussion?

Let them appear for a quick, earthless moment, as ghosts, separate, dissimilar and complete. They are even now moving, as before death, on their own ground. Is Time's cold scroll recoiling on itself until the dead years speak, or is it in the throb of the now that the spectres wake and wander through walls? (373-4).

The castle is not haunted in the literal sense of supernatural visitations, but as this dense and poetic passage stresses, the dead are nonetheless active in its phantasmagoric confines.

As the castle is the epitome of the Gothic castle, so are other elements in the novels definitive representations of Gothic conventions. The cast of characters provides us with all the standard types, albeit inspired perversions of those types. Lord Sepulchrove, 76th Earl of Groan, ruler of Gormenghast, is the remote, brooding father (cf. Otranto's Manfred). Fuchsia is his virginal, emotional daughter (cf. Emily St Aubert). Mr. Flay and Nannie Slagg are their loyal servants, often providing us (especially Nannie Slagg) with comic relief (cf. The Romance of the Forest's Peter, The Italian's Beatrice). Steerpike, an ex-kitchen boy with dreams of grandeur, is the unrepentant Machiavellian villain (cf. Vathek) and Faustian over-reacher (cf. Victor Frankenstein, Melmoth). The chef, Abiatha Swelter, is the materialistic, brutish villain (cf. Montoni). Titus is the young, romantic hero (cf. Caleb Williams) and the male heir of the patriarchal line (cf. Otranto's Theodore). None of them is doing business as usual, but they can be identified as established Gothic character types.

All the other basic ingredients of Gothic soup are also to be found in Peake's bubbling cauldron. Doubles abound, as almost every character is part of a thematically connected pair; the most evident example of doubling is Titus's unnamed foster-sister, simply known as the Thing, who is a key element in Gormenghast, and who is an obvious

mirror of Titus—she is what Titus could be if he were free of the ritual demands of Gormenghast Castle. The plots of both novels revolve around issues of Titus's inheritance, as so many Gothic novels are concerned with inheritance. Peake's language is fevered, phantasmagoric, extreme, as the previous excerpt from Gormenghast's remarkable opening pages should suffice to show. Sublime descriptions of architecture and nature are frequent, Steerpike's famous ascent to the rooftops of Gormenghast and his resulting awe being an example of the former (90-2), and Flay's distant observance of Keda's suicide on foreboding Gormenghast mountain being an example of the latter (322-4). Radcliffe's sublime descriptions never come close to equalling Peake's. Here is a brief sample: "the sky about [Gormenghast mountain] was old-rose, translucent as alabaster, yet sumptuous as flesh. And mature. Mature as a soft skin or heavy fruit, for this was no callow experiment in zoneless splendour--this impalpable sundown was consummate and the child of all the globe's archaic sundowns since first the red eye [i.e. the sun] winked" (322-3).

If more proof of the Gothic nature of these novels is needed, more can easily be supplied. In Steerpike's wooing of Fuchsia we have sexual aggression (frustrated at his lack of immediate success, Steerpike finally decides in effect to rape her so that he can later blackmail her). We have pathetic fallacy a-plenty as the weather in these novels is always consonant with the dramatic events of the plot--"Peake uses weather in Radcliffian fashion," says Tanya Gardiner-Scott (11)--as when Swelter and Flay play out the finale of their mutual hatred, accompanied by a violent storm; as Swelter strikes what he thinks will be a death-blow upon Flay, a peal of thunder sounds at the exact same moment (308). We have a fainting heroine, as Fuchsia passes out during Titus's Breakfast (287-8); we have grisly deaths that would make Matthew Lewis proud, as Flay skewers Swelter (318), and Lord Sepulchre is devoured alive by owls in the Tower of Flints (320); Satan even makes a cameo appearance, albeit as Steerpike's pet monkey.

In short, as Gardiner-Scott, one of the few critics (along with Punter) to acknowledge the Gormenghast world's utter Gothic-ness, has said, the novels' "setting

and atmosphere suggest the term [Gothic] in the grand tradition of Walpole, Beckford, Radcliffe, Lewis and Maturin" (1). If I have spent considerable time attempting to prove this, it is for a very simple reason: my entire argument hinges on a recognition of Titus Groan and Gormenghast as Gothic, and not just as Gothic, but as the finest the genre has to offer, the apotheosis of Gothic. If we consider this to be true, then there is at least one important implication which I want to follow through: if Peake's work is Gothic, and it is by far the best Gothic ever written, then Peake must be doing something with the genre that all the other Gothic writers failed to do. If Gothic is a failed genre, as Elizabeth Napier submits it is, then Peake is Gothic's one success, he is the one who solves the conflicts at the heart of the genre.

How? What distinguishes Peake from other writers in the Gothic tradition? Let us take a step back, and consider just what it is those other writers were doing.

While Anne Williams is indisputably right when she says, "Walpole's claim to be the Gothic creator ex nihilo is as dubious as Manfred's to the throne of Otranto" (9-10), we can nevertheless consider Walpole as the founder of Gothic. No artist works in a vacuum; Walpole obviously didn't magically summon a new genre into being from nothingness. But, while we may often overlook the fact, I think if pressed we would generally admit that when we say that someone is a 'creator' we don't really mean that they genuinely 'create;' rather, they synthesize existing elements and throw in a little originality in such a way that the resulting work of art is so different from anything that has gone before that we call it 'new.' In effect, a 'creator' is someone who takes whatever's out there in the culture and transforms it in a way that comes across as striking, innovative, sufficiently different that it deserves a new name. For example, all the elements of David Lynch and Mark Frost's Twin Peaks existed already, but no one previously thought of combining them in such a way, and this is why we can praise them as the 'creators' of an original, seminal work of art. We can praise Walpole for the same reasons--and Mervyn Peake. When John Clute says of the Titus books, "the sequence is perhaps best thought of as being sui generis"

(918), he presumably does not mean that it should be taken as literally sui generis, but rather that it is so innovative in the way it manipulates existing artistic materials that it is worthy of our praise as being sui generis.

I contend that Peake and Walpole were essentially pursuing the same goal--but Peake got it right, while Walpole failed. But Walpole's effort is certainly commendable. As Robert Kiely remarks of Walpole and his successors, "however awkward their techniques may seem today, [their works] were deeply serious efforts to stretch or break through old conventions and to probe areas of experience not approached by Defoe or Fielding" (vii). Walpole's innovation was to blend the ancient and the modern, the novel and the romance: he was "attempting to give novelistic substance to his dreams and to usher fantasy into the realm of the prosaic. The uneasiness of expression that characterizes the attempt reminds us that Walpole's challenge to fictional expression is a real one, beyond the terms of any simple formula of blending two kinds of romance" (Haggerty 16). This was Walpole's triumph--that he tried something new. His failure was that it didn't work: "his mistake," Kiely accurately points out, "was not in speaking of combining the ancient with the modern, the romance with the novel, but in assuming the result would be a simple and harmonious union" (26). Robert Geary concurs: "In the more than three decades between Otranto and The Monk, nobody had solved the problem which Walpole had faced in trying to blend the amplitude of romance, including supernatural elements, with 'truth to Nature,' that is, the fundamentally realistic context of the contemporary novel" (81).

Walpole's intention for the Gothic was for it to possess the fancy of romance and the verisimilitude of the novel. He states this goal in the first preface to Otranto, and his words would, in effect, become a manifesto for writers of popular Gothic and horror: "allow the possibility of the facts, and all the actors comport themselves as persons would do in their situation . . . the characters are well drawn, and still better maintained" (7-8). The Gothic novel, theoretically, gives us 'real' people in unreal situations: the human quality of the characters is the reader's point of identification, through which the reader

enters the novel's world, enabling the fiction to have some emotional impact. This might have been the case in the eighteenth and even nineteenth century. But Walpole's (and all his successors') characters are not realistic. Even in comparison to their contemporaries, the Gothic novelist's characters seem flat. Despite their realistic claims, the strain the Gothic puts on realism shows in early Gothic novels, less as a result of the supernatural elements than the poorly-developed characters and preposterous plots/settings.

This, then, is Gothic's great failing. It aims for realism in its characters and fails: this is what Napier is saying when she calls Gothic 'failed' and Coral Anne Howells when she comments that while Gothic writers "always insist on the powers of feeling and imagination they tend to concentrate on external details of emotional display while leaving readers to deduce for themselves complex inner psychological movements, from such evidence as a 'certain wildness of aspect' or a 'settled paleness of the countenance'" (15).

But let's assume for a moment that a Gothic novel did succeed in portraying its characters realistically. Would it then work? Does it help to have psychological realism when the events the characters are going through are ludicrous, the situations they are put in absurd? In a word: no. I wouldn't care if Walpole provided ten pages of Conrad's background history with a psychological acumen worthy of Margaret Atwood: that gigantic helmet falling out of the sky and squelching him is still preposterous. The machinations of the plot, with its threats of incest, its 'the-true-heir-stands-before-you-now' revelations, its menacing black-plumed helmets, are as silly as the plot twists of Monty Python and the Holy Grail. Day emphasizes an important fact: "the Gothic vision is parodic" (169). That Walpole and his successors didn't succeed is not surprising, because they were facing two insurmountable obstacles: 1) the tools of psychological realism needed to fulfill Walpole's requirements would not be available for another century or so, after George Eliot, the Brontës, Henry James, and, 2) Gothic wouldn't work even if the tools of realism were available, because its lurid tone and preposterous plots/settings are irrevocably unrealistic. Walpole's desire to mix psychological realism with horrific events is a recipe for horror

fiction, not Gothic. He was groping in the dark, seeking to define a fictional form that wasn't ready to come into the light—a genre of the absurd, the excessive, the terrifying. But from Walpole to Maturin, Gothic authors resolutely tried to contain their absurd melodramas within a realistic framework.

What would happen if a Gothic novel were freed of these realistic constraints, displaced into an unspecified other world where our expectations of reality no longer apply? Enter Mervyn Peake, for Titus Groan and Gormenghast are precisely that: Gothic set apart from reality. So what does happen when the Gothic is, so to speak, liberated? It becomes absurd. Gothic conventions, when unconcerned with any form of 'realistic' representation, are grotesque. The characters are bizarre and unnatural; the castle seems drawn from the mind of an architect on LSD.

There is, therefore, something fundamentally grotesque about the Gothic genre, something which seeps through the ostensible realism. This is the crucial difference between Walpole's Gothic and Peake's—between a failed genre and a literary triumph. The word 'grotesque' can easily be loosely associated with the genre. It crops up repeatedly in the fiction, and Morner and Rausch's NPC's Dictionary of Literary Terms says the term Gothic "calls to mind gloom, grotesqueness, mystery, and DECADENCE" (92). The non-capitalization of "grotesqueness" is a non-reference to the literary term 'grotesque:'

Generally, anything distorted, ugly, abnormal, fantastic, or bizarre to the point of being ludicrous or absurd When applied to LITERATURE, the term grotesque refers to a type of writing, to a kind of CHARACTER, and to a kind of subject matter, all characterized by exaggeration and distortion of the natural or the expected. A work of FICTION may be called grotesque if it involves physically or psychologically deformed characters whose actions are abnormal, incongruous, or comically absurd (93-4).

This definition is pure Peake, and Peake is pure Gothic. Grotesque, as a literary term, should be linked to Gothic as a characteristic device, and one of more interest than the clichés: fainting heroine, gloomy castle, confinement, et al. Elizabeth MacAndrew has touched upon the centrality of the grotesque to the genre: "Gothic fiction . . . looks inward at man's mind. It makes use of the grotesque to create a doubtful murky atmosphere.

Through it, inner evil is projected outward, but in such a manner that it will ultimately be apprehended as lurking in the shadows within us" (157). MacAndrew touches upon the two key points I wish to explore: Gothic causes terror (i.e. the idea that evil lurks "within us" rather than as a horrific external force) and that it does so by means of the grotesque. This is the strength of great Gothic fiction: "the grotesque element greatly increases the ambivalence of a work. It takes it out of the realm of didactic literature and gives an uncertainty to its values and its moral stance, regardless of how definitely they may be stated." and, furthermore, "a tale may make us apprehend the possibility that the nature of the human mind renders the evil portrayed possible. Then the story will be of the type that makes even sensible people afraid of the dark. Effectiveness is not the result of greater 'probability' or a move toward realism" (MacAndrew 156-7). Exactly. Peake's work is neither probable nor realistic, but it is a good deal more terrifying than, say, The Castle of Otranto, which strives feebly for realism, and thereby utterly defuses its impact. By throwing the demands of realism out of the window, Peake enables his Gothic to be fully-functional. That Peake finally achieves what Walpole set out to do almost two centuries before is hinted at in a remark by Kiely: "Walpole took to portraying . . . unnatural acts performed by improbable characters in unlikely places and thereby established the general fare of Gothic fiction for decades to come" (42; my emphasis). I think this is a fair enough description of what Walpole was doing, and the underlined phrase seems to me as good a nine-word description of Titus Groan as one could hope for. By embracing the grotesquerie inherent in Gothic's conventions, Peake portrayed the most unnatural acts, the most improbable characters, and the most unlikely places to be found in Gothic fiction.

We have now established two premises: 1) the grotesque is a fundamental element of the genre, and, 2) it is through the grotesque that Gothic achieves, on occasion, the ability to terrify the reader. We can identify a Gothic work by the following: the presence of a recognizable set of conventions (either directly or indirectly taken from The Castle of Otranto); a narrative tone characterized by excessive, emotionally-charged language; the

presence of grotesque characters; and an attempt to implicate the reader in the emotional state of these grotesques, to make the reader "apprehend the possibility that the nature of the human mind renders the evil portrayed possible," to make the reader feel terror. But as Todorov remarks, "a work's inclusion within a genre still teaches us nothing as to its meaning. It merely permits us to establish the existence of a certain rule by which the work in question [is] governed" (141). What does it mean to say that Gothic fiction is governed by the principles outlined above? What does it tell us about that always-important category, the reader? Let us move on to look at the major texts of Gothic's 'Golden Age,' and see what a reading of Gothic--based on the idea that Peake's works are the genre's ideal texts--tells us about how these grotesque characters and absurd plots can actually affect us as readers, how they achieve their power, and why they often fail to have any power.

3. Explaining the Gothic

The grotesque is a key principle in Gothic literature, and one central to its affective power. The 'realistic' depiction of people confronted by the supernatural and the terrifying is not what holds power in Gothic these days. To the twentieth century reader, Walpole's claims to realism are ludicrous. An insistence, fostered in part by the authors themselves, on seeing Gothic characters as unrounded 'realistic' characters prevents recognition of an interesting element in early Gothic fiction: all the major characters are grotesque, not just the more obviously exaggerated ones like Frankenstein's monster or Melmoth. Placing emphasis on the part of the above-quoted definition that specifies that grotesques are "characterized by exaggeration and distortion of the natural," "to the point of being ludicrous or absurd," one can put all the major early Gothic characters in that category. The virtuous heroines—Emily St Aubert, Matilda (in Otranto), The Monk's Agnes and Virginia and Antonia, Frankenstein's Elizabeth—with their sickly-sweet, inhuman virtue, are exaggerated, and they now seem ludicrous. Other female characters tend to the opposite pole: some vice is exaggerated, and becomes the defining characteristic for the likes of Madame Cheron in Udolpho, Matilda in The Monk, and Vathek's mother Carathis. Likewise, male characters are created by taking one trait and exaggerating it to ludicrous proportions (Ambrosio's lust, Manfred's desire for power, Caleb Williams's sense of honour, Falkland's bitterness, Frankenstein's scientific hunger, Montoni's generic evil, Vathek's sensuous decadence), or by creating a ridiculously heroic, chivalrous character (Valancourt, Theodore, Clerval). As the genre develops, the characters become less clearly grotesque, and more realistic. Caleb Williams and Frankenstein are part of the trend, moving away from Gothic grotesques to the psychologically complex, really 'real' characters of the horror novel. But, in the early Gothic novels, most obviously in Vathek, the characters can be described as grotesques watered-down by realism: failed grotesques, mostly. Or, to be more generous, we could call them (to coin an ugly term) proto-

grotesques: early, vaguely understood attempts at a fictional tool which was not quite ready to flourish, but which might never have flourished had it not been for these first attempts.

As the term is generally understood, there is nothing grotesque about Emily St Aubert. But she is two-dimensional and her characteristics are exaggerated: a contemporary reader can easily find her comically absurd, although she is obviously not intended to be. As she mopes about writing her wretched poetry in La Vallée, the reader can easily choose to be amused. Rather like early Star Trek episodes, depending on the reader's indulgence, early Gothic can--at face value--be taken as comical. Emily is, in the literary term's terms, grotesque; stripped of its negative connotations, 'grotesque' can be applied to virtuous and villainous characters alike. Mr Flay is just as grotesque as Swelter. Fuchsia is just as grotesque as Cora and Clarice, yet Flay and especially Fuchsia are sympathetic characters. So, every major character in seminal early Gothic fiction can be considered grotesque--insipid grotesques out of place in a realistic milieu, but grotesques nonetheless.

This is significant because the interaction between these grotesque, puppet-like, inhuman characters, paradoxically generates the most human and affecting elements in the Gothic, at least for the contemporary reader encountering them 200 years after the fact. These grotesques are excessively simplistic, lacking all the richness of detail, the absurd whimsicality, the nonsensicality, of Peake's grotesques--that is what makes Peake's Gothic the ultimate Gothic, because he utilizes the full potential of the grotesque, while the earlier authors were labouring blindly. All their major characters can be separated into two very general groups: those whose virtuous qualities are exaggerated and those whose villainous qualities are exaggerated. The former can be considered as a kind of unmarked, unstained, pure human template, an impossibly saintly individual whose purity remains spotless. The latter is marked, stained, impure, notable mainly for some vice taken to an extraordinary extreme. To distinguish between them, let us call them virtuesque and grotesque, respectively. The virtuesque is contrasted to the grotesque, time and again, and the conflict

of these two poles, virtue and vice, good and evil, call them what you will, generates the paradoxical bridging of those "conflicting intentions" which Napier tells us plague the genre. It is this juxtaposition, finally, that terrifies us.

Which raises the question: how? What makes us care about these static, wooden, psychologically unconvincing characters? How can they possibly make us terrified? Terror is achieved through a device that I will call the dynamic moment: namely, the moment when the two static, extreme character types interact, and when the static poles of reader and text likewise interact. Coral Ann Howells refers in passing to "those moments of intensity where contradictory elements are fused together at the dynamic point of agony or ecstasy" (140), and it is this fusion of contradictory elements that I mean by 'the dynamic moment.'

The dynamic moment has two forms: internalized and externalized. We can find both in The Monk. Ambrosio is the character around whom the novel revolves, and he generates the dynamic moment, the link between virtuesque and grotesque, between reader and text. Ambrosio is transformed from virtuesque to grotesque in the novel: he represents both. The pure virtuesque is Antonia--she, it is quite obvious, is one of those Gothic women possessed of unfailing and exaggerated virtue (she even veils her naked charms while bathing alone [335]). And the lusty Matilda is the grotesque, the perverse extreme--she is not even human, but rather a spirit-servant of Satan. These two women inspire a metaphysical tug-of-war in Ambrosio's soul; they are externalizations of his internal conflict. He begins the novel without a "single stain upon his conscience, [having] subdued the violence of strong passions and an impetuous temperament" (186-7). He too is a virtuesque: a saintly example for other men. But the grotesque in him is developing, hinted at by the "Pride [that] told him loudly, that He was superior to the rest of his fellow-Creatures" (186). Through the influence of Matilda (the external grotesque), a burgeoning internal grotesque becomes the dominant aspect of Ambrosio, manifest in his boundless lust. This is the point, when virtuesque and grotesque clash, that the dynamic moment is

generated. For the contemporary reader, neither sweet, chaste Antonia nor demon-lover Matilda is easy to identify with; their defining characteristics render them, in a sense, inhuman. One is too saintly, the other too demonic, to strike us as a 'real' woman. Ambrosio, in his transition from virtuesque to grotesque, becomes very human, if only for a brief time.

This is the paradox of the dynamic moment: two contrasting, unreal characters come together to create someone 'real.' Unlike asexual Antonia and oversexed Matilda, Ambrosio becomes somewhat comprehensible when his lust first develops; it is a readily identifiable human feeling. When it becomes obsessive and perverse, it ceases to be something we want to identify with; it becomes the exaggeration of the grotesque. But in that moment of transition, Ambrosio is possessed of very human, and, in a way, sympathetic characteristics. He is a proud man who is falling, a man tempted by human passions. If the reader is going to empathize with anyone in The Monk, then this would be the moment when it is easiest to do so, thus far in the novel. Out of this collection of narrowly developed or undeveloped characters springs one who now appears to be human, to momentarily acquire a third dimension to his character, as when he looks at a picture of the Madonna: "Oh, if such a creature existed, and existed but for me! Were I permitted to . . . press with my lips the treasures of that snowy bosom. Gracious God! should I then resist the temptation? . . . Fool that I am! Whither do I suffer my admiration for this picture to hurry me?" (187). Ambrosio's internal struggle with his sexual lust is something we can latch on to, something that is familiar and relevant. It humanizes him as the infamous erotic fantasy in The Last Temptation of Christ humanizes Jesus. In this way, the dynamic moment generates a sympathetic view of the character, who is now, briefly, a character, not a grotesque.

And then Ambrosio takes it too far: he becomes a grotesque, an exaggeration, inhuman. But the dynamic moment when virtuesque and grotesque meet has made him human; we have identified with the sexual desires that later make him grotesque. In this

way, the dynamic moment generates terror: the lust of the grotesque has been made recognizable as something present within the reader. That familiar something is taken to extremes, but having identified with Ambrosio, we can not simply say, "Well, I'd never do such a thing." True, few people would do what Ambrosio does, but because the dynamic moment has enabled us to first identify with Ambrosio's lust, it is all the more effective as a means of terror when it takes that familiar human quality and takes it to a perverse extreme. Ambrosio's lust is a twisted manifestation of a characteristic that we all share: sexual desire. Because it has been made familiar, it is far more affective and unsettling than Satan appearing in a cloud of smoke or the Wandering Jew's ghastly burning cross. If Gothic novels can still affect contemporary readers, it is not through the Gothic clichés, which, in becoming clichés, have been stripped of their affective power. Rather, it is in these rare dynamic moments, the meeting point of extremes, making familiar and sympathetic a human trait which will later become exaggerated and repulsive. "The book," says Punter of The Monk, "is full of psychological contrasts which have little to do with the verisimilitude of the portrayal of particular characters, but are meant to enhance the general sense of precariousness which Lewis wishes to encourage; he tries constantly to challenge his audience, to upset its security, to give the reader a moment of doubt about whether he [or she] may not himself [or herself] be guilty of the complicated faults attributed to Ambrosio" (91). It is the dynamic moment that creates the reader-text interaction necessary to engender such doubt and guilt: it gives grotesques, who are not particularly credible as realistic characters, a sinister element of reality. And this gives the Gothic the power to disturb us: it "draw[s] the reader into a sympathetic understanding of the evil exhibited" (MacAndrew 156).

Having invoked the critically complex notion of 'identification,' and intending to use it liberally in the next few pages, I think it's worth further discussion before proceeding. Noël Carroll's Paradoxes of the Heart contains a particularly fruitful discussion of the concept. What do we mean when we say a reader 'identifies' with a

character, with a text, with a fiction? Carroll's answers are illuminating. He postulates, first, that we don't suspend our disbelief when we read, but neither do we simply engage in a game of make-believe based on the rules laid down by each author. As proof that we don't literally suspend our disbelief, he asks us to consider this--if we are in a movie theatre, watching a horror movie, and a shambling, bug-eyed, frightening monster (possibly with some of its friends) appears on the screen, do we run frantically for the exit door? Surely, if we were suspending our disbelief, we wouldn't remain there, munching our popcorn, watching as the monster wreaks havoc? If we actually believed it, we would get the hell out of there. The other extreme is to say that fiction is purely fiction, that we never consider it as any more than that, that it's a mutual game of play-pretend. The author provides the appropriate cues; we the audience provide the appropriate reactions. The problem, says Carroll, with such a theory, is that it assumes we 'choose' to be moved by a fiction, and if we choose not to do so, we won't be affected. Carroll's counter-argument effectively disproves the play-pretend theory: "One reason to be suspicious of the notion that art-horror is a pretend emotion rather than a genuine emotion is that if it were a pretend emotion I could elect to remain unhorried by [the film version of] The Exorcist: I could refuse to make believe I was horrified. But I don't think that was an option for those, like myself, who were overwhelmingly struck by it" (74). It certainly wasn't an option for me, and I have a friend who, at 8-years-old, decided that R-ratings are irrelevant and watched it; she had nightmares for a week and has been horrified by the idea of possession ever since. She could never bring herself to watch the movie again--hardly the reaction of someone who is 'pretending' to be scared.

So what is happening when we read (or watch) fiction? Carroll's notion of "thought-content" is useful: "I maintain," he writes, "that the practice of fiction--including our emotional responses, where appropriately motivated by the text--is actually built on our capacity to be moved by thoughts and to take pleasure in being so moved" (83). We entertain the possibility that fiction is real; we grant that the "thought-content" is

hypothetically true; we consider, for the duration of our reading, that things are as the author portrays them, and then consider whether the characters are convincing. Those that do convince us are those that move us. Those that fail to do so, we don't appreciate on a subjective, emotional level, although there are many other reasons to enjoy fiction. This, I maintain, is true of all fiction. Gothic fiction has a particular goal--to make us feel terror--and a specific way of making us feel terror, and one criterion by which we can judge it is by its success in manipulating us so that we feel a degree of terror.

The only way for an author to make us feel terror is to make us identify with the character(s). As Gothic is notoriously inept at convincing characterization, it should, as a necessary corollary, fail to make us feel terror. But, through the dynamic moment, it manages to do so. Dynamic moments are those specific moments in Gothic fiction when we can, so to speak, enter the text, get inside the characters' minds, empathize with their feelings, identify with them. When I say identification, I don't mean that the character literally takes over our identity. Rather, what happens is that, as we read, we come across a moment when we say, "Yes, I understand that. I recognize that character's reaction, I understand it, I can relate to it, it is believable." Joseph Gixti makes the same point: "what is frequently referred to as 'identification' can be more accurately (though less dramatically) described as an onlooker's imaginative or empathic insight into the experience of a character (fictional or otherwise)" (105). And this allows the fiction to have meaning for us; it relates to our own lives, our own minds, and so can affect us. Most works of fiction are, to a greater or lesser degree, full of such empathic moments; there is a constant dynamic interplay between reader and text.

Gothic, be it The Monk or Titus Groan, is not the same. Most of it is absurd and alienating--it distances us from the text. The dynamic moment, in such works, is specific and localized, a stylized device that we can see in operation in the most affective Gothic, and failing to operate in those Gothics that are dated and ineffective. This has not been discussed at any length by critics of the genre, but in remarks found throughout the critical

corpus, it is evident that there is a perception that Gothic functions in such manner, that it relies upon the interplay of stylized extremes to make it at all convincing.

The Monk shows us the dynamic moment at work both externally and internally: the novel has characters who are uniquely virtuesque, others who are uniquely grotesque--externalizing the internal struggle of Ambrosio, within whom reside the two extremes. He generates the dynamic moment; that Ambrosio is the most human, real, and affective character in the novel is the reason why he is the most memorable. The names and details of every other character in the novel tend to fade away quite quickly; Ambrosio lingers--he is the character who affects us most, the power of Lewis's Gothic is now mostly contained within him. The dynamic moment is the basis for whatever power the genre now has. It explains what MacAndrew means when she says of Gothic, "The Sentimental hero [virtuesque] and the Gothic villain [grotesque] begin to merge into one character torn by terrible conflict These changes barely increase their mimetic qualities but, because they are ambiguous, they are more acceptable as characters" (54). It is the successful dynamic moment that makes them "more acceptable," that renders their conflict "terrible." It is early Gothic's answer to 'realism:' "When we speak of 'realism' or truth to life in a novel like The Monk, it is not a Defoe-like accumulation of detail that is meant, but a contrast between static and stylistically formal scenes and short episodes of concrete action" (Kiely 114-5). A look at variations on the dynamic moment in other early Gothic novels confirms this.

The most powerful scenes in Radcliffe's The Mysteries of Udolpho occur in Udolpho itself, when Emily is subjected to Montoni's tyranny. The early scenes in the novel, with Emily writing her 'poetry,' obeying every word of her father and reverencing him in an almost obsessive way, come close to being, or perhaps are, unintentionally parodic. Contemporary readers may find Emily laughable--seeing the comic grotesquerie inherent in the virtuesque heroine. She is, however, indisputably admirable in her confrontations with Montoni. Although completely in his power, knowing that the only

way she could get away would be to sign over her inheritance, she absolutely refuses to do so: "the law . . . gives me the estates in question, and my own hand shall never betray my own right" (381). She maintains this attitude throughout her stay at Udolpho, demonstrating a courage in the face of oppression which many would not have. The tension of this portion of the novel and the sympathetic identification with Emily are again created by specific dynamic moments, solid rocks the reader can cling to in a sea of psychologically abstracted characters and actions. If Emily is clearly the virtuesque, Montoni is in an equally obvious way the grotesque, a perversely evil man, an unfeeling, inhuman villain. When the two conflict, they have more emotional impact on the reader than any of the hokey Gothic devices employed by Radcliffe. As is the case with Ambrosio, the dynamic moment--when static Montoni and static Emily interact--creates sympathy, and as a consequence, also generates terror--although the manner in which this functions here is not the same as in The Monk.

Udolpho's opposition of virtuesque and grotesque is completely externalized: there's no danger of Emily becoming frighteningly grotesque, and no hope of Montoni becoming ludicrously virtuous. But when the two clash, the threat to Emily renders her much more human and sympathetic than she had previously been. When the grotesque threatens the virtuesque, the latter ceases to be silly--it is by far the more palatable of the two forms of grotesque. Her sometimes-ludicrous virtue becomes the source of Emily's courage, which earns her more respect than any other quality she possesses. And when we identify with Emily as a woman being abominably threatened by a grotesquely twisted man, and admiring her resistance, Montoni disturbs us in a way he hadn't before. While he's wandering around being evil-for-evil's-sake, he is certainly contemptible, but it is only when he becomes a force threatening the suddenly human, vulnerable, admirable Emily, that he has any power to disturb us in the way a well-created Gothic villain should. The dynamic moment, this conflict between virtuesque and grotesque, creates the moments with the most emotional impact in The Mysteries of Udolpho. In Radcliffe's novel, however,

unlike Lewis's, the dynamic moment is entirely externalized, for neither character changes a great deal; they do, however, through the interaction of the two forms of grotesque, become more lifelike and capable of moving the reader. It as if these two two-dimensional characters meet perpendicular to one another, and in doing so, become three-dimensional for the duration of their conflict. This is, I think, implicit in MacAndrew's comment that Udolpho uses its villain as part of the characterization of the heroine (95-6).

But Radcliffe's dynamic moment creates far more sympathy than it does terror; Radcliffe's novel is not very terrifying any more because the moral attitudes of the work make it clear that Emily will eventually triumph. The externalized dynamic moment creates sympathy, but Radcliffe's novel undermines its potential to terrify. This is not simply due to the undisguised didacticism of the narrator—it is because an externalized dynamic moment is inherently weaker than an internalized one. When the reader is drawn into the transition between virtuesque and grotesque, as in Ambrosio, the terror of the grotesque becomes more potent because it contains a crucial element of familiarity, a trace of sympathetic identification. The conflict between two static grotesques generates some of the same effects, but not as convincingly. Thus, The Monk, nowadays, is more effective at disturbing, unsettling, perhaps terrifying, the reader than is The Mysteries of Udolpho. That is, I think, why Robert Geary says Lewis's novel is "still frightening" (60), and Anne Williams that it "somehow manages to remain interesting and even powerful" (115), while critics generally turn to Radcliffe's use of the sublime, or to extra-textual aspects of the novel, when discussing The Mysteries of Udolpho. A look at externalized vs. internalized dynamic moments in other early Gothic should persuasively show the internalized dynamic moment to be more effective.

Mary Shelley's Frankenstein makes use, as does The Monk, of the internalized dynamic moment. Because it is so widely discussed and praised, it would be easy to think that Frankenstein is considerably more sophisticated than earlier Gothic. It is not—neither in its prose, its narrative pacing, or its depth of characterization is it better than, say, The

Monk. It is of course far superior in its symbolic power--Frankenstein's monster has never left our imagination, while Ambrosio is a mere footnote. The other principle strength of the novel, as far as moving the reader is concerned, lies in the simple but effective use of the dynamic moment in both of its central characters, Victor Frankenstein and his nameless creation. The characterization of the two central figures is very simple, and perhaps they are so effective as a result of that simplicity--it makes them universal.

Frankenstein first wins our sympathy in the description of his childhood and the establishment of an intelligent, respectable character. The scorn with which his interest in natural philosophy is treated, first by his father (39), then M. Krempe (46), wins the reader to Frankenstein's cause. We can relate to a naïve youth scorned by skeptical adults--a common enough situation. Our sympathy is lost when it becomes the focus of a self-destructive obsession, put to unnatural uses. But there is still some identification with Frankenstein: his grotesque actions have been given a human dimension through the earlier sympathetic treatment of his character. Because he is not a static character, but rather one who has gone through a transition from virtuesque to grotesque, despite the fact that his later actions are reprehensible, we can still see a little of ourselves in Frankenstein, giving the novel greater emotional impact. To quote MacAndrew again (for she seems to grasp the centrality of the grotesque in Gothic more than any other critic): "To the extent that our identification with Frankenstein is close, our fear of the evil that comes from him will be great" (101).

The dynamic moment is used just as effectively in Frankenstein's creation. The creature is set up to appear as a hideous, murderous monster; before we have heard its side of the story, it has been described in very unflattering terms by Frankenstein and is known to have committed murder. In the mind of the reader, it is a grotesque. When it tells Frankenstein its story, we learn that it was noble and well-intentioned after its creation. The issue is not complicated: the creature was born pure, a virtuesque. The reader is able to witness, in its story, the transition from virtuesque to grotesque. It becomes sympathetic

insofar as we identify with its confusion and desire for revenge against its maker, who has definitely treated it unfairly. Its murderous vendetta against Frankenstein's friends and family is not the horrifying rampage of some slobbering, deranged beast, but rather the terrifying, all-too-human action of a tragic figure. We look at the monster, and perhaps think, "Had I been in that situation, I would probably have done as he did." That is terror. The change from morally pure creation to vengeance-driven murderer, the dynamic moment, allows us to identify strongly with Frankenstein's creation, and allows the creature to affect us. The presence of two convincing dynamic moments is part of the power, the greatness, of this novel, one of the reasons why it is indisputably one of the finest classic Gothic novels.

Godwin's Caleb Williams likewise makes use of the internalized dynamic moment. Aguirre says that "the Gothic, ontological point of the novel . . . is . . . the conversion of Caleb Williams and, beyond that, about the process whereby humankind may be seduced into changing allegiance to its Enemy" (104; Aguirre's emphasis). That is exactly the point in Caleb Williams, and is a reasonable generalization about all Gothic. The dynamic moment is what makes that "conversion" accessible to us in this novel of extremes. Early in the novel, we are given an account of "the ruin of that Falkland who was courted by sages, and adored by the fair" (11), an explanation of why we now see only the shadow of a man formerly of "uncommon dignity" (12). The bitter recluse is a grotesque; the young, chivalrous Falkland was a virtuesque. The transition between the two generates sympathy for Falkland. This allows the reader, to some extent, to understand Caleb's persistent love for his master, despite the suffering he must endure because of Falkland's actions. Some sympathy must be created for Falkland if the novel is to have the effect it intends: Caleb's actions would be absurd and contemptible if Falkland's ruthlessness were not balanced by the human, sympathetic element created by the dynamic moment.

Much of the impact of Caleb's plight is gained through an externalized dynamic moment, the conflict between Caleb, virtuesque, and Falkland, grotesque. Caleb's sense

of honour and duty is exaggerated to the point of grotesqueness, like Emily's maidenly virtue; it becomes something we can identify with only when that ludicrous sense of honour is confronted with the depredations of the grotesque Falkland, when it is the cause of prolonged anguish for Caleb. When put to the test, Caleb maintains his sense of honour under stress, earning respect and sympathy; the externalized dynamic moment renders him human, no longer a static character but a person whose ideals are strained, a man who must resolve inner tensions. The effectiveness of the externalized dynamic moment (which is key to the effectiveness of this novel as a whole) relies upon Falkland's internalized dynamic moment. The grotesque is given a human dimension, unlike Montoni. This in turn proves that, in the world of Caleb Williams, the good don't always win, for a formerly admirable person becomes irrevocably detestable due to the influence of others, particularly Tyrrel. The internalized dynamic moment is the key to identification with the characters, and the key to terror. And as far as definitions are concerned, that we call Caleb Williams Gothic at all seems to me indication of the centrality of the dynamic moment and the feeling of pervasive terror I am claiming as Gothic hallmarks: this novel, of all novels widely considered as Gothic, is singularly deficient in its use of conventions. Godwin dispenses with most of Walpole's claptrap, but what he does keep is the terror, the proto-grotesques, the mood of borderline-hysteria conveyed in the excessive language and emotive characters. These, as much as (if not more than) castles perched on mountainsides, anaemic heroines, and ghostly revenants, are Gothic qualities. Caleb Williams's "affinities to the Gothic," confirms Geary, "lie in its pervasive atmosphere of terror" (90).

Godwin's novel, because of a relatively effective dynamic moment, comes across as more sophisticated, more psychologically real, and more affective, than two other late eighteenth century Gothic standards--Otranto and Vathek. The characterization in both novels is feeble: the characters are very much either virtuesque, grotesque, or minor players with no more than a name as identification. Virtue and vice are taken to extremes; attempts to mask this are clumsy, as when we are told Manfred is "not one of those savage tyrants

who wanton in cruelty unprovoked," and his "virtue was always ready to operate" (27). This is little in evidence in the novel. We are told that "the next transition of his soul was to exquisite villainy" (31)--we are told, not shown. In his actions throughout the novel, Manfred demonstrates plenty of "exquisite villainy," but very little operational "virtue." except for his final repentance. The transition, the internalized dynamic moment, is not shown, and Manfred doesn't come across as anything but an insensitive power-hungry tyrant, a grotesque from start to finish.

The other characters in the novel are the virtuesques whose externalized conflicts with the grotesque Manfred generate whatever affective power the novel retains--very little. I suspect, for most readers. As E. F. Bleiler says, Otranto "is not, of course, a great novel, and it would be absurd to claim greatness for it" (Three Gothic Novels xviii). One reason it is not great is that its characters lack depth, and consequently there is no strong reader-text dynamic. We are never shown a way into The Castle of Otranto. If we are to care about these characters, it is because their virtue is being subjected to the oppression of the tyrannical grotesque. It doesn't work anymore; the characters are too two-dimensional to allow for any sympathetic identification with them as 'real' people under stress. A tragic scene such as Matilda's death at her father's hand is stripped of almost all affective power because the moment is completely externalized: we get a bird's-eye view of the action, not a mind's-eye view. The internalized dynamic moment is necessary to generate sympathy for the characters and thereby enable us to feel the terror that the Gothic is aiming for.

Vathek supplies further proof. The characters are mostly grotesques: the only one developed at any length who qualifies as virtuesque is Gulchenrouz. The novel is mostly grotesques being grotesque, excessive, and repulsive. But even scenes which involve the murder of many innocents, like the "good people" slain by Carathis's servants while hoping to rescue their Caliph from a burning tower (104), are curiously unaffektive. Napier says of The Monk, "the characters with whom we most readily sympathize . . . undergo punishments so extreme as to excite horror rather than pity" (119), and this is the

problem we also encounter in Vathek. The dynamic is here simply the conflict of grotesques and non-descripts; there is no familiar human dimension to give the scene emotional power. Vathek himself has only one dimension, and we can never identify with him as human: he "is a character without moral dimension. We are prevented from seeing him as a 'fallen' character since, from the beginning, he is just Vathek, always and forever the same, a fantasy sensualist with a few tender traits but without sufficient complexity of character to make us mourn his loss of innocence or regret his unfulfilled promise" (Kiely 53).

The externalized dynamic moment is a less useful device than the internalized: to be affective, it requires the internal characterization which a writer like Radcliffe provides, but it also needs to occur within a conflict which generates real suspense, where we believe that the virtuesque is not immune, something Godwin does well in Caleb Williams. We can see this difference again in comparing two Poe stories: "William Wilson" and "The Black Cat."

"William Wilson" is, unless you choose to read the story as a delusion on the narrator's part (a defensible reading), about the externalization of an internal grotesque. But it is entirely external. From the outset, Wilson is a grotesque, who presents himself in extreme, extravagant terms: "from comparatively trivial wickedness I passed . . . into more than the enormities of an Elah-Gabalus" (626). He has always had "evil propensities" (627). He undergoes no transition from virtuesque to grotesque: he starts out as grotesque and just becomes even more so. The other Wilson, clearly an externalization of his conscience (although certainly capable of representing other things, too), is a virtuesque, completely externalized. The story is a dramatization of an internal conflict which has conscience and base instinct separately embodied. The story has power--more than The Castle of Otranto--because the conflict is narrated from the perspective of the grotesque, providing lots of humanizing psychological details, and because there is suspense, and because it capitalizes on the formal qualities of the tale, whose importance is well-accounted

for by Haggerty. And Poe's stories do not have the same straightforward didacticism as Radcliffe: the virtuous do not necessarily triumph.

But I find "The Black Cat" to be more effectively terrifying; and it has an internalized dynamic moment. The narrator begins the story as a pleasant man. "noted for the docility and humanity of [his] disposition" (223). That overly-perfect virtuesque becomes twisted by "the spirit of PERVERSENESS," a spirit which he makes comprehensible by asking: "who has not, a hundred times, found himself committing a vile or a stupid action, for no other reason than because he knows he should not?" (225). I've never, as he has, cut out a cat's eye because I knew I shouldn't, but I have been stubborn for no good reason. That stubborn perverseness is an impulse which has a human, believable element to it. The narrator takes it much too far, and loses our sympathy, but his actions are all the more horrific because they begin recognizably, as a result of alcoholism and the imp of the perverse. The absolutely repulsive grotesque takes shape in a human, believable way; we can identify with him up to a point. This gives his actions an unsettling familiarity which makes the story more effective in terms of being terrifying than "William Wilson," in which the narrator is someone we can never really identify with in the same way, for he is evil from the start.

The dynamic moment has its advantages, insofar as it can keep the reader involved to some extent in the extreme actions of a Gothic character, but has its downside as well. It's worth noting that the dynamic moment is the end result of what the Gothic authors did, not what they actually seem to have wanted to do. Their goal seems to have been psychological realism, as it was understood by the literary standards of the time--but it just isn't very good psychological realism, by the standards of the time or today's standards. Francis Russell Hart says that Gothic authors are aiming for psychological credibility, and he's right, but he also says such realism is "the 'novelistic' standard by which they must all be judged" (103). I see his point, but all these novels are failures by 'novelistic' standards; what they do well, albeit inadvertently and infrequently, is create terror, and not through

'novelistic,' credible characters. What we get instead is a dynamic moment when a character is made familiar and recognizable to us appearing amid monotonous, static descriptions of character and action. If there's no dynamic moment, we never become very subjectively involved with the text. Even if there is, it's usually not on the first page--we have to read a considerable amount of the work, and grant the author our patience, for it to have any effect. So, even if it can be effective, it's not a very efficient literary device, and it's a rather accidental one--a point implicit in Hart's statement--but I think it's more productive to look at what's effective and praiseworthy in the texts for the reader reading them today, rather than what the authors wanted us to be praising.

But these authors were in fact aiming at psychological realism, and they were hardly talentless, so the characterization is not all wooden and two-dimensional; that simply tends to be the overall effect. Sometimes, though, an author could manage, throughout an entire novel, to maintain a semi-complex level of characterization. Godwin's St Leon is one such work. It is the most unjustly ignored of the early Gothic works. Geary criticizes it as "a work of less than compelling interest" with a "lack of psychological intensity and complexity," and says its supernatural elements "possess little sense of the uncanny: they are plot and symbolic counters to activate . . . a story of consequences of an individual's break with the shared sacred outlook of tradition" (72-3). He is right on the last point: although St Leon is given access to the elixir of life and the philosopher's stone, both remain offstage and, while the consequences of having them are the novel's central thrust, they have only an oblique presence in the text. St Leon uses the excuse Frankenstein would later use, claiming that he did not want to share such terrible secrets with others--but Mary Shelley's Faust-figure is more convincing than her father's when he says this, because we at least see the supernatural manifest in Frankenstein. Even if we're not sure of the how and the why of the novel's supernatural element, we don't care, because it is still presented directly to us. Not so in St Leon, and the use of the supernatural seems, as a result, contrived and poorly integrated. But Geary's other criticisms are too harsh. It is

not so much that Godwin's work lacks psychological "complexity" but that it aims for complexity and is only partly successful. The long novel is narrated in the first-person, and is very internalized: much of it is St Leon's abstracted agonizing over his decisions and motivations. He is torn between public and private life: the desire for glory, honour, respect, and the desire to do well by his family, which includes the requisite saintly wife. There is no single dynamic moment when St Leon falls from grace into damnation; he wrestles between the two states throughout the course of the novel, unsure of what (if anything) should be done with the alchemical powers at his disposal. Neither is there any protracted externalized dynamic tension between St Leon as virtuesque or grotesque and another extreme character. The result is a work which, for all that it is more psychologically complex than many other early Gothics, is less compelling than some (The Monk, Godwin's own Caleb Williams). Unfair though it may be, this is a novel to be damned by faint praise. The psychology is better than others, but not good, and it therefore occupies the unsuccessful middle ground between works of psychological complexity (say, Austen) and works of static, extreme characters made accessible through a dynamic moment (The Monk). Still, it's better than Otranto.

Another case of semi-decent psychology is Melmoth the Wanderer. In this novel (much better known than St Leon) we also have a central character who is portrayed as wavering back and forth between two positions. Melmoth is diabolical at times, pathetic at others. He is damned, and sometimes we despise him for it, but sometimes he seems more a sad figure bound to a grim, implacable fate. But, whatever pole he inhabits, he never seems human. He is entirely externalized: we are told what he does by the various narrators, or through his words, but we never get inside his mind. As said before, to make us feel terror, humanization of the characters is needed—we need to get into their minds. Melmoth is always a brooding, glowering, demonic presence, aloof from us 'mere' humans—but his final plunge into eternal damnation was, for me, an effectively affective moment. And given the novel's endurance in criticism, it seems to have been for others,

too. Glen Cavaliero says, "Static and wooden though most of the characterization is, inflatedly rhetorical though much of the language sounds, it remains a powerful expression of romantic protest that verges on theodicy" (33), and "Melmoth . . . , although frequently demonic in appearance, seems more melancholy than malignant. It is the melancholy which constitutes the malignancy: he embodies the last enemy, Despair. And yet his reasons for despair are so much in evidence that he elicits a certain sympathy" (31).

How does a man who has bargained his soul away and who takes pleasure in the suffering of others elicit "a certain sympathy?" In Gothic, if there is effective terror, it is always through some variant of the dynamic moment--the meeting of, the contrast between, extremes. And Maturin's specialty is extremes. Melmoth the Wanderer is a chronicle of characters in dire situations--a man trapped in a madhouse, a pair of lovers confined in a cell until one is forced to eat the other, a man forced to become a monk against his wishes. In the individual narratives nested within the overall tale of Melmoth, Maturin provides us with some terror in the way I have discussed: "Maturin insists that in addition to the direct presentation of the terror, there is personal reflection on it so that we can understand, and even feel, its power" (Haggerty 28-9). The novel remains unrelentingly on the most distant shores of human emotion and experience. This is one of its strengths. The other is the use of proto-grotesques.

Melmoth is, mostly, a grotesque, a demonic figure twisted so that he is no longer fully human: "With Maturin's Melmoth the Wanderer," says MacAndrew, "we find a grotesque thoroughly integrated into a Gothic novel that is bizarre but hardly comic. The Wanderer is a grotesque" (163). He is; but he is also, implicitly, a virtuesque--in this theological novel, it is significant that we are all born with grace, with the means of salvation. Melmoth, uniquely, has declined the gift. But the memory of his once-redeemable soul stays with him; in his memory, he is, like all of us, inherently virtuesque, and this is frequently expressed in the novel, most evidently in the relationship between

innocent Immalee and malignant Melmoth. Virtuesque and grotesque intermingle in passages like this one:

Absent from [Immalee], [Melmoth] returned to the world [outside her island] to torture and to tempt in the mad-house where the Englishman Stanton was tossing on the straw

. . . but while present, that purpose seemed suspended; he gazed often on her with eyes whose wild and fierce lustre was quenched in a dew that he hastily wiped away, and gazed on her again. While he sat near her on the flowers she had collected for him . . . ,--while he heard accents issue from those lips which he felt it would be impossible to pervert as it would be to teach the nightingale blasphemy,--he sunk down beside her, passed his hand over his livid brow, and, wiping off some cold drops, thought for a moment he was not the Cain of the moral world, and that the brand was effaced,--at least for the moment. The habitual and impervious gloom of his soul soon returned. He felt again the gnawings of the worm that never dies, and the scorplings of the fire that is never to be quenched (298-9).

This, in microcosm, expresses the ambivalence surrounding Melmoth. In a few lines, he goes from a dewy-eyed lovebird to the "Cain of the moral world;" the image of this Satanic figure of "impervious gloom" seated on a carpet of wildflowers strewn by naïve, vivacious Immalee is quite grotesque--bizarre, but not comical, as MacAndrew points out. Melmoth seems to encompass the extremes of the human condition: he is the ultimate sinner, yet still lingering in him are traces of the divine soul, and Maturin keeps us aware of both poles. This, presumably, is why Hart speaks of Melmoth's "full humanity" (102)--other than the fact that Melmoth represents moral extremes, I fail to see how he can be considered fully human. And it is this implied sense of humanity that renders Melmoth an effective Gothic villain. The humanity comes from the dynamic interaction of virtuesque and grotesque. It is an internal conflict, but, unfortunately, we see it only from the outside. Maturin's willingness to go to extremes provides Melmoth with a certain inevitable power, but how much more effective he could have been, if only we had been given an internal dynamic moment--to see Melmoth within ourselves, rather than as an archetypal representation of the full theological potentiality of the human condition. We recognize Melmoth's humanity, but we don't identify with it. Nonetheless, with Melmoth we have now reached the end of the classic Gothic period, and seen that in that novel, as well as those other

works which have received the most praise for their internal merits--The Mysteries of Udolpho, Caleb Williams, The Monk, Frankenstein--we can understand the affective power to reside in the more or less successful use of the dynamic moment, either internalized or externalized.

The dynamic moment is hardly the only standard by which Gothic is to be judged. Vathek, for instance, has little reader-text dynamic--in the sense that we don't identify with the characters--but it does have other redeeming qualities. Nonetheless, as a general rule of thumb, those Gothic novels which are still frequently discussed are those which best engage and affect the reader . . . and I suspect that is why they are the most frequently discussed, because this makes them more enjoyable to read. If we look at a few works which are lesser known, and discussed only intermittently, we will see that they are lacking in effective dynamic moments--the texts do not humanize the characters, they don't make us care, they keep us always at an analytical distance.

Brockden Brown's Wieland begins with a rather effective dynamic moment, in a little prologue concerning the titular Wieland's grandfather. Due to a not unpleasing but "labourious and mechanical" profession, he becomes increasingly bored with life, inclined to "morose and gloomy reflection" (7-8). This inexplicable discontent seems to be, in effect, a midlife crisis, a circumstance particularly recognizable to modern readers; even if we have not experienced such restlessness ourselves, it is such a well-known phenomenon that we can empathize with it. The elder Wieland takes to religion as comfort, which provides an object for "the craving which had haunted him" (9). In our era of born-again Christians, this character's transformation seems reasonable enough. One can see similar character portrayals in such modern works as Michael Tolkin's film The Rapture, in which the protagonist, experiencing an existential crisis, changes almost overnight from a detached sexual adventuress to a devout Christian believer. In short, the original dynamic moment in Wieland seems convincing, relevant, and therefore engages us. Unfortunately,

that Wieland dies a scant few pages later, and only serves to emphasize the unengaging quality of the rest of the book.

The supposedly dynamic moment, in the novel's main narrative, is concerned with Clara Wieland's sudden love for an enigmatic stranger who is eventually revealed to be a malignant force in the novel. Here is Clara's transition:

My attention was, in a few minutes, recalled by the stranger, who returned with the empty cup in his hand. I had not thought of the circumstances, or should certainly have chosen a different seat. He no sooner shewed himself, than a confused sense of impropriety, added to the suddenness of the interview, for which, not having foreseen it, I had made no preparation, threw me into a state of the most painful embarrassment He placed his cup upon the bench, stammered out thanks, and retired.

It was some time before I could recover my wonted composure. I had snatched a view of the stranger's countenance. The impression it made was vivid and indelible Every feature was wide of beauty, and the outline of his face reminded you of an inverted cone.

And yet his forehead, so far as shaggy locks would allow it to be seen, his eyes lustrously black, and possessing . . . something in the rest of his features, which it would be vain to describe, but which served to betoken a mind of the highest order This, in the effects which immediately flowed from it, I count among the most extraordinary incidents of my life. This face, seen for a moment, continued for hours to occupy my fancy, to the exclusion of almost every other image (60-1).

For no reason whatsoever, Clara becomes obsessed, with disastrous consequences. Her obsession is utterly inhuman and inexplicable; there is nothing dynamic, no subjective reader involvement, in this scene. Her love just appears, *ex nihilo*. There is nothing sexual about it ("every feature was wide of beauty"). There is nothing for us to latch on to, nothing to identify with. This could be a source of terror—that one can fall in love with someone who will destroy us is a terrifying thought, and not inconceivable. But because there is nothing to empathize with, we feel no sympathy for Clara and consequently no terror. Love, certainly, is not rational, but this scene is simply ludicrous; good writers can make sudden, fierce love seem convincing (cf. Pride and Prejudice, Gwethalyn Graham's Earth and High Heaven, Anthony Minghella's film of The English Patient), but in Wieland, this crucial moment in the text, the place where we could enter into this world of exaggerated, two-dimensional characters, is unconvincing, and so, as a whole, the novel remains unmoving—and infrequently discussed by Gothic critics.

Radcliffe's The Italian is much discussed, but if St Leon is the most unjustly ignored Gothic text, The Italian is for me the most overpraised. Where Emily is the focal point of Udolpho, Schedoni is the focal point of The Italian (the novel is named after him, after all). For this novel to create terror, Schedoni's ambiguity has to be convincing. He is as distant and extreme a character as Melmoth, but, for all that this is Radcliffe's least sentimental Gothic, she does not have Maturin's ability to take us to extremes. Schedoni is a second-rate Melmoth. Worse, when we actually do get 'inside' his head, his ambivalence fails to convince. It is rooted in the (false) realization that Ellena is his child, and the pangs of remorse have more to do with the failure of Schedoni's schemes than any paternal (and humanizing) feeling on his part. To be dynamic, the turning point has to draw us into Schedoni's situation, to make us feel for a moment that we are in some way similar to him. But the change in feeling prevents us from experiencing any sympathetic fellow-feeling:

Schedoni, meanwhile, shut up in his chamber, was agitated by feelings of a very opposite nature. When their first excess was exhausted, and his mind was calm enough to reflect, the images that appeared on it struck him with solemn wonder It appeared that he had been persecuting his own child Every step that he had taken with a view of gratifying his ambition was retrograde, and while he had been wickedly intent to serve the Marchesa and himself, by preventing the marriage of Vivaldi and Ellena, he had been laboriously counteracting his own fortune (243-4).

Schedoni's "affrighted conscience" (246), as it is described, is nothing more than a regret that his ignorance prevented him from making more productive use of Ellena and Vivaldi. His transition is merely a change from one villainous scheme to another--and a much tamer one at that, which makes him much too 'domestic' (so to speak) and boring for a Gothic villain. If Radcliffe had presented us with a man actually racked with guilt by the thought that he had been persecuting his own child, we would have an effective dynamic moment. We might empathize with the villain, and once we do that, as with Ambrosio, we cannot quite coolly dismiss any of their actions as alien to our own. But Radcliffe's dynamic shift is, 1) abstracted to a simple description of an "affrighted conscience," and, 2) contradictory in its details, because Schedoni is really upset only because his own schemes have backfired. I am unconvinced by Schedoni, and unimpressed by The Italian.

Last--and least--in this quick survey of failed dynamic moments, is Shelley's Zastrozzi. This novel is, in many ways, standard Gothic fare--the conventions are all in place, the fevered language is in place, and the characters are acting out the right emotions--but it is quite simply atrocious. It is a structural mess (although compared to the even more wretched St Irvyne it is a miracle of rare design), in large part due to a completely skewed dynamic moment. The novel begins in medias res, with the following: "Torn from the society of all he held dear on earth, the victim of secret enemies, and exiled from happiness, was the wretched Verezzi!" (5). There is a reason for Verezzi's dire circumstances, but the entire novel (short though it is) passes, all the action springing from the cause of Verezzi's angst, with almost no explanation. Finally, in a ludicrously abrupt finale, the villain Zastrozzi appears and explains that he has persecuted Verezzi as revenge for his mother's death at the hands of Verezzi's father (102). The basic materials of terror are here, but used in an entirely wrong manner. The novel centres on Verezzi, not Zastrozzi, and although Zastrozzi's persecution could be granted some legitimacy, we know nothing of the background history, and so the whole novel takes place in a sort of causal fog--everything is shrouded in mystery. Zastrozzi's revelation is the dynamic moment in the text, but it comes a little too late to rescue this mess. We are thoroughly fed up by the time we get to the final page, and couldn't care less why Zastrozzi did what he did. We have to become subjectively involved with a character relatively early in a text--ideally in the opening pages, at least in the first half of the work, so that as the character is taken to extremes, we who have become dynamically involved are swept up in the momentum, and terror is given time to intensify. This is how effective terror is created; Shelley's method only creates inadvertent humour--that is if we have the patience to read to the last page. It is with very, very good reason that Shelley's poetry has endured while his two novels languish in critical and popular obscurity.

Clearly then, if a character's actions and motivations remain abstract and generalized, a text cannot create terror. Implication with the character, a sense of

familiarity, a feeling of identification, is a must for the engine of terror to operate at maximum efficiency. The humanization of character has a huge impact on how we read a text; Napier, among others, has commented on how disappointing it is to find in Udolpho that while "St Aubert . . . is made to seem to entertain a secret passion for a woman who is not his wife," it is "a suggestion whose ethical and emotional dimensions are utterly ignored: the 'mistake' functions not on the level of character but of story" (135). The novel would have been so much more intriguing if Radcliffe had done something with St Aubert's passion other than used it to generate suspense. This instance is a prime example of Gothic's failure to give a human dimension to its proto-grotesques, thereby limiting its potential. This is not to say that those novels which lack successful dynamic moments are incapable of moving us—but they are incapable of creating terror. We do find horror in these texts, and it is useful to distinguish between the two sensations. Horror makes us recoil; it is a cold feeling of alienation, of fear that certain actions could take place. Even the most undynamic of texts can create horror, because horror need only make us entertain an idea, rather than identify with a character.

It is horror that seizes us when, in Wieland, Clara discovers that all her loved ones are dead, and that the killer is her brother. It is the same sensation we feel when watching the news and we hear a report of a mass-murder spree. One does not need to know the victims to be moved; it is the idea that shocks us, as does the idea that Clara's own brother could commit such atrocities. Likewise, Zofloya, a poor novel for the most part, contains perhaps the most horrifying moment in Gothic fiction (those who might think female writers write only sentimentalized Gothic can think again). The adolescent, orphan girl Lilla is taken by the villains of the piece, Zofloya and Victoria, and chained naked in a remote cave (Vol. 3, 40). Not satisfied with letting her starve to death in loneliness, her captors decide that "she shall have food," because "there is certainly a pleasure . . . in the infliction of prolonged torment" (42). Eventually, she is killed, stabbed repeatedly by Victoria (104), but all the elements of this death—the innocence and youth of Lilla, the utter

injustice of her death, the nakedness that emphasizes her vulnerability, the sheer joy which her tormentors take in tormenting her--make it chillingly horrifying. The characters are empty stylizations of human beings, but we need only entertain the notion of such a death and we are horrified. Its impact is similar to the protracted death scene of Maddy in Twin Peaks, where Lynch plays on our expectations as TV viewers (the clever detective always appears on the scene in time, doesn't he?) by drawing out the brutal murder over an exceptionally long period, and having, eventually, no one come to the rescue--indeed, no one has the faintest suspicion that the murder is happening. All we are left with is a chilling, motiveless, violent killing--the effect is overwhelming. That is horror, not terror: a more potent version of what Charlotte Dacre does with Lilla. Terror and horror when combined make for particularly powerful moments. Kiely says, "Occasionally, as in . . . The Monk, the artist rises above his own earlier contradictions and produces a conclusion which surpasses in power and coherence everything which preceded it" (2). This is true of The Monk because our trace of sympathetic identification with Ambrosio makes him a vehicle for terror (as Cavaliero remarks, Ambrosio is a character "whom Lewis makes it difficult for one altogether to detest" [29]), and when the horror of the final scene takes place, with Ambrosio dying a lingering, gruesome death, we are both horrified at the idea of his death and terrified by our implication in his character--and therefore in the brutal fate he receives. This all-too-rare combination of terror and horror creates Gothic's supreme moments.

It certainly does have some fine, memorable moments. For a genre full of static characters with generalized motivations, it can still create images that resonate in the reader's mind long after the book has been put back on the shelf: Ambrosio lying broken by the river bank as eagles tear his flesh; Victor Frankenstein confronting his creation; the black cat screaming from its perch atop the head of a corpse being disinterred from behind a wall; Melmoth seated in shadow, advising his namesake and Monçada to quit his apartments as the hour of his death approaches. The dynamic moment can explain how it is

that these scenes have any power, because it is only through that device that the characters concerned are capable of haunting us, of lingering in our memories, of becoming part of our consciousness. Mishra says, reasonably enough, that "'character'--the central discovery of the Enlightenment novel, the 'novelistic norm,' the spectacle that binds the viewers to an objectified presence like a specular filmic image--has little place in a theory of the Gothic where stylized figures are much more abundant" (54). But we have to account for the ability of the Gothic to affect us with terror somehow. The arbitrary movements of stylized figures, one would think, do not make for emotionally powerful literature--but occasionally they do. D. H. Lawrence's statement about "The Fall of the House of Usher"--it "is lurid and melodramatic, but it is true. It is a ghastly psychological truth" (qtd Wilt 22)--is an apt statement of the overall value of Gothic. It can sometimes present terrifying concepts with the force of "psychological truth." Stylized figures do not make useful embodiments of "psychological truth"--but the idea of the dynamic moment explains how it is that they, for all that they are "lurid and melodramatic," can grip us with terror. It explains how it is that Gothic can rise above the paradoxes that Napier justly criticizes. And it accords with Twitchell's claim--which could serve as a motto for this essay--that "it is hard to say anything insightful about what exactly it is within the [G]othic novel that gives it coherence unless the methodology is psychological" (18).

Having arrived at a theory thanks to Mervyn Peake, does the theory actually hold true in the texts it derives from, Titus Groan and Gormenghast? Yes. As usual, if it's Gothic, it's to be found in evidence in Peake's work--and, furthermore, it is more effective there than in any other Gothic. Two examples--Titus and Steerpike--can show us how it is that Peake can make his grotesques more psychologically sound than most 'realistic' characters.

Titus is an infant throughout the first book, and mostly a catalyst of events. In Gormenghast he is older, but still a child. C. N. Manlove complains that the "several and confused motives behind Titus' longing to be free--dislike at being marked out, objection to

his lack of choice, hatred of responsibility, horror at the Ritual, the lust for new horizons--are served at us in continual rotation, until we have a sense only of some vague and cloudy impulse directing him" (240). Everything Manlove says is correct, except that this is no flaw in the novel. Titus is a child: Gormenghast's opening presents this as his prime characteristic--"for first and ever foremost he is child" (373; Peake's emphasis). Children don't act or think logically. Their impulses are generally "vague and cloudy." Titus and his sister Fuchsia are the most convincing child characters I have ever encountered in fiction, precisely because Peake ignores the rules of the creative writer's handbook and makes them inconsistent--whimsical, emotional, stubborn, rebellious, moody . . . childish. Here, vagueness and abstraction of a character serves not to distance the reader, but to make the character more convincing. Alison Milbank has remarked, in another context, that "children, powerless in an adult world, naturally view the world through Gothic spectacles" (9), and in a sense Peake's novels are about that very concept: the world viewed through Titus's eyes as a phantasmagoric, inexplicable, Gothic realm. As we have seen already, vagueness and cloudiness are typical in Gothic characters; we find the same here, but it is used to the advantage of the text. And Peake also provides dynamic moments to 'ground' us in Titus's feelings at a specific moment, to make him even more sympathetic. One of Gormenghast's most compelling moments is a confrontation between Steerpike, arch-nemesis of Titus and (to the child) "the arch-symbol of all the authority and repression which he loathed" (602). Titus, thinking he has been pestered by a classmate, hisses "Shut up!" (601), turns around, and finds Steerpike's gangling figure looming over him. He has offended a sacred figure; but "to apologize would be to submit" (602), he realizes. And so, defiantly, he says not a word by way of apology. This magnificent scene gains its power from many surrounding details, but it is primarily, primally, a confrontation between the ultimate child, Titus, and the ultimate symbol of cold authority, Steerpike. As we all wished to do as children, Titus stares down the authority-figure and does not submit. Here, the vague sense of rebellion that animates Titus (and is utterly true

to a child's feelings) is coupled to a specific act of rebellion; if you like, the theory has been illustrated with a concrete example. This is a splendidly dynamic moment. It humanizes the already human Titus; it rounds out his character; it makes us identify with him thoroughly, for we are rooting for the child's freedom and we loathe Steerpike. Thus, Peake uses the Gothic tools to perfection, capitalizing both on the vague, exaggerated, stylized Gothic character and on the dynamic moment when one extreme confronts another to involve us closely with the emotions at work. Peake's characters, it should be noted, are not proto-grotesques, but fully developed grotesques who move beyond simplistic virtuesque/grotesque, good/evil oppositions, although clearly Titus is good and Steerpike evil. But it is not through Titus that we are to feel terror in this novel; however, the use of the dynamic moment to make us identify with him shows us a perhaps unique instance of an author who enables us to identify strongly with multiple characters in a Gothic text, to create a multi-layered, chaotic, reader-text dynamic rather than a single-level, linear, Monk-like dynamic.

It is Steerpike who is the vehicle for terror, and what a vehicle he is--"a remarkable creation" (Pringle 28). Steerpike's abstracted character is that of the aesthetic villain, a cold, rational, calculating youth who turns evil into an art-form. The Woman in White's Fosco is such a villain, except that he is older and stouter; he and Steerpike are memorable for much the same reasons. Steerpike's self-dramatization, his perverse delight in his handiwork, is present almost from the beginning. He is first seen as a kitchen boy, but loathes his position, and he escapes. We know that he hates Swelter, but it is not this that is used as our means of identification. It is a detail, a plot point which gives him some familiar motivation. But his real motivation is the motivation of all artists: the desire to create works of art. Who can explain it? It is abstract, irrational, vague--but familiar to many of us. Anyone who has taken pride in the completion of a good essay, a painting, a short story, a musical composition, that satisfies her expectations, can see herself eerily reflected in Steerpike. We are often provided insight into the workings of his cold

intelligence, and it is through these moments that we come to recognize a little of ourselves in him. For a considerable time, Steerpike has been planning the death of the decrepit, foul-mouthed, loathsome Master of Ritual, Barquentine, so that he can take his place as keeper of Gormenghast's secrets and enforcer of its traditions. Following behind Barquentine, he muses about the impending murder: "The time was almost ripe in Steerpike's judgement for the Master of Ritual to be dispatched. Apart from other motives the wiping out of so ugly a thing as Barquentine seemed to Steerpike, upon aesthetic considerations alone, an act long overdue" (492-3; my emphasis). The chilling detachment of this idea--murder as an aesthetic consideration--is horrifying. What makes it terrifying is that we could not agree more: killing Barquentine would be aesthetically pleasing. As much as we may dislike Steerpike, we dislike Barquentine just as much, and he is so repulsive a personality that his death does seem overdue. This is a fiction, it has aesthetic requirements, and we as readers, aesthetically speaking, would like Barquentine's death. And so we become implicated in Steerpike's ruthless mind.

Peake carries this even further when the murder is about to occur: "as . . . Steerpike obtained an even clearer view of the candleflame an idea occurred to the young man which made all his carefully prepared plans for the death and disposal of the ancient's body appear amateurish: amateurish through lack of that deceptive simplicity which is the hallmark of all great art" (571). Steerpike's feelings are those of the artist who has a spur-of-the-moment inspiration, who sees a way of improving upon his story, song, sculpture. Anyone who has undertaken an artistic endeavour can surely relate to the feeling, if not to Steerpike's medium, murder. There is something absurdly normal and quotidian about Steerpike's thoughts, despite the cruelty involved. This evokes terror, because it makes us sense that our minds are not so different from those of a ruthless killer--and Steerpike is as ruthless and remorseless as any literary villain. And as terrifying.

Once more, we can see Gormenghast and Titus Groan as the quintessential Gothic texts--they exploit the full potential available from Gothic conventions, language,

grotesques, and terror. The skillful use of dynamic moments to stimulate an ongoing subjective involvement with the characters is fundamental to the full exploitation of the Gothic. There is another sense in which these novels are representative of all Gothic: they embody the two distinct periods of 'pure' Gothic fiction. The first period, which I have alternately called 'early,' 'classic,' or 'Golden Age' Gothic, is clearly present in Gormenghast's Gothic conventions, which can be found, de-fantasized and de-grotesquified, in works from Otranto to Melmoth. But in its sophisticated use of the grotesque and its greater moral ambiguity, it has affinities with the later, refined Gothic works of the nineteenth century that came after Melmoth.

4. Refining the Gothic

If we skip a period of almost 80 years--jumping from Melmoth the Wanderer to the 1890s--we can still find Gothic texts founded on principles similar to those of the earlier period: namely, the identification of the reader with weakly developed grotesques in order to produce terror. In both The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mister Hyde and Dracula, we find Gothic fiction that has not changed much in the 70-plus years since Melmoth. We are still in the simplistic world of virtuesque and grotesque--indeed, Jekyll/Hyde is perhaps the most famous example of a virtuesque/grotesque pairing in all fiction (although, as we shall see, the terms virtuesque/grotesque are not quite accurate in the original text).

Neither work contains anything resembling fully-rounded, three-dimensional, psychologically complex characters. The only characters developed at any length in Jekyll and Hyde are the Jekyll/Hyde pair and Utterson--who is established in the opening paragraph as a sort of Everyman, who tempers self-indulgence with self-discipline, for he drinks gin only when alone, and "though he enjoyed the theatre, [he] had not crossed the doors of one for twenty years" (93). We are told that he was "in any extremity inclined to help rather than reprove" (93). In short, he's Joe Average. And he is the most complex character in this short novel. Jekyll and Hyde are moderately developed, while Enfield and Lanyon are very minor figures. Stevenson's fictional world is more a world of non-descripts than of grotesques, with the notable exception of Hyde. For all that the setting is London, we are still in the psychologically shallow realm of surfaces familiar to us from The Castle of Otranto and The Monk and Frankenstein--a world much like that of Dracula. Stoker's novel gives us the stout-hearted and rather bland men of action Seward, Morris, and Harker, while Lucy and Mina are the passive females, and Van Helsing's the one with the funny accent. I am being unfair to Stoker--his characterization is far better than, say, Walpole's--but George Eliot this is not.

Nevertheless, everyone knows of Jekyll and Hyde and Dracula--albeit in versions differing significantly from the originals--but if you mention Tertius Lydgate to someone, the response is likely to be a blank look. For all their artistic failings, Stoker and Stevenson created figures central to twentieth century Anglo-American culture: George Eliot cannot say the same. As Twitchell says, "When we look back over the past two centuries we see that certain images and sequences have plagued popular culture. Surely it is important that these motifs won't go away" (4). It doubtless is important, but what I am interested in here is why they won't go away. In discussing Jekyll and Hyde's affinities with traditional Gothic, Edwin Block tells us that it "creates a mood of terror shading into horror created on both narrative and figurative levels of the text. It also suffers from some standard 'weaknesses' which unsympathetic critics often ascribe to Gothic tales: cardboard characters and unconvincing dialogue" (11). We are beset by the old Gothic paradox: cardboard characters that somehow manage to create a powerful mood of terror. Block's phrasing is particularly apt, because in this section I want to concentrate on the idea of the "mood of terror" that pervades later Gothic works, rather than the terrifying dynamic moments that are found in earlier works. The notion of "terror shading into horror" is also à propos of my hypothesis, because in Dracula and Jekyll and Hyde we have two of the final 'true' Gothic narratives. The twentieth century completes a gradual transition away from Gothic terror, toward the horrors of the H. P. Lovecrafts and Ira Levins and Stephen Kings of popular fiction.

Dracula, published as it is in 1897, is on the threshold between horror and Gothic. The central 'let's-kill-Dracula' plot works only on the level of horror. It is the vampire's mutability, his Otherness, that is horrifying. We never feel sympathetic, never feel through an identification with the undead that there is a little of the vampire in us; he is inhuman, and we recoil in fear, rather than shuddering in recognition. Anne Williams says, "The horror of Dracula is the horror of man confronting a universe that no longer confirms or conforms to the patriarchal structure of reality" (134). Perhaps this accounts for the myth's

endurance, but for those of us who are perfectly happy to see "the patriarchal structure of reality" break down, even Dracula's horror is not pervasive, never mind his terror.

But it is a novel intriguing for many reasons beside the eponymous vampire. For one, Stoker's novel (like Frankenstein and Jekyll and Hyde) is still of considerable interest to the contemporary reader partly because the original text is quite different from the popular cultural myths we all know--Frankenstein, we discover when we read the novel, is the name of the scientist, not the monster; we find there is no romantic subplot in Stevenson's Jekyll and Hyde . . . and Dracula has a fascinating subplot involving a character called Renfield. It is Renfield who intrigued and disturbed me in my first reading of Dracula. Like an opening act that upstages the headlining artist, Renfield can grab the reader's attention in a way that his Master doesn't. Renfield creates a link--a dynamic--between reader and vampire that Dracula doesn't create.

Renfield is grotesque: he qualifies almost automatically by virtue of his insanity, for, as Philip Thomson points out, "Manifestations of insanity, particularly those involving maniacal laughter, are often grotesque, because insane behaviour is abnormal . . . it can be comic and frightening at the same time" (53). Renfield's madness runs the gamut of insanity: from violent frenzies to child-like friendliness, confirming him as a grotesque--the only well-developed grotesque in the novel.

His derangement at first seems alien and inexplicable. Confined to his cell, he becomes a microcosmic embodiment of the food chain, as he captures flies and feeds them to spiders, then feeds the spiders to birds, and the birds to cats. This hint of method in his madness makes Renfield intriguing. Seward remarks, "The case of Renfield grows more interesting the more I get to understand the man" (74), and the reader shares the sentiment. But Renfield's carnivorous evolution becomes unnerving--beyond the sheer perversity of capturing flies for the sake of feeding them to spiders--when its end result becomes apparent, when he remarks, "I don't take any stock in cats. I have more to think of now, and I can wait; I can wait" (116). He is waiting for Dracula, the vampire, who feeds on

humans--if we extrapolate Renfield's chain of progression, we go from cats eating birds, to humans eating cats, to vampires eating humans.

Suddenly, we are part of the chain, which becomes a sort of mutant version of Darwinism. We are reduced, on a fundamental level, to spiders that eat flies, or, worse, the flies getting eaten by the spider/vampire. The grotesque madman Renfield--a violently delirious man who is, like Hyde, a human laid bare, devoid of morality--is suddenly an aspect of us, a part of our primitive unconscious urges. Seward, watching Renfield, remarks, "There is a method in his madness, and the rudimentary idea in my mind is growing. It will be a whole idea soon, and then, oh, unconscious cerebration! you will have to give the wall to your conscious brother" (75). The wall that must give way is not only between conscious and unconscious, but also the wall between us and Renfield. The narrative cleverly implicates us in Seward's interest. Intrigued by the case study, we too try to figure out the end result: when we discover that Renfield's bizarre behaviour has a perfectly logical consistency, it is unnerving, for we realize that the supposed lunatic thinks like us. The division between sanity and madness collapses--an uncomfortable thought. Seward says of Renfield, "I shall have to invent a new classification for him, and call him a zoophagous (life-eating) maniac; what he desires is to absorb as many lives as he can" (77), and we cannot but acknowledge that the non-vegetarians among us are a little zoophagous ourselves. We absorb other lives so that we may live: survival of the fittest. Our link to Dracula as a vampire is tenuous at best; vague sexual symbolism surrounding blood transfusions may make for fascinating interpretations and psychoanalysis, but it doesn't make us feel one with the vampire. It is Renfield who allows us to see ourselves in the figure of the vampire--to see that Dracula is in a sense simply higher up on the food chain, and like us, is just trying to survive. The overall result is effective Gothic, for Renfield awakens a number of disturbing ideas, and all of them are potentially terrifying.

This would be what Block calls terror on the "figurative" (i.e. symbolic) level; he also mentions "narrative" terror. This I have alluded to in referring to the way we become

interested in Renfield through a devious narrative strategy. Provide a madman, give him some eccentric behaviour which seems to obey a hidden logic, and we as readers take delight in trying to figure out what the logic is; every reader has a little of C. Auguste Dupin in her. In Dracula this is particularly cunning because it makes us try to think like Renfield, making identification with him all the more likely--but use of the 'detective story' strategy is useful at any time. It implicates the reader in the story, in the minds of the characters, and this can be a useful tool in Gothic fiction as in detective fiction: in the latter it generates suspense, in the former it is a useful adjunct to (or basis for) terror. Where Dracula makes occasional use of such a narrative strategy, Jekyll and Hyde as a whole is structured around the mystery of Mr. Hyde--who is he? and what is his relationship to Henry Jekyll? As with Dracula, this is a useful way of creating an active reader-text dynamic, even if it is a 'watered-down' dynamic, since many readers encountering the story already know the general idea behind the Jekyll/Hyde mystery.

But even for the reader knowledgeable about the story through first- or second-hand knowledge of twentieth century film versions, the text of Jekyll and Hyde can still pack a potent punch. The narrative structure of detection is part of its appeal, but this merely serves as a basis for the story's terror. Twitchell succinctly touches on the reason why Jekyll and Hyde is so unsettling: "Hyde in print [as opposed to horror movies] is a strangely sympathetic figure" (232). But what is sympathetic about this twisted, violent creature, that makes him terrifying in print, rather than horrifying on the screen?

Much like Renfield, Hyde is a perverse interpretation of Darwinism, and it is this grounding in scientific 'fact' that makes him so disturbing to our sensibilities. He represents a man devolved, as his stunted, hairy, atavistic body makes quite evident; he is a man robbed of any nobler instincts, a lower rung on the Darwinian ladder of evolution. And as the implication of Renfield's experiment is that on one level humans are much like spiders consuming flies, the implication of Hyde is that on one level he represents 'pure' humanity. The most basic, primitive, animal urges in ourselves are embodied and

magnified by Hyde. And, according to Darwin, it is from Hyde that we are evolved; the terrifying idea presented in Jekyll and Hyde is that the root of humanity is Hyde. We may evolve from that level, but we can never transcend it--it is the basis on which human consciousness is founded. Punter rightly says, "This is the reversion of the species, the ever-present threat that, if evolution is a ladder, it may be possible to start moving down it. Not surprisingly, this threat cannot be named in the text" (244; Punter's emphasis). The text's unnamed terror springs from the idea not only that we might move down the ladder, but that down is the only way we can move. If we read the story this way, the 'purification' of Jekyll into Hyde, rather than a superior figure, makes sense. As MacAndrew says, "The potion itself, it should be noted, is neutral. Had he taken it when his good nature was uppermost, he would have been an angel" (225). The potion is neutral; it is not an evil influence, merely a catalyst. Why did it catalyze a transformation into the grotesque, not the virtuesque? While Jekyll does make some feeble rationalizations, saying, "Had I approached my discovery in a more noble spirit . . . I had come forth an angel instead of a fiend At that time my virtue slumbered; my evil, kept awake by ambition, was alert and swift to seize the occasion" (127), his explanations are insufficient. His remark about slumbering virtue does not follow logically from what has been said in the previous paragraphs. He is avoiding a confrontation with the terrifying implications of his experiment. The only way to go was down: humanity is as high up the ladder of the evolution as it's going to get for the time being, and the only purification that can occur is the elimination of all those moral ideals that get in the way of animal instincts. Jekyll and Hyde, anticipating Freud (as has often been remarked), posits that the domination of reason/morality over instinct/gratification is uneasy, and easily usurped. The Hyde aspect of humanity, we are being told, is more deeply entrenched in the human mind than the lofty ideals we value so highly.

This is disturbingly plausible, all the more so for the twentieth century reader because of the advent of Freudian psychology. Jekyll, while often thought of as the

virtuesque opposite of Hyde's grotesque, is actually neither angel nor monster, but simply an ordinary man, a generally nice man who does much good in the world; the excessive shame of his private vices, he says, is caused by "the exacting nature of my aspirations [rather] than any particular degradation in my faults" (124). His vices are the vices of youth, of growing up, that we all share; we make mistakes, we feel guilty—and he feels especially guilty because of his high standards. This is one of the dynamic moments in this text, when we feel an identification with a sympathetic human being who is at other times an extreme exaggeration. But the mind of this ordinary man (like Freud, Stevenson doesn't seem to have been too concerned with the female side of the human equation), when provided with a neutral potion that will distill one aspect of his mind into a purified form, chooses not the angelic, but the demonic, the animal, the evil. This is because there is no choice. The potion could have no other result; it is not human nature to be angelic, but it is natural (if we choose to interpret Darwin Gothically) for humanity to be "pure evil" (126), as conceived in moral terms.

This reading also helps to explain various characters' violent reactions to Hyde. Both Enfield (96) and Utterson (100), before they are even fully aware of Hyde's nature, detest him upon first sight. But the most violent reaction of all is from Lanyon, who commits suicide as a result of witnessing Hyde's transformation into Jekyll. Such hatred is understandable if we see it as instinctive dislike intensified by a recognition of Hyde's common link with all humanity. Enfield, Utterson, and Lanyon, we can theorize, recognize that Hyde is a part of themselves, and unwilling to admit to this, they are all the more determined to despise him as something hideous, repulsive, and alien from humanity. This explanation is much like the psychological theory that intense homophobia is a result of fear of one's own homosexuality. In adopting this approach—that the disgust Hyde provokes is due to the other characters' denial of their common nature—a number of Lanyon's phrases become particularly significant.

Lanyon's first sight of Hyde is accompanied by a "subjective debility of constitution" (122; my emphasis)--implying "subjective" identification with Hyde rather than "objective" appraisal. While Lanyon at first attributes his reaction to simple distaste, he later "has reason to believe the cause to lie much deeper in the nature of man" (122), which makes perfect sense if we accept that Hyde, in this story, represents humanity's deepest nature. Lanyon summarizes his ambivalent reaction as "disgustful curiosity" (122), "curiosity" again implying a subjective identification with or interest in Hyde, a desire to know more, which can be understood if Hyde represents an important truth about humanity. After the revelation that Hyde is Carew's killer and that Hyde is Jekyll, Lanyon says his "life is shaken to its roots" (124)--i.e. he has come to recognize his roots for what they are, having seen them externalized as Hyde. His suicide becomes understandable in light of this reading; otherwise, it seems rather excessive.

And so in Jekyll and Hyde we find terror being evoked through the typical Gothic strategy: the text allows for a dynamic interaction between the reader and a grotesque character (Hyde), an interaction that forces us to examine the most unsettling aspects of our own nature. You don't have to believe that Stevenson's tale is a fictional expression of a depressing 'truth' about humanity. I certainly don't believe it, but the story can make me feel, or consider, for a moment, that it might be true, and that is all it takes to create effective terror. It makes the reader consider the possibility that grotesque excess lurks within his own mind; makes her recognize a part of herself in a disturbing character. Thirty minutes after the book is put down, the feeling may pass . . . but it may return, for well-constructed terror can make us feel a certain sense of unease whenever we consider it, because it seems vaguely plausible, and few of us are so certain in our beliefs that we can't be shaken once in a while by a more disturbing alternative.

Both Jekyll and Hyde and Dracula are, as a whole, more successful works than most earlier Gothic, although they lack some of the demented vitality that makes a work like The Monk greater than the sum of its parts. Nonetheless, in terms of characterization,

as already mentioned, both works seem to ignore a century's worth of realism, and are throwbacks to classic Gothic. But they make use--although not as effectively as they could have--of some other techniques that have been developed in post-Melmoth nineteenth century Gothic in order to produce a more pervasive atmosphere of terror, a sense of unease that permeates the whole text, rather than radiating outward from a single dynamic moment. Crucial to the overall effect of these texts--and crucial to Gothic after Melmoth--is their moral ambiguity. The terror is rooted not in theology (which has become unfashionable), but in science (in a theory still largely credible today). In a nutshell, The Monk says that God will punish us for sexual transgression; Jekyll and Hyde says that we have not evolved very much beyond our primitive and bestial ancestors. The latter idea is more shocking, because it is not grounded in a simplistic good/evil duality that most of us no longer accept. The problem of The Monk is not so much whether the reader believes in God or not, but that the religious view of sexuality is no longer relevant. The Monk can still affect us, but somewhat like "Carmilla," its power to terrify has been restrained by cultural change. The moral ambiguity of Dracula and Jekyll and Hyde is better suited to contemporary sensibilities. A similar ambiguity pervades all the post-Melmoth texts I will be looking at--and is aided and abetted by greater control of other Gothic tools, namely formal structure and (of course) the grotesque.

Issues of formal structure have been accounted for by Haggerty. As Napier's argument about Gothic's failures was complementary to the previous section, so Haggerty's argument about Gothic form complements this one. While my interest is in the grotesque character of Gothic fiction, Haggerty explores the form of the fiction, his idea being that the form of the tale is ideally suited to the genre. Speaking of Hawthorne, Haggerty remarks that he "employs a grammatically complex and rhetorically subtle mode of literary discourse that substitutes a nearly fully effective Gothic textual procedure for the isolated and ineffective Gothic 'content' of earlier works" (108), and this idea can be generally applied to all post-Melmoth nineteenth century Gothic. The result of the "Gothic

textual procedure" is terror, as in "Rappaccini's Daughter," of which Haggerty says, "Instead of being terrified by the Gothic experience, we become, with Giovanni, the agents of that terror" (129). My argument all along has been that terror only works when we, to some degree, feel ourselves as agents, or potential agents, of the Gothic experience. Haggerty's persuasive argument is that Hawthorne makes us agents of the terror through the complexities of the reading process. Dracula and Jekyll and Hyde, albeit less skillfully, are similarly effective.

We have moved beyond the simplistic dynamic moment to a "fully effective Gothic textual procedure" which extends the dynamic moment to encompass the entire novel. Haggerty's argument accounts for the formal aspects of "fully effective Gothic;" I am trying to build on his argument to show "fully effective Gothic" relies not just on a better-developed formal aesthetic, but also on the deployment of the grotesque in the characterization and even in the narrative's perception of its fictional world. It is a combination of three qualities--a more complex "textual procedure," greater moral ambiguity, a fully-developed aesthetic of the grotesque--that makes the great post-Melmoth Gothic novels so memorable as works of art. Those three qualities, complementing one another within the same text, allow for a fuller evocation of terror than is to be found in any earlier Gothic relying largely upon a dynamic moment, or (if we're lucky) two dynamic moments.

Indeed, MacAndrew tells us that the more refined use of the grotesque and the moral ambivalence of later nineteenth century Gothic are not independent of one another. Gothic "makes use of the grotesque to create a doubtful murky atmosphere" (157). It is morality that becomes doubtful and murky, for "the exploration into human evil seems less and less able to draw a line between it and the good. This movement in [later] Gothic tales probably reflects the general tendency for moral absolutes to give way before moral relativity in the modern world" (185). By showcasing the grotesque potential of our everyday lives, works of later Gothic are capable of making us feel the terror that we

ourselves are merely grotesque, that the grotesque is within us, and that this is more real than our moral distinctions.

The grotesque as a literary tool truly begins to flourish in the texts of this era. Gothic, as we saw in Peake's works, is at heart as absurd as it is scary. The absurdity does not weaken the impact of his novels: quite the opposite. Fully effective Gothic relies upon exploiting the genre's two mutually reinforcing characteristics: its humour and its terror. MacAndrew speaks of "the combination of the bizarre and the comic that makes a grotesque" (153), while Wolfgang Kayser says, "the grotesque is the expression of the estranged or alienated world, i.e. the familiar world is seen from a perspective which suddenly renders it strange (and, presumably this strangeness may be either comic or terrifying, or both)" (qtd Thomson 18). It is indeed this combination of qualities that makes the grotesque a powerful literary device. So far, we have mostly seen proto-grotesques that are bizarre and excessive, and sometimes unintentionally comic, but none that are presented in the sinister-comic fashion that is the sign of a successful grotesque--except in Peake, whose grotesques are definitive. Not even the later works by Stevenson and Stoker made better use of the grotesque. The failure of early Gothic was, I believe, bound up with its failure to exploit the comic aspect of the grotesque. Day tells us that one of Poe's quirkier tales, "Berenice," "manages to combine the fearful and the comic. It is not a reduction of the Gothic tale, but rather an expansion" (61). Through the comic, Gothic can enhance its effect. And while Stevenson and Stoker, through their moral ambiguity and their use of narrative structure, gave us texts more sophisticated than classic Gothic, even they are lacking a certain je ne sais quoi that can be found in the finest later nineteenth century Gothic works. The quoi of that je ne sais quoi, as we shall see, is the grotesque.

For all that I have been vaunting Peake's accomplishments, he is not alone in his ability to create exquisite grotesques. A number of nineteenth century Gothic works use the grotesque with equal panache--and through it they create the sinister, unsettling, subtly

terrifying atmosphere that we recognize as Gothic. A number of critics have alluded to this atmosphere: "in the nineteenth century," says Fred Botting, "Gothic fiction seemed to go underground: its depths were less romantic chasms or labyrinthine dungeons, than the murky recesses of human subjectivity" (11); Day writes, "the atmosphere of the novels is heightened by a more subtle interpenetration of the exotic and the ordinary after 1820" (34); speaking of Poe, Louis S. Gross says a fusion of "narrative strategies change[s] Gothic fiction . . . by inscribing an ironic dissociation between the experience of terror and its meaning that finally leaves the Gothic quester, both character and reader, unsure of anything he [or she] knows" (41). All three critics seem to have the same concepts in mind—"murky recesses of human subjectivity," "interpenetration of the exotic and the ordinary," "unsure of anything he [or she] knows," all tell us that later Gothic makes the familiar strange and the objective subjective, in a subtle and disturbing fashion. Howells even sees this happening in Udolpho: "Mrs Radcliffe's world is a frightening one full of shifting perspectives where ways of seeing and judging are continually dissolving into uncertainty" (28). I think Radcliffe's heavy-handed didacticism eliminates any uncertainty, but Howells's description of her world is an excellent general description of the archetypal Gothic world, a place of "shifting perspectives" and "uncertainty." This is partly achieved through the formal qualities of the tale, where subjective and objective become intermingled; but as important as this intermingling is the widespread use of the grotesque.

If Dracula and Jekyll and Hyde were works that failed to capitalize on the potential of the grotesque, other Gothic works of the period did harness Gothic's full potential. In The Turn of the Screw, James gave us perhaps the most famous and skillful of Gothic narratives that prevents the reader from separating objective 'truth' and subjective 'feeling.' In our lack of certainty, we share the perceptions of characters in the Gothic world, who can never be sure of anything. Are the children truly possessed, or is it all a figment of the narrator's imagination? There is no way of knowing. This is the "textual procedure" that helps build The Turn of the Screw's Gothic affect. In terms of content, Edwin Block

makes the case for the story's affinities with classic Gothic: "Of the Gothic conventions that 'The Turn of the Screw' employs, the minor details and conventional trappings are more obvious but less interesting than the thematic concerns. On a less obvious level, however, the Gothic twist which the story gives to conventional themes like forbidden knowledge, self-knowledge and the corruption of innocence link [it] to the long Gothic tradition of psychological exploration through the symbology of the horrifying" (207)--a symbology which becomes terrifying through our identification with the characters whose psychology is being explored. Finally, as all obedient Gothic novels should, The Turn of the Screw includes the grotesque as one of the weapons in its arsenal of terror. How does James use the grotesque? I feel The Turn of the Screw is too complex, subtle, and brilliant for any aspect of it to be fittingly analyzed in a few paragraphs. To remedy this problem, let us jump almost a hundred years into the future, then back to the seven or more decades between Melmoth and James's masterpiece, and perhaps then I will have developed enough 'ancillary documentation,' so to speak, to explain James's deft use of the grotesque as the culmination of its ongoing refinement in a number of nineteenth century masterpieces of Gothic.

Geoffrey Harpham says that "the sense of the grotesque arises with the perception that something is illegitimately in something else. The most mundane of figures, this metaphor of co-presence, in, also harbors the essence of the grotesque, the sense that things that should be kept apart are fused together" (11). Philip Thomson concurs: "the grotesque [is] a fundamentally ambivalent thing, . . . a violent clash of opposites" (11). It is this fusion of incompatibles that makes the grotesque such a potent means of creating terror. We want to separate the humorous and the scary into separate categories--by fusing those categories, the grotesque engenders an unsettling feeling that can be a potent source of terror, especially when magnified by the content and structure of the work. The utility of the grotesque for Gothic fiction is hinted at by Thomson, who says that it at times has "an aspect . . . of eeriness, of the spine-chillingly uncanny" (5). What better description of

Gothic atmosphere could there be than to call it eerie and "spine-chillingly uncanny"—terms which Thomson is applying to the grotesque. The fully-developed use of the grotesque in both its grimmer and more comical manifestations can be of immense service to Gothic writers. That we do not find it being used in such a way in early Gothic is a result of the authors' attempts to ground their absurdities in realism. Beckford is an exception: there is an understanding in Vathek of the comic potential of Gothic grotesquerie, as when the Giaour, curled up in a ball, is kicked through the town by the entire populace (95). But Beckford is trying to do the two separately: melodramatic Gothic on one hand, comic grotesqueness on the other. The novel uneasily jerks from one extreme to the other; it doesn't work properly. The later Victorian Gothic writers made much, much better use of Gothic grotesques because they did not deny the absurdity of the Gothic—it is allowed to be ludicrous and uncanny, absurd and disturbing, at the same time. This is what the Gothic atmosphere is: a continual sense of uncertainty created by the narrative structure and a grotesque perception of reality which prevents us from distinguishing the humorous from the horrific.

For all that it is a TV show from the early 1990s, Twin Peaks is as good an example as one is likely to find of the ultimate Gothic atmosphere, of a place where (as the 'Bravo!' channel's introduction to the show tells us) "nothing is quite what it seems." The show is often casually referred to as Gothic, and it's no coincidence that a recent show heavily influenced by Twin Peaks was called American Gothic. But what's Gothic about Twin Peaks? Fred Botting tells us the show explores "evil's multiple sources in primordial, individual, cultural and narrative locations: deep in the woods, in human fears, selfish desires and sexual repressions, in the community and within the family. The evil in the woods alludes to Hawthorne; the evil father resonates throughout Gothic, as does the identification with psychopathology" (176). The allusions to Hawthorne and the Gothic father are tenuous links at best; what is genuinely Gothic about Twin Peaks is indeed "the identification with psychopathology"—i.e. terror--that it invokes, an identification with evil

lurking in our fears, desires, repressions, our communities, in the places we live and the everyday things we do. Twin Peaks achieves this identification by presenting a world that we, surrounded by American culture, are intimately familiar with, then turning it on its head.

In Twin Peaks, a community emblematic of small-town America, everything begins, or first appears, as it should. There are pretty waitresses in the Double R Diner, one of whom married her high school sweetheart (who drives a red Corvette); Laura Palmer (the centre of the murder mystery) is a beautiful Homecoming Queen who does volunteer work in a Meals on Wheels program; James Hurley is the James-Dean-like rebel with leather jacket and sullen expression, while Bobby Briggs is the good-looking star of the football team; Benjamin Horne is the successful, well-groomed entrepreneur who runs the Great Northern Hotel. We couldn't be further away from the world of Gothic; this is an archetypal vision of America dominated by family values, conventional gender roles, luck and pluck. We may actually think there is much wrong with such a world, but the point is that it is familiar, it reflects images and long-established beliefs we see in our lives or in the media on a regular basis. It is the world as we recognize it from American TV and right-wing politicians.

But nothing is as it seems in Twin Peaks. Laura Palmer, Homecoming Queen, was a prostitute, a drug-user, and a psychological wreck; one of the central images of the show is a framed mantelpiece photograph of a smiling Laura, which reveals nothing of her true nature. This split between Laura's image and her actual behaviour embodies one of the show's principle themes: it shows us the dark, disturbing, Gothic 'truth' that is hidden behind the quaint vision of small-town America that we are all familiar with. As FBI Special Agent Cooper learns more and more about Laura's unknown activities, so do we find out more about what goes on behind closed doors in Twin Peaks; needless to say, none of it is exactly as the American Dream tells us it should be. One of the pretty waitresses at the diner is having an affair with a married man while her husband is in jail

for manslaughter; the other (who married her Corvette-driving sweetheart) is physically abused by her husband--and she is also having an affair, with Bobby Briggs, who was Laura Palmer's public boyfriend, although Laura was seeing James Hurley in private . . . and then there are her activities as a prostitute. She worked for One-Eyed Jack's, a brothel/casino run as a sideline interest by the elegant entrepreneur Benjamin Horne. And that's just the tip of the iceberg . . .

There are only a handful of 'normal' characters on the show, notably Sheriff Truman, Pete Martell, taciturn police deputy Hawk, Doc Hayward, and (although the word 'normal' is woefully inaccurate) Agent Cooper. Virtually everyone else is having an affair (or two) and/or has a hidden, sinister agenda. It is this all-encompassing discrepancy between the characters' public personas and private personalities that is in large part responsible for creating the show's Gothic atmosphere. All our expectations and preconceptions become meaningless; they no longer apply. Twin Peaks is, as Thomson said of the grotesque, "a fundamentally ambivalent [place], . . . a violent clash of opposites;" and as Harpham said, "things that should be kept apart are fused together." Twin Peaks abstracts the grotesque to the level of an all-embracing concept--the idealized image of small-town America contrasted to its dark underbelly--rather than using it as a focus for specific characters. This is the grotesque purely on the level of atmosphere--and this is why I have chosen Twin Peaks to look at as a specific example of Gothic atmosphere.

There are many facets to Twin Peaks's brilliance, but for my purposes the other major element of the Gothic atmosphere is the show's extraordinary ability to balance on a line between comedy and dark psychological drama, to remain continually on this line from episode to episode and scene to scene. The dialogue is pure soap opera, as are the characters, but the twisted things they do, the evil that is committed, makes it impossible to shrug them off as merely amusing. There is nothing funny about Maddy's murder scene; it is intense, almost unbearable drama. But much that goes on in the show--not least the

absurd dialogue, characters, and overacting—is hilarious. Much like Joel Coen's film Fargo, the show extrapolates from our reality to show the extremes of both humour and evil, resting together cheek-by-jowl so that we can't quite decide what approach to take. When Dr. Jacoby asks Bobby if Laura made him cry after they first made love, and Bobby bursts into tears, saying that Laura took pleasure in manipulating him, do we laugh at this parody of psychiatry and at Bobby's hilariously exaggerated reaction? Or do we feel a chill at Laura's cruelty and at the kind of psychological suffering she inflicted on herself and others, a cruelty and suffering which has other consequences that are not at all amusing? There is no appropriate response: the scene is at once comic and deadly serious. When a mynah bird (named Waldo) becomes a key witness in the murder investigation, it seems wonderfully weird and whimsical, but then when we hear the mynah bird mimicking the sounds of a teenaged girl's protests as she is about to be raped, accompanied by the eerie Twin Peaks theme music, we lose any inclination to laugh.

Almost every scene (especially in the first season), except for occasional violent ones like Maddy's murder or whimsical ones like those between Andy and Lucy, has a similar potential to be both funny and disturbing. The overall effect is considerable, especially when Twin Peaks, even without the fusion of laughter and horror, is already a place where our expectations are unsettled. It all adds up to as fine and sustained an example of Gothic atmosphere as you can find in any period or any medium. Gothic atmosphere (and in Twin Peaks the atmosphere alone is pure Gothic) results when our expectations are consistently confounded, when a world that is always teasingly familiar remains teasingly strange. We see the world of Twin Peaks as bizarre and eerie, but we can never quite dissociate it from our world; the characters, for all their perversity, are so banal and everyday that we cannot quite dissociate their actions from our own, except in the most extreme cases. Twin Peaks creates a constant dynamic interaction between the mundane/quotidian aspects of human life and the depths/extremes life can reach. We can

never firmly place ourselves in one category or the other: the result is an atmosphere of subtle, elusive terror.

Now let us return to the subject at hand--post-Melmoth nineteenth century Gothic--armed with an understanding of what Gothic atmosphere feels like, and let us look at how the feeling is developed in post-Melmoth Gothic. While the end result is the same as Twin Peaks, Victorian Gothic writers used more specifically Gothic means to achieve the atmospheric effects: to wit, overtly grotesque characters and situations. Judith Wilt comments on the importance of Gothic to the Victorians: it "provided tools not of imagery alone but also of plot and narrative strategy and even moral and aesthetic vision that the subtle architects of the great 'serious' traditions of English fiction used as intimately as, if less colorfully than, the 'entertainers,' Scott, Dickens, and the Brontës" (5). When Wilt speaks of entertainers who use Gothic's traditions "colorfully" and who have a "moral and aesthetic vision" inspired by Gothic, she hints at the importance of the grotesque to writers working in the Gothic vein. The consummate grotesques of a Melville or a Wilkie Collins are largely responsible for making their Gothic "colorful," while the grotesque provides the Gothic both with its "moral" vision, i.e. a growing ambivalence, and also its "aesthetic vision:" a vision of the world as a confused, mysterious place, where things that we had thought long familiar and understood become bizarre, sinister, and terrifying.

Melville's works, for example, are often considered to be partly Gothic, and I think it his ability to fuse extremes in a grotesque manner that is the most Gothic quality of his writing. We can see examples of this throughout Moby-Dick, where the comic and the sinister appear in rapid succession, or simultaneously, so frequently that it can be quite unsettling. There is something utterly stupid and laughable about Ahab's quest for revenge against the white whale for severing his leg--after all, it was Ahab who attacked the whale in the first place; how exactly did he expect the whale to react?--but the intensity and obsession with which he pursues his quest, and the symbolic depth which it acquires (largely through Ahab's own words), mean that we soon lose any inclination to laugh at

this bitter, peg-legged, old man. The comical and the sinister feed off one another, grotesquely, to intensify the discomfiting effect of the novel.

But for the precise evocation of terror, "Bartleby" is the finest example of Melville's use of the grotesque. The story is not overtly Gothic, but it makes the occasional nod to the genre, with lines like this: "Like a very ghost, agreeable to the laws of magical invocation, at the third summons [Bartleby] appeared at the entrance of his hermitage" (117). But for all that it is not conventionally Gothic, it works far better at disturbing the reader than most Gothic novels—and it is funny, at the same time. Bartleby is absurd, but he is also unsettling. In this grotesque mix of humour and discomfort the story is thoroughly Gothic.

For example, it is at first amusing when the narrator asks Bartleby to do something and he matter-of-factly replies, "I would prefer not to" (112, 113, 116), but as it becomes a consistent refrain, and as Bartleby acquires increasingly inhuman characteristics, never doing anything, never leaving the office, apparently subsisting on nothing other than gingersnaps and cheese (120), it becomes menacing. Bartleby comes to haunt the office like a Gothic spectre, with "mildly cadaverous" replies coming from his "white attenuated mouth" (123). Entitled as we are to the narrator's thoughts, we are sympathetic as his frustration mounts: "nothing so aggravates an earnest person as a passive resistance" (115), he says, and it is surely a sentiment in which we can share, most of us doubtless having felt similar frustration at some point. Of course, this is an extreme example of passive resistance, but it is rooted in familiar experience. Melville takes the amusingly trivial—a scrivener who declines his employer's requests with a cutely funny phrase—and turns it into a source of terror. This is what makes the story so unsettling: it began so innocuously.

The terror is considerably more complex here than it is in earlier Gothic because it has nothing to do with simple good/evil distinctions. We might recognize that Ambrosio's lust is founded upon something familiar to all of us, but, nonetheless, we never really believe we might actually do what he does. Terror doesn't have to convince us that we

would actually commit the acts that terrify us--but it is all the more effective when it does. And in "Bartleby," what would we have done if we were in the narrator's shoes? His actions seem reasonable at the time--they become terrifying when we realize that they lead to Bartleby's lonely death in the aptly named Tombs (139-40). We, like the narrator, would probably have done as he did; we understand him when he says he "strove to be entirely carefree and quiescent, and my conscience justified me in the attempt, though, indeed, it was not so successful as I would have wished" (136). He has that nagging feeling we have all had at some point, when we try to justify something to ourselves rationally, but know in our heart that we have done something we shouldn't have. Fortunately, such a feeling is usually about relatively minor errors--not because we have inadvertently committed a man to death. But "Bartleby" shows us how our normal, acceptable ways of thinking could lead to a man's death. It shows, as terror always does, the potential for harm lurking within our own minds. The initially unremarkable scenario, amusing in its banality, serves only to emphasize, to intensify by means of contrast, the story's unnerving conclusion. The story is subtly and effectively terrifying and uncanny, not despite its absurdity, but because of it.

There is no simple dynamic moment in "Bartleby;" it is replete with subtle, familiarizing details that create a strong reader-text interaction. The dynamic moment is a phenomenon we find functioning by accident in early Gothic; it is not the dynamic moment that is important to later Gothic--it is the multi-faceted use of the grotesque, the human extreme, to create terror that is important. We will no longer be looking at specific, limited dynamic moments created by proto-grotesques, but rather considering how the fully-realized grotesque can be used to create an ongoing dynamic of terror. There are as many ways to read "Bartleby" as there are readers; it cannot be reduced to a single dynamic moment the way I have reduced The Mysteries of Udolpho or "The Black Cat." But I think part of the story's power--and it is a prime example of a story that has depth, that resonates, its images unforgettable--is the skilled use of the grotesque, the sinister-comical,

to affect the reader with terror. It takes an ordinary man (the narrator) who performs an ordinary action that turns into an indirect murder. This is achieved by playing on the comic-sinister aspects of the grotesque Bartleby. In this way, Melville's classic short story is as Gothic as Gothic gets: it is, in a sense, a dynamic moment which lasts for all 37 pages.

But "Bartleby" is not a particularly good example of the central Gothic tradition of the nineteenth century whose roots are clearly in classic Gothic. Melville as a writer is associated with Gothic, but specific works of his are not generally labelled Gothic-- although, as is the case with "Bartleby," it can be illuminating to consider them as such. So let us look at writers whose works are overtly part of the grand Gothic tradition-- Sheridan Le Fanu, Wilkie Collins, Nathaniel Hawthorne, James Hogg--to demonstrate the centrality of the funny and frightening grotesque to 'pure' post-Melmoth Gothic, not just dubiously Gothic works like "Bartleby."

Collins, with Peake and Dickens, is perhaps the greatest portrayer of "colorfully" grotesque characters. And setting aside the use of the grotesque, momentarily, we can see that novels like The Woman in White are more obviously Gothic than "Bartleby:" the melodramatic plot turns, the virtuesques (Walter Hartright, Laura Fairlie, Marian) and the grotesques (Sir Percival Glyde, Frederick Fairlie, Count Fosco), the isolated locales of the main events, are all Gothic hallmarks. But it is the grotesque that makes The Woman in White truly a Gothic work, not just a work with Gothic affinities.

Having already discussed Steerpike at length, detailed analysis of the implications of Fosco as aesthetic villain are unnecessary. Suffice to say that if Fosco is one of the archetypal literary villains (a point doubtless made in every back cover blurb about the novel), then his impact is in large part due to our ability to relate to his conception of himself as artist. He dies unrepentant, satisfied with what he has done because, ultimately, it results in a good story: "I announced, on beginning it, that this narrative would be a remarkable document. It has entirely answered my expectations. Receive these fervid

lines--my last legacy to the country I leave for ever. They are worthy of the occasion, and worthy of FOSCO" (571). His narrative meets his own aesthetic standards; therefore he doesn't feel guilty about his crimes. As with Steerpike, and unlike the less effective Melmoth, we do not just see Fosco from the outside, but get inside his mind, thanks to his first-person narrative (557-71). We are made to see a little of ourselves in Fosco, and so he is effectively terrifying as a villain.

But there are other important factors in the creation of a memorable literary grotesque. The physicality of the grotesque is often part of the cumulative effect, and very much so in Fosco's case. While the grotesques in The Woman in White do not constrain themselves to any sort of 'realism'--it is highly unlikely that you'll meet someone like Fosco anytime soon--they are paradoxically far more 'real' than the proto-grotesques of a Radcliffe and Walpole straining to remain within the boundaries of realism. What makes Collins's grotesques so effective? Consider these descriptions of Fosco:

Fat as he is, and old as he is, his movements are astonishingly light and easy. He is as noiseless in a room as any of us women; and, more than that, with all his look of unmistakable mental firmness and power, he is as nervously sensitive as the weakest of us. He starts at chance noises as inveterately as Laura herself

. . . . one of his most curious peculiarities . . . [is] his extraordinary fondness for pet animals

. . . . His white mice live in a little pagoda of gaily-painted wirework . . . and they are perpetually let out They crawl all over him, popping in and out of his waistcoat, and sitting in couples, white as snow, on his capacious shoulders. He seems to be even fonder of his mice than of his other pets, smiles at them, and kisses them, and calls them by all sorts of endearing names

He had a broad straw hat on, with a violet-coloured ribbon round it. A blue blouse, with profuse fancy-work over the bosom, covered his prodigious body, and was girt about the place where his waist might once have been, with a broad scarlet leather belt. Nankeen trousers, displaying more white fancy-work over the ankles, and purple morocco slippers adorned his lower extremities. He was singing Figaro's famous song in the Barber of Seville . . . with ecstatic throwings-up of his arms, and graceful twistings, and turnings of his head, like a fat St. Cecilia masquerading in male attire (197-8, 205).

These virtuosic descriptive passages are full of the tiny details that are woefully lacking in earlier Gothic. In abstract, Fosco is an implausible character; even in these passages, he is described as a study in contrasts, and could come across as merely ludicrous, but Collins invests him with such a palpable physical presence, through the detailed descriptions, that

he seems as 'real' as a fictional character can get--especially by comparison with the bland, conventionalized Walter Hartright and Laura Fairlie. The precise descriptions of the clothing, the image of the mice sitting on his shoulders, the gestures that accompany his singing, make the implausible seem perfectly acceptable: "Collins invests this fat, foppish, grandiose and eloquent figure with a startling amount of life" (Punter 224). This makes the grotesque all the more disturbing. Fosco is already full of contradictions--that a man this cruel fawns over cute little mice is a brilliantly grotesque gesture on Collins' part--and in addition to all the inherent contradictions, we have the added paradox of a logically implausible character who seems much more real and vital than the 'credible' characters in the text. The terror that Fosco creates, the reason he is such a famous villain, is that he is first of all a brilliant grotesque who is unsettling because he breaks down all our familiar categories (he is simultaneously corpulent and graceful, cruel and kind, ruthless and sensitive, masculine and feminine) and so creates the unease of the grotesque, and, secondly, because Collins builds this unease into terror by breaking down the final division--reality/text--and making us see some of our real selves in Fosco the textual other.

But it takes more than one character to establish an all-encompassing Gothic atmosphere. The more grotesquerie in a Gothic novel, the better. Gormenghast showed us this; by empathizing with the grotesque Titus, even if he is not a source of terror, the overall terror of the novel is intensified. Similarly, in The Woman in White, Collins does not limit the grotesque to Fosco alone. Pesca is another grotesque whose presence makes the text all the more evocative and haunting. This Italian stereotype is amusing, with his quaintly incorrect English--"deuce-what-the-deuce," "my-soul-bless-my soul" (8-9)--and his emotive behaviour, but when this harmless little man is revealed to be a former member of a secret Brotherhood who, in telling this to his friend Hartright, risks being punished by death (535), our impression of him is turned inside-out. This grotesque discrepancy between truth and appearance--the failure of our habitual categories--contributes to the overall atmosphere of this textual world where none of our distinctions are useful.

Then there is Frederick Fairlie, Laura's guardian, a man of pure, motiveless apathy: "Mr. Fairlie is too great an invalid to be a companion for anybody. I don't know what is the matter with him, and the doctors don't know what is the matter with him, and he doesn't know himself what is the matter with him" (28). Reclining in his easy-chair, surrounded by objets d'art, "he had a frail, languidly-fretful, over-refined look--something singularly and unpleasantly delicate in its association with a man, and, at the same time, something which could by no possibility have looked natural and appropriate if it had been transferred to the personal appearance of a woman" (32). This abstract of Fairlie is preceded in the text by a lengthy, detailed description, so that the quoted passage serves to confirm the subjective impression that the objective description conveyed. Again, the grotesque is made effective by unnatural contrasts. First, there is the (outdated) idea that languor is uniquely feminine and improper in a man. Then, having already set up one (supposedly) unnatural contradiction, Collins intensifies it by having Hartright remark that this languor is so profound that it goes beyond even femininity. The grotesque is rendered even more extreme by the doubled bizarreness--a method akin to Maturin's doubling of adjectives to make the extreme even more extreme. This alone makes the character unsettling, but it becomes horrifying when coupled with Fairlie's utter lack of compassion for other human beings. His only concern is himself. We are not made to feel any sympathy for Fairlie, so this is not terrifying. But the mild horror he creates and his powerful grotesqueness enhance the mood of the novel, an evocative mood which makes everything we take for granted seem alien and perverse.

Le Fanu is another writer whose work is at times Gothic. As we have seen, the well-known "Carmilla" is not strictly Gothic. But, by any useful definition of the genre, his novel Uncle Silas is Gothic. There are melodramatic plot turns, a living 'ghost' (like Bartleby) in the form of Uncle Silas, plenty of descriptions of natural scenery, isolated locales for the main events--and the grotesque. Indeed, the novel is self-conscious about its Gothic nature; our narrator, Maud Ruthyn, says that Bartram-Haugh, the scene of the

novel's terrifying denouement, "reminded me of that delightful old abbey in Mrs. Radcliffe's romance [The Romance of the Forest], among whose silent staircases, dim passages, and long suites of lordly, but forsaken chambers, begirt without by the sombre forest, the family of La Mot[t]e secured a gloomy asylum" (196). There are other allusions to the same novel; Le Fanu is aware of his Gothic antecedents and is, in fact, using them to satirize Maud, but unlike Austen's Northanger Abbey, the satire is limited to the character, and does not mock the nature of the Gothic narrative. It is, then, a very Gothic novel, and uses its Gothic devices with great skill. E. F. Bleiler says that "in many ways Uncle Silas is the Victorian mystery par excellence, for it is equal in narrative skill to The Woman in White and The Moonstone and is superior to both in atmosphere, intelligence, and emotional power. Uncle Silas is still a living novel, and it may well be one of the scant half-dozen nineteenth-century novels that are still honestly read for pleasure rather than as a school exercise" (Best Ghost Stories vi). Aside from the rather miserly (not to mention ridiculous) notion that only six nineteenth century novels can still be read for pleasure--by the time I'm done with this section, I will have discussed seven such works, and there are plenty more--Bleiler's point is valid. Uncle Silas is, as his remark implies, a pleasure to read. It is The Moonstone's superior and The Woman in White's equal for sheer exuberance--for "atmosphere, intelligence, and emotional power." The three qualities I see as essential to Gothics like The Woman in White and Uncle Silas--the grotesque, the tale structure, terror--can not unreasonably be seen as synonymous with Bleiler's "atmosphere, intelligence, and emotional power." It is the combination of these qualities that makes Gothic fiction resonate in the reader's mind, and that makes it pleasurable to read.

To say that a book is a 'pleasure' may not seem a useful critical approach, but it bears looking into. After all, when fans of Gothic talk about it, you will likely hear comments such as, "I know it's ridiculous, but it's still a lot of fun to read." What does it mean to say that something is 'fun' to read? For this, when we get right down to it, is why people read--not because a text reflects an important historical moment, not because of an

interest in a text's Freudian hermeneutic, but because it's pleasurable. Day agrees--"The initial and primary importance of [Gothic] stories lies in the pleasure they give us" (ix)--and so does Louis S. Gross: "Gothic narrative makes its appeal viscerally, if at all. Whatever niceties of style and form it gives us are secondary to the emotional impact of the images" (75). This is true of early Gothic, where terror happens almost by accident, but I think in later Gothic the style and form complement and amplify the impact of the images. The terrifying image of, say, Hyde lying dead in Jekyll's workshop, is all the more potent for being the climax of a detection narrative which engages the reader in its mysteries, and for taking place in a world where objective 'reality' has become subjective, shifting, sinister, unreliable. Collins and, as we shall see, Le Fanu magnify their terrifying images, magnify the pleasure of their narratives, by having them take place in an eerily grotesque world of uncertain boundaries.

The conclusion of Uncle Silas is a tour-de-force manipulation of subjective first-person narrative. Maud dashes about Bartram-Haugh, unsure of anything that is going on, utterly terrified, and the incoherence of her narrative implicates us in her terror--we try to figure out what's going on, and we can't, because our focal point is Maud's first-person narrative, and she is clueless. Haggerty's point is again relevant: effective Gothic textual procedure supplants hokey Gothic gimmicks in the manufacture of terror. But, the final dynamic opposition of Maud, a subtly-satirized virtuesque, with a variety of grotesque forces is the explosion of forces that have been gathering momentum throughout the novel. The finale capitalizes on the Gothic atmosphere of instability, the ongoing confusion of categories, so fruitful to terror, that is achieved by multiple and effective use of grotesques throughout the text.

Early in the novel we are introduced to the most overt of the grotesques (the only one as flamboyant as those in The Woman in White): Maud's governess, Madame de la Rougierre. She is a startling figure: "She was tall, masculine, a little ghastly perhaps, and draped in purple silk, with a lace cap, and great bands of black hair, too thick and black

perhaps to correspond quite naturally with her bleached and sallow skin, her hollow jaws, and the fine but grim wrinkles traced about her brows and eye-lids" (18). Contrasts are already beginning to be established (masculine vs. feminine; hair that doesn't match the skin), and Le Fanu builds on this: she is bald (the hair is a wig), her physique is "on an unusually large scale" (18), and she is an alcoholic--none of these corresponding to Victorian notions of femininity. She speaks in a ludicrous Franglais, which Le Fanu takes delight in transcribing as exactly as he can: "Maud!--what a pretty name. Eh! bien. I am very sure my dear Maud she will be very good little girl--is not so?--and I am sure I shall love you vary moche. And what 'av you been learning, Maud, my dear cheaile--music, French, German, eh?" (18). This is quite amusing, and would serve to defuse Madame's startling, sinister incongruities--except that her menacing appearance occasionally translates into violent actions. In one such scene, Maud is refusing to tell her something, and Madame says, "'You must tell, petite dur-tête, or I will break a your leetle finger.' With which words she seized that joint, and laughing spitefully, she twisted it suddenly back; [Maud] screamed; she continued to laugh" (28). "I will break a your leetle finger" may sound funny when spoken in Madame's French accent, but it rapidly ceases to be amusing when she tries to follow up on her words. The comical and the sinister are fused, playing off each other to evoke an atmosphere of unease. And while Madame is, in abstract, less grotesque a character than Count Fosco, she "is so grotesquely masculine a parody of femininity that she resembles a pantomime dame rather than a real woman" (Milbank 180). But while she may not seem "a real woman," any more than Fosco seems 'a real man,' she is very 'real'--she is totally convincing--within the context of the fiction.

When dismissed by Maud's father and sent packing, she disappears for much of the novel. But Le Fanu maintains the eerie mood. Uncle Silas himself is another grotesque, a slightly less lethargic Frederick Fairlie, occasionally capable of perverse fits of rage: "the old man's fury for a moment overpowered him. In an instant he was on his feet, quivering from head to foot. I never saw such a countenance--like one of those demon-grotesques

we see in the Gothic side-aisles and groinings—a dreadful grimace, monkey-like and insane" (331). Uncle Silas—and Uncle Silas--is, not coincidentally, explicitly grotesque and explicitly Gothic. And as with Collins and Peake, the grotesque is used also to characterize more than the villains of the novel; Millicent, Maud's friend at Bartram-Haugh, is another character who combines usually opposed qualities. She is not, strictly speaking, a grotesque, but she contributes to the overall ambience of collapsed (and therefore useless) boundaries. Millicent, unlike Madame de la Rougierre, is a delightful character; her unstereotyped femininity makes her very appealing. She has little sense of decorum and propriety. As Maud says, in her high-handed way, Millicent is "a bumpkin" (206). She speaks in 'Bumpkinese' (again, the phrasings of her dialogue are lovingly detailed by Le Fanu): i.e. "Tell your tales, and welcome I wish I was here when you jawed cousin. If Winny was here she'd catch you by the timber toe and put you on your back" (204). She is a tomboy, laughing uproariously when she feels like it, threatening to throw stones at people who irritate her, and possessing a carpe diem sensibility quite unlike your average Victorian female character: "To-morrow be hanged!" she says to Maud, who (as a good Radcliffian heroine should) is refusing to paint a picture because she feels a little fatigued. "You'll do it to-day, bury-me-wick, but you shall; I'm wearying to see you make a picture, and I'll fetch your conundrums out o' your drawer, for do't you shall" (201). Millicent confounds preconceptions we might have had; hearing about her beforehand as the mistress of Bartram-Haugh we are programmed to expect refinement, elegance, and gentle femininity. Millicent defies our culturally programmed categories, just as such categories are confounded elsewhere in the novel. If Madame de la Rougierre's masculinization is grotesque, Millicent's masculinization renders her human--but both baffle our expectations of 'reality.' While Millicent is not a grotesque, the principles of the grotesque--so evident in Madame and Uncle Silas--are nonetheless at work, generating the unsettling atmosphere that finally culminates in the terror of the conclusion. For both Collins and Le Fanu, grotesque characters are crucial to the emotional impact of the novel, because they establish

the right tone and context for the uncanny terrors of the Gothic plot, and those characters are used much more productively than the proto-grotesques of early Gothic were.

Apart from characters with a touch of the comical and absurd, post-Melmoth Gothic also refined the genre by capitalizing on the comic possibilities inherent in the bizarre twists and turns, the preposterous situations, of Gothic plots. In Hogg's The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner, the first major Gothic work after Melmoth the Wanderer, we can see the important difference between the early Gothic and the more refined, later nineteenth century Gothic. Hogg throws away most of the stock Gothic elements and instead manufactures Gothic terror through the use of intense language, a narrative incorporating elements of the tale, and the grotesque. Formally, the main action of the novel is accounted as two separate tales, two different perceptions of the same events; by the time we're finished the second account, however, there's still a lot left unaccounted for. Few of the novel's fictional 'facts' can be clearly established by the reader. This creates a feeling of uncertainty, a context of mystery where nothing can be stated definitively. Combined with the harrowing events of the plot and the perturbing sinister-comic grotesquerie, this evokes a pervasive feeling of Gothic terror.

The affective power of the novel is aided considerably by Hogg's understanding of the comic possibilities of the grotesque. As Kiely says of one event in the novel, "One's reaction is likely to be the unhappy combination of 'This is too ridiculous to be true' and 'This is too true to be funny.' Hogg's use of humor is in no sense a case of 'comic relief,' nor is it inconsistent with the essential seriousness of his work" (230). This is what the earlier Gothic writers failed to realize: humour in the key scenes of a Gothic work--rather than being confined to Shakespearean subplots--is an effective means of building terror. Hogg turns a tennis match--of all things--into a scene of terror by fully exploiting the sinister-comic duality of the grotesque.

Wringhim, the justified sinner of the title, intrudes upon his brother George's game of tennis by standing in the area of play, and refusing to move. This is the sort of thing

young brothers and sisters do to each other; Wringhim's stubborn insistence is along the lines of a sibling who echoes the other's words until it becomes annoying, and takes even more pleasure in doing so once the sibling is frustrated. On this level, the scene is amusing and familiar. On the other hand, Wringhim and his brother do not know each other-- Wringhim's actions seems motiveless to George. This already gives the scene a sinister quality. In a valiant attempt to ignore Wringhim, the players continue their game despite his presence. But soon Wringhim begins to verbally taunt his brother, and some of the spectators are amused. Eventually, George strikes Wringhim with his racket, drawing blood. Grim, implacable, Wringhim resumes his position, and eventually the players quit their game (46-8). In another context, this would be good material for a Monty Python sketch--imagine John Cleese standing immovable on a tennis court while Michael Palin and Eric Idle play tennis, until Idle gets frustrated and smashes Cleese with his racket, but Cleese doesn't bat an eyelash, and you can see that the scene has an absurdly comic quality. But Wringhim's malicious intent and his intractability, even when violence is used, lend the scene a perverse, disturbing quality. What is superficially comic, laughable, is fundamentally unsettling. That we chuckle while simultaneously being unnerved makes the unnerving Gothic feeling all the more potent. We want to separate the comic and the terrifying, and find that we cannot easily do so. Such incidents, which realize the latent comic potential of early Gothic, contribute to the overall distortion of the familiar world--a distortion that never wholly occludes the familiar--which is the Gothic atmosphere. Hogg's novel seems to be the first to have understood the need for fully-developed grotesques--at once funny and frightening--in Gothic fiction, and that this is more important than the traditional Gothic clichés. For this reason, Justified Sinner can be considered the starting point of refined nineteenth century Gothic--for all the subsequent nineteenth century Gothic authors were attempting the same feat, to liberate Gothic's full possibilities from the confines of its rigid conventions.

As the above examples hint at, the grotesque is not only a form of characterization, but also a form of perception. The language used to describe an event can render it grotesque. Peake's work is so grotesque not just because it is inherently grotesque, but also because it is delineated in grotesque prose. Hawthorne's The House of the Seven Gables features a similarly grotesque perception of reality, that allows him to take some rather boring characters and events and infuse them with a tragi-comic, grotesque terror--not the tragi-comic that "points only to the fact that life is alternately tragic and comic," but rather that tells us "the vale of tears and the circus are one, that tragedy is in some ways comic and all comedy in some way tragic and pathetic" (Thomson 63). The narrator self-consciously comments on this grotesque perception of things that animates the novel: "It is a heavy annoyance to a writer, who endeavors to represent nature, its various attitudes and circumstances, in a reasonably correct outline and true coloring, that so much of the mean and ludicrous should be hopelessly mixed up with the purest pathos which life anywhere supplies to him" (42). It is this mixture of the ludicrous and the pathetic that we find in Peake, and which likewise colours most of Hawthorne's novel.

The most mundane people and things become tragi-comical--Hepzibah, for one, with her indelible scowl, is a virginal maiden who is "gaunt, sallow, [and] rusty-jointed" (43), who should make a sad figure as she tries to set up her cent-shop, but instead comes across as foolish. To comfort her melancholy brother Clifford, she tries to wrap him in "her great, warm love"--"but her little efforts to amuse him! How pitiful, yet magnanimous, they were!" (150). Great, warm love is reduced to pitiful little efforts: a grotesque discrepancy. Similarly, the chickens of the Pyncheon House's garden, for all that they are a "paltry rivulet of life" (172), are described in lengthy, grandiose terms quite disproportionate to their importance in the narrative. When Hepzibah cooks one of the eggs for Clifford, the narrator comments: "Thus unscrupulously did the old gentlewoman sacrifice the continuance, perhaps, of an ancient feathered race, with no better end than to supply her brother with a dainty that hardly filled the bowl of a tea-spoon!" (172).

Breakfast is transformed into the tragic end of an "ancient feathered race;" the mean and ludicrous are mixed with pathos. Here, the effect is comic, but as with Millicent and Pesca in Uncle Silas and The Woman in White, these light-hearted grotesqueries contribute to the overall atmosphere of mystery and irrational fear.

Hawthorne's skill with such transformations of mundane events into epic incidents is evident in the descriptions of the little boy who buys and hungrily devours gingerbread from Hepzibah's cent-shop. The boy has been steadily consuming gingerbread in a variety of shapes:

Phoebe, on entering the shop, beheld there the already familiar face of the little devourer--if we can reckon his mighty deeds aright--of Jim Crow, the elephant, the camel, the dromedaries, and the locomotive. Having expended his private fortune, on the two preceding days, in the purchase of the above unheard-of luxuries, the young gentleman's present errand was on the part of his mother, in quest of three eggs and half a pound of raisins. These articles Phoebe accordingly supplied, and, as a mark of gratitude for his previous patronage, and a slight super-added morsel after breakfast, put likewise into his hand a whale! The great fish, reversing his experience with the prophet of Nineveh, immediately began his progress down the same red pathway of fate whither so varied a caravan had preceded him. This remarkable urchin, in truth, was the very emblem of old Father Time, both in respect of his all-devouring appetite for men and things, and because he, as well as Time, after ingulfing thus much of creation, looked almost as youthful as if he had been just that moment made (129).

A child eating candy turns into a whale-devourer and an emblem of Father Time, an incongruity of subject and style that is a splendid incidence of whimsical grotesquerie. Other elements in The House of the Seven Gables are less whimsical; the grotesque here does not directly invoke terror, but it creates the Gothic atmosphere--and the skilled manipulation of form, the merging of novelistic and tale-telling techniques, to affect the reader is all the more affective because of the use of the grotesque. MacAndrew writes that "the grotesque and dream worlds are not separate. Together they form Victorian Gothic fiction All are one extraordinary kinetic vision. Its components shift and replace each other, and the viewer, instead of standing back on terra firma to watch, finds himself [or herself] floating among them, unable to wake from another's dream" (155). Haggerty's point is that the "dream world" atmosphere is evoked by incorporating the form of the tale into that of the novel; my point is that the "grotesque" is created through these sinister-

comic treatments of character and incident I have been analyzing, and concur with MacAndrew's idea that the two overlap. The presence of the grotesque enhances the unsettling atmosphere evoked through manipulation of form, and vice versa.

Hawthorne is adept at both, and this constitutes the novel's Gothic-ness. The House of the Seven Gables has only a few stock Gothic elements--a locale which, despite being urban, is isolated; concern over issues of inheritance; ghosts that are hinted at but never confirmed as real or false. It has enough such elements to make us wonder, "Is this Gothic?," but on the basis of convention alone, it would not qualify--it is the language, the use of the grotesque, the formal qualities of the tale, that allows us to consider it a definitive work of post-Melmoth nineteenth century Gothic.

The presence of the grotesque in Victorian Gothic is evident in the above works because they take advantage of its comical and/or absurd aspects. Not all nineteenth century Gothic was interested in Gothic's absurdity; some writers took a straightfaced approach to the material, but the sinister-comic elements in Collins, Melville, Hawthorne, Hogg, and Le Fanu reveal the presence of the grotesque, and thereby alert us to its less obvious presence in other works. Having established the grotesque as a possibly recurring element in nineteenth century Gothic, we can see how it influences less obviously grotesque works which are nonetheless commonly earmarked as Gothic: Wuthering Heights and The Turn of the Screw.

Brontë's marvelous novel is chock-full of little mysteries, questions that tease us with their inability to be answered. This is the breakdown caused by the use of the tale, that makes the 'objective' world reliant upon our 'subjective' perceptions, which destabilizes the reality we take for granted. To cite one of many possible examples, there is no way of knowing if the ghosts alluded to in Wuthering Heights are 'real' or not (278). The difficulty of pinning the novel down as 'fantastic' or 'realistic' fiction is but one of the many confusions it creates; it is all but uncategorizable, and this is part of its greatness. The novel is often affiliated with Gothic, but is it, strictly speaking, Gothic? As I have

been saying that the grotesque is a central Gothic device, can we find the grotesque in this novel? Heathcliff, for one, is evidently a larger-than-life figure, who could be a grotesque, but ultimately is not. He is a character straining at boundaries: the boundaries that prevent his acceptance among the family at Wuthering Heights, the imposed limitations of everyday life that prevent the full expression of his love for Catherine. He cannot bring himself down to the ordinary level of marriage, family dinners, domestic comforts--but neither can he transcend such things. He is a man trapped between two worlds: freedom and convention, passion and control, Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights. In a similar sense, Wuthering Heights is trapped between two types of fiction--or, rather, it occupies the no-man's-land between the two types: Gothic fantasy and Victorian realism. This is why it is hard to categorize, because it is, at one and the same time, a Gothic novel and not a Gothic novel. There is almost but not quite enough of the Gothic in the language, the form, the conventions employed, the use of the grotesque, to call it Gothic, and too much of those conventions for us to say unequivocally that it is not. Thus it is that Heathcliff is almost a grotesque; he is a man of excess, a human figure taken to the extreme of probability, but he never fully surpasses the limits of the human.

A true grotesque should be recognizable as grotesque, as ridiculous, beyond the boundaries of the real: such is the case with a Mr. Flay, or a Count Fosco, or a Vathek, but Heathcliff stays (barely) within the limits of realism. We know this because, after all, he of all people would like to transcend the human, but there is no moment when the text definitively allows him to transgress the material, domestic, mundane, 'real' world. That is part of his tragedy. Joseph Wiesenfarth remarks, rightly, that "everyone associated with [Heathcliff] calls him a devil and a fiend and labels his machinations hellish or infernal," and he is "an updated Zofloya (Zofloya), Matilda (Monk), and Zatain (Abbott)" (77). This is his grotesqueness--that he is at times diabolical, supernatural, inhuman (or so it seems). But he never becomes a Zofloya or Zatain, because he does not inhabit a fully Gothic world: it is only partly Gothic, and so he is only partly a grotesque Gothic villain. He is

not a villain lifted whole from the page of old Gothic fiction, an Ambrosio with amnesia. He is the stark embodiment of a psychological truth common in the novel That is why Heathcliff is terrifying. [He] is devil and fiend in Wuthering Heights not because he is the father of lies but because he tells and supports with hideous hardheartedness the paradoxical truth that a man cannot live rationally without irrational love (Wiesenfarth 80).

He is a character caught between extremes—either a man nearly irrational without love, or a man nearly rational with love—but because he never fully occupies one extreme, he is never fully grotesque. He is caught in the dynamic moment, one of "those moments of intensity where contradictory elements are fused together at the dynamic point of agony or ecstasy" (Howells 140), and suspended there for the entire novel. Emily Brontë's use of the grotesque, like her use of all other Gothic elements, is on the cusp of being Gothic, but never quite reaches it, so that we can say that Wuthering Heights is both Victorian Gothic and Victorian novel, or that it is neither—but we cannot say that it is one or the other. Certainly, though, if anyone wishes to call it Gothic, it is primarily because of her deft use of Gothic structure—the tales by two narrators of questionable reliability—and her fusion of normally distinct categories that is grotesque in the widest sense of the term, but (like Le Fanu's *Millicent*) not truly grotesque by a more precise definition of the term.

The Turn of the Screw is equally hard to pin down. In every way possible, it creates terror—and harnesses its potential. Shoshana Felman says, "If the strength of literature could be defined by the intensity of its impact on the reader, by the vital energy and power of its effect, The Turn of the Screw would doubtless qualify as one of the strongest—i.e., most effective--texts of all time" (143; Felman's emphasis). And Haggerty, commenting on this quote, says, "In the realm of Gothic fiction, where effect is all, 'The Turn of the Screw' remains unparalleled" (151; my emphasis). I couldn't agree more with either statement, and I think it's interesting that, for a work that is near-perfect in aesthetic terms, both Felman and Haggerty are concerned with its effect. This is why I have chosen to explore what it is that makes Gothic effective, because its effect/affect is the vital aspect of the genre, and "the intensity of its impact" is important (as Day and Gross pointed out earlier). While we indeed cannot define literature by its impact, we can try to gain a better

understanding of how it makes an impact. As far as Gothic is concerned, the grotesque is always a factor, and The Turn of the Screw is no exception.

I have arrived at James's masterpiece by way of Twin Peaks and a handful of Victorian Gothics in the hope of showing the various ways the grotesque can be employed without exhaustively detailing each such method in James's novel. We have seen that the comic aspects of the grotesque can be used to intensify, by means of contrast, the terror of a work ("Bartleby," Justified Sinner), that the widespread use of grotesque characters contributes to the hauntingly indefinable atmosphere of Gothic (The Woman in White, Uncle Silas), and that the grotesque fusion of opposites can be used as a lens through which the entire textual world is shadowed by the dark tint of Gothic (The House of the Seven Gables, Wuthering Heights). There is, of course, overlap in the way these authors use the grotesque. The grotesque lens colours Justified Sinner as much as The House of the Seven Gables, while grotesque characters proliferate throughout "Bartleby" as much as Uncle Silas. Similarly, The Turn of the Screw takes full advantage of all the Victorian refinements of the grotesque and the Gothic to manufacture an intensely Gothic atmosphere. Like Twin Peaks, The Turn of the Screw remains poised unrelentingly on the threshold; rather than the comic and the sinister, however, it straddles the line between the (uncomically) eerie and the familiar, from beginning to end. This grotesque fusion of categories works on the level of perception (are the ghosts real or not?), the banal which is transformed into the fatal (the governess's crush on her employer which becomes a contributing factor to her obsession for Miles), and on the level of characterization.

One of the most haunting aspects of the novel is, of course, the children, Miles and Flora, and it is they who are the grotesques in this novel. Rusty Lemorande's 1992 film of the novel, while inevitably unable to match the richness of the text, was able to capture the eeriness of the children quite effectively. One scene original to the film has Miles perform a magic show for the governess; utterly solemn, he puts Flora in a box and prepares to saw her in half, at which point the governess panics and stops him. The scene seems a natural

extension of what we see in the text. In the text itself, the eeriness is in large part due to the governess's ambivalent sexual attitude towards Miles--and we, experiencing the text through her, are uncomfortably close to her attitude. But it is the incongruity of children who act and speak like adults that makes them grotesque and terrifying. The following exchange does not sound in the least like a governess and her ward:

I stood over him with my candle. "How did you know I was there?"
"Why, of course I heard you. Did you fancy you make no noise? You're like a troop of cavalry!" he beautifully laughed.
"Then you weren't asleep?"
"Not much! I lie awake and think."
I had put my candle, designedly, a short way off, and then, as he held out his friendly old hand to me, had sat down on the edge of his bed. "What is it," I asked, "that you think of?"
"What in the world, my dear, but you?"
"Ah, the pride I take in your appreciation doesn't insist on that! I had so far rather you slept."
"Well, I think also, you know, of this queer business of ours."
I marked the coolness of his firm little hand. "Of what queer business, Miles?"
"Why, the way you bring me up. And all the rest!"
I fairly held my breath a minute, and even from my glimmering taper there was light enough to show how he smiled up at me from his pillow. "What do you mean by all the rest?"
"Oh, you know, you know!" (369-70)

Such exchanges lead the governess to remark that he "appear[ed] as accessible as an older person--[his precocity] imposed him almost as an intellectual equal" (371). The grotesque fuses normally distinct categories; here, child's appearance and adult's mentality are brought together. The result is disturbing--this is why Alia, another child with an adult's mind, is called an "abomination" in Frank Herbert's Dune (462). The governess notes Miles's beautiful laugh, the feel of his hand, and while neither comment is explicitly sexual, they are implicitly so, especially since they are not isolated remarks, but consistent with her perception of Miles throughout. Miles's remark, "I lie awake and think," is unchildlike, as is a phrase like "this queer business of ours." There is a constant sense of dislocation, an inconsistency of appearance and reality, a constant tension born of contradiction that is the hallmark of the grotesque. The effect is strengthened--rather like Hartright's reaction to Fairlie as too languid for a man but also too languid for a woman--by a doubled sense of displaced expectations. Miles is strange, first because of his

unnatural maturity, and, secondly because of the Governess's unnatural sexual response to him.

The atmosphere of mystery, of wavering boundaries, that we saw in Hawthorne, Collins, Le Fanu, Hogg, Brontë, reaches its ultimate expression in The Turn of the Screw. The grotesque children are one element in a complex web of eerie paradoxes. Everything is at once familiar and strange; the dynamic opposition of extremes is subtle, comprehensive, and effective. But if we laboriously took apart the novel (though who would want to?) we would find it to be a near-infinite series of dynamic moments, of contrasts and transitions between static extremes. This dense, textured work, for all its differences, has its roots in the Gothic techniques of a Maturin or a Mary Shelley. One of those techniques, yet again, is the grotesque, which like all the other Gothic techniques, is refined into high art by James in his manufacturing of terror.

Which raises the question: why would we want to be terrified? What possible pleasure do we derive from an experience which makes us consider, even fleetingly, that the world is ruled by dark, disturbing forces lurking within our own minds? It's not exactly what one expects in a genre often labelled 'escapist.' There are many ways to explain the appeal of Gothic. On a very basic level, Carroll's assertion, cited previously, is relevant: "the practice of fiction--including our emotional responses, where appropriately motivated by the text--is actually built on our capacity to be moved by thoughts and to take pleasure in being so moved." The type of emotional response is not what is important--we simply enjoy being moved by a work of art.

Others have developed explanations more specific to Gothic. Day writes: "The Gothic reveals to the reader the capacity of fantasy to convert the fearful, anxious, or dangerous into genuine pleasure; fantasy becomes the affirmation of the power of the imagination to control and channel the threatening emotions and impulses" (63). MacAndrew contends that Gothic, particularly the more refined nineteenth century works, can provide insight into human failings: "It . . . works to compel suspension of moral

judgement and so gradually increases understanding of the foibles of human nature" (202). Bayer-Berenbaum says that the Gothic probes the limits of human experience, taking us as far as we can go: "The Gothic imagination soars to the heights and penetrates the depths. It broaches the unthinkable, attempts the forbidden, and assaults the ordinary with terror and with zest" (146). All of these have some relevance: there can be no totalizing explanation for Gothic's appeal. This is one reason for its endurance; its appeal varies from reader to reader and critic to critic.

To add my own theory to the mix, I would say that Gothic (like all literature) offers the reader an implicit philosophical construct; it says, "Imagine if you will, that this (Ambrosio, Frankenstein, Vathek) is the dark truth about human nature;" the best Gothic texts force us to confront and consider the possibility of this truth, and enable us either to revise our own philosophical constructs or to reinforce them by denying the Gothic philosophy. Either result is valuable. One does not need to believe Gothic's terrors; one simply needs to feel them for it to be worthwhile reading. In the same way, one does not need to accept a philosopher's beliefs to find them interesting, valuable reading. I think all 'great' fiction contains a philosophical value, presenting a challenge to our own opinions that can shock us into changing our opinions or strengthen them in the rejection of the alternate hypothesis; the 'great' Gothic texts are no exception.

Gothic's value also lies in its modernity. As a literature of terror and absurdity, it can still speak to our contemporary world, which has its own share of terror and absurdity. MacAndrew says of Vathek, "The wildly melodramatic exaggeration of its lurid scenes . . . creates a grotesque effect. They arouse horror on the verge of laughter, as the Absurd universe of the twentieth century does" (137), while Mishra, along the same lines, says that "Vathek anticipates Salman Rushdie" (24). But Beckford's oddity is hardly the only Gothic work to still speak to us at the end of the twentieth century: "the Gothic fantasy [i.e. the entire genre] casts its shadows into the twentieth century; its twilight deepens and surrounds us still [It] remains a fable of failed identity because modern culture has yet

to resolve the relationship within the identity into either the archetypal conceptions of masculine and feminine that we have inherited from earlier eras or the alternative archetype of the androgyne" (Day 150). There are other way to explain why it remains an effective fable of failed identity, but Day's central point is valid: Gothic still interests us today. If Gothic may seem like escapism, it ultimately forces us to confront those uncomfortable thoughts deep within our minds that we are trying to escape from: in the end, it is "no escape at all" (Day 69). Even Ann Radcliffe, of all people, can be seen as presciently modern: "The Mysteries of Udolpho, like the Gothic in general, anticipates the thoroughly God-abandoned forms of modern literature" (Castle 121).

But even if Gothic was ahead of its time, it did not manage to survive until its time came--unless one considers its critical trendiness as a form of survival. There is no identifiable, 'pure' Gothic genre in the twentieth century--although there are offshoots of it in the 'modern' Gothic, in horror, detective fiction, science fiction, etc. Aspects of the genre have become disseminated throughout our literature and culture, and "the diffusion of Gothic forms and figures over more than two centuries makes the definition of a homogeneous generic category exceptionally difficult" (Botting 14). There are texts that are obviously Gothic in the early period; there are works generally accepted as Gothic, although the definition is liable for debate, in the nineteenth century after Melmoth; but in the twentieth century the tools of Gothic are appropriated by and dispersed throughout a number of literary modes. We can see traces of Gothic in works by Stephen King, William Faulkner, Isak Dinesen, Salman Rushdie, Daphne du Maurier, in movies, comics, and television--but few of them are thoroughly and consistently Gothic. We find a few elements of the Gothic--the excessive, the grotesque, the conventions, the terror--but generally not all in one text. Occasionally we do, in such works as Eco's The Name of the Rose, Dinesen's Seven Gothic Tales, Iain Banks's Walking on Glass, Iris Murdoch's The Unicorn, see enough of the elements combined to label the work Gothic, but they always play with the genre in a self-conscious manner, deconstructing the edifice of Gothic fiction

to expose either its ultimately nihilistic outlook (as we see in The Name of the Rose and Walking on Glass) or its misogynistic outlook (as we see in Seven Gothic Tales and The Unicorn). In fact these texts are as much anti-Gothic as they are Gothic, because they invoke and manipulate all the conventions in order to attack the assumptions that go along with those conventions.

Nonetheless, Gothic, diffused though it may be, is an invaluable source of inspiration for countless authors of varying interests, forms, and talents. Because, finally, however ridiculous Gothic's terrors may often seem, they capture an irrational feeling which we have probably all felt, if only briefly: "There are few of us who have not sometimes wakened before dawn . . . after . . . one of those nights of horror and misshapen joy, when through the chambers of the brain sweep phantoms more terrible than reality itself, and instinct with that vivid life that lurks in all grotesques, and that lends to Gothic art its enduring vitality" (Wilde 146). Wilde, fortuitous coincidence though it may be, links three words which I believe are inextricable: terrible, grotesques, Gothic.

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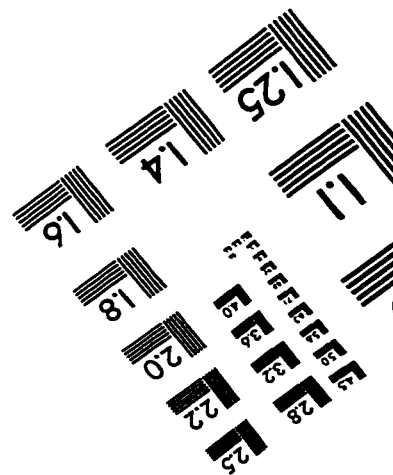
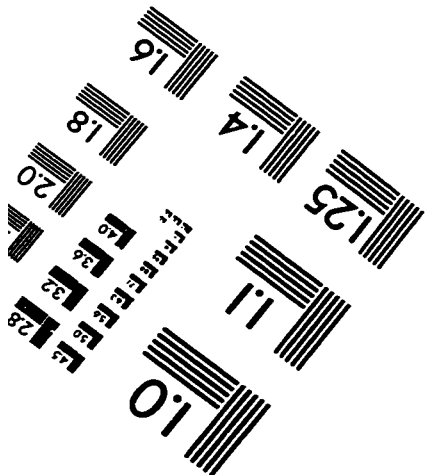
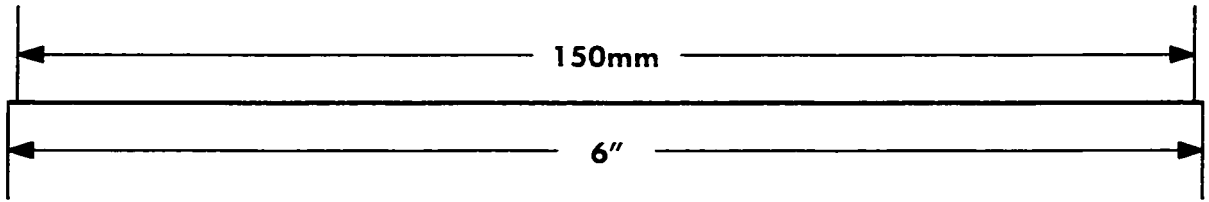
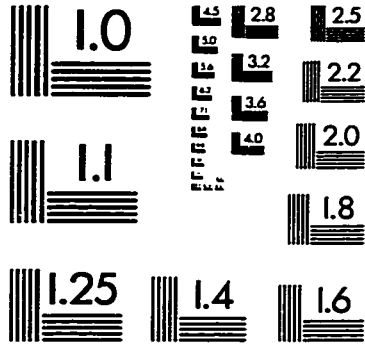
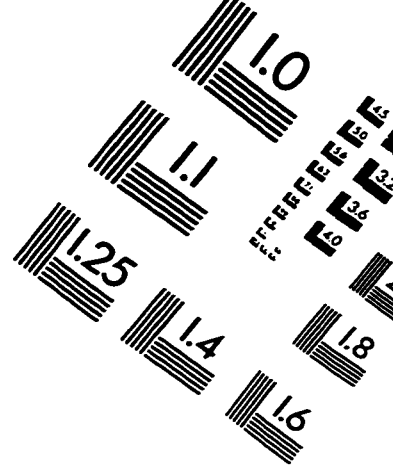
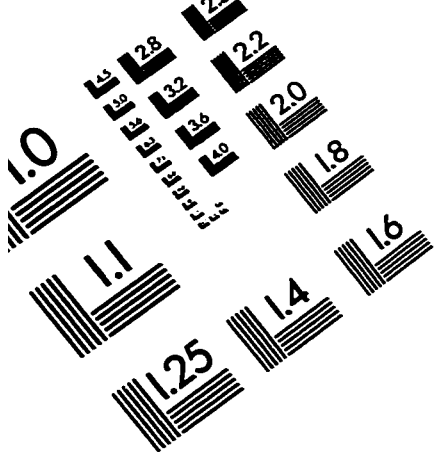
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