Backgrounds and Contexts

Civilization and the Goths

Historically, the Goths were one of several Germanic tribes instrumental in the fall of the Roman Empire. In the absence of early written records, little can be said with much certainty about them, although archaeologists have confirmed their early settlement in the Baltic and their gradual migration down to the Black Sea. The Goths made their first incursion into Roman territory during the third century, and eventually, under Alaric, took Rome in AD 410, subsequently establishing kingdoms in France and Italy. The first extant history of the Goths is Jordanes's *Getica* (551), and here an etymological confusion begins. As Samuel Kliger (1945) has shown, Jordanes aimed to glorify the Thracian tribe, the Getes, from whom he sprang, and therefore identified them with the more impressive tribe of the Goths. In addition, he gave credence to the idea of a general northern identity, and all those tribes later called 'Germanic' or 'Teutonic' came to be known collectively as the 'Goths'.

Far more important than any sketchy history of the actual Goths that can be reconstructed, however, are the myths that developed around them, and the varying aesthetic and political agendas that these myths were subsequently appropriated to serve. 'Gothic' became a highly mobile term, remaining constant only in the way it functioned to establish a set of polarities revolving primarily around the concepts of the primitive and the civilized. Initially, because the Goths left no literature or art of their own, they came to be remembered only as the invaders and destroyers of the great Roman civilization. Since very little was known about the medieval world generally during the Renaissance, the idea of the 'Dark Ages' that followed the fall of Rome soon expanded to include the medieval period generally, up to about the middle of the seventeenth century, and 'Gothic' became a term applied to all things medieval. When Italian art historians of the early

Renaissance first used the term 'Gothic' in an aesthetic sense, they erroneously attributed a style of architecture (q.v.) to those Germanic tribes that sacked Rome, and identified this style as barbaric, disordered and irrational in opposition to the classical style. By the eighteenth century a Goth had come to be defined, in the terms of Dr Johnson's *Dictionary* of 1775, as 'one not civilised, one deficient in general knowledge, a barbarian', and the medieval or Gothic age as a cultural wasteland, primitive and superstitious. This equation of the Gothic with a barbaric medieval past served not only to establish through difference the superiority of the more classical traditions of Greece and Rome, but also to confirm the virtues of the equally civilized, ordered and rational present.

During the eighteenth century, however, the Gothic also began to be invested with a set of different and contradictory values in both aesthetic (see 'Gothic in the Eighteenth Century' below) and political terms. This resulted from the reclamation of a native English past that played a crucial role in the eighteenth-century development of both a literary and a political nationalism. The history of the term 'Gothic' actually begins in political discussion, where the project of producing the past as barbaric and superstitious had begun to be contested as early as the sixteenth century (Smith 1987). Since the term had expanded to include all the Germanic tribes, including those who invaded Britain in the fifth century, it was possible to offer an alternative, if mythical, construction of the Gothic past as the site of a true national, democratic and civilized heritage. Here the past becomes idealized to provide not a site of difference, but a site of continuity.

In establishing this alternative myth of Gothic origins, commentators drew upon such sources as the Roman historian Tacitus' *Germania* (AD 98). What Tacitus said about the Germanic tribes generally came to be particularly associated with the Goths, and he depicted them as brave, virtuous and, as demonstrated by their representative system of government and their invention of the jury system, possessing a strong belief in justice and liberty. The belief that the English constitution originated with the Anglo-Saxons was common, if contested; it was, however, given renewed authority in the eighteenth century by the influential historian Charles-Louis de Secondat Montesquieu in his *Spirit of the Laws* (1748, trans. 1750) when, citing Tacitus as his source, he famously commented that the English idea of political government derives from the Germans and their 'beautiful system . . . invented first in the woods' (in Clery and Miles 2000: 61). According to the Whig view of history, such moments as the signing of the Magna Carta and the Revolution of 1688 were ones when a tradition of freedom that had been displaced with the French invasion of 1066 was reaffirmed. The Glorious Revolution had consequently not introduced an entirely new social order,

but rather recovered an original social order that had been replaced by foreign authoritarian rule. In this rethinking of history, rather than being seen as the despoilers of civilized values, the Goths were celebrated as the *source* of these values. As James Thomson wrote in his poem 'Liberty' (1735–6), the Goths were those who reinstated the liberty once held but lost by a decadent Rome. In settling Britain they 'brought a happy government along; / Formed by that freedom which, with secret voice, / Impartial nature teaches all her sons' (4.682–4). Similarly, Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) continually recalls the Gothic heritage – which he discusses in terms of 'chivalry' – to assert the superiority of a civilized England over a barbaric France. The Goths were now seen to have laid the very foundations of a democratic, rational British society, and the Gothic to be the site of a uniquely British culture and politics.

The myth of the Goths, then, can be seen in various ways to have been, as Mark Madoff observes, 'a product of fantasy invented to serve specific political and emotional purposes' (1979: 337). Like the Goths themselves, 'Gothic' as a term is endlessly mobile; simultaneously, its essential function remains unchanged. As the brief history of the terms 'Goth' and 'Gothic' outlined above suggests, the Gothic is identified with the primitive for specific ideological purposes, and these are achieved in two main ways. In one, the Gothic is associated with the barbaric and uncivilized in order to define that which is other to the values of the civilized present. Alternatively, the Gothic is still associated with the primitive but this primitive has now become identified with the true, but lost, foundations of a culture. The Gothic past is consequently seen as retaining not only more power and vigour than the present, but also, in a strange way, more truly civilized values. What remains constant throughout the developing political use of the term is that the Gothic always remains the symbolic site of a culture's discursive struggle to define and claim possession of the civilized, and to abject, or throw off, what is seen as other to that civilized self.

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Gothic in the Eighteenth Century

The birth of Gothic as a genre of fiction, the 'Gothic novel', and all its numerous successors came about as a direct result of changes in cultural emphasis in the eighteenth century. The reputation of the eighteenth century has mainly been as an age of reliance on reason, as a time when enlightenment was seen as possible and the rational explanation of natural and human activities formed an agenda in the service of which most of the European intellectuals of the age worked. However, as is always the case with such simple histories of ideas, this inevitably tells only part of the story.

During the eighteenth century, there was, for example, a shift in the meanings and connotations of the word 'Gothic'. Whereas previously it had referred specifically to the 'Goths' (q.v.) themselves, or at least to later imaginings of them, to the barbarian northern tribes who played so reviled a part in the collapse of the Roman Empire, less weight came to be placed on the presumed geographical significance of the word and correspondingly more on the historical. Here, however, there was a serious difficulty, for very little was actually known in the later eighteenth century about the history of the Dark Ages, or indeed about medieval history. From being a term suggestive of more or less unknown features of the Dark Ages, 'Gothic' broadened out to become descriptive of anything medieval – in fact, of all things preceding about the middle of the seventeenth century.

Another connotation was attached to this: if 'Gothic' meant to do with what was perceived as barbaric and to do with the medieval world, it could be seen to follow that it was a term which could be used in structural opposition to 'classical'. Where the classical was well ordered, the Gothic was chaotic; where the classical was simple and pure, Gothic was ornate and convoluted; where the classics offered a world of clear rules and limits, Gothic represented excess and exaggeration, the product of the wild and the uncivilized, a world that constantly tended to overflow cultural boundaries.

These extensions in, or reversals of, meaning have a perceptible logic; but what started to happen in the middle of the eighteenth century had less to do with logic and more to do with a shift in cultural values. For while the word 'Gothic' retained this central stock of meanings, the value placed upon them began to alter radically. It is not possible to put a precise date on this change, but it was one of huge dimensions which affected whole areas of architectural, artistic and literary culture in Britain and also in some parts of mainland Europe; for what happened was that the 'medieval', the primitive, the wild, became invested with positive value in and for itself and came to be seen as representing virtues and qualities that the 'modern' world needed.

Gothic stood for the old-fashioned as opposed to the modern; the barbaric as opposed to the civilized; crudity as opposed to elegance; old English barons as opposed to the cosmopolitan gentry; often for the English and provincial as opposed to the European or Frenchified, for the vernacular as opposed to an 'imposed' culture. Gothic was the archaic, the pagan, that which was prior to, or was opposed to, or resisted the establishment of civilized values and a well-regulated society. And various writers, starting from this point, began to make out a case for the importance of these Gothic qualities and to claim, specifically, that the fruits of primitivism and barbarism possessed a vigour, a sense of grandeur that was sorely needed in English culture. Furthermore, these writers began to argue that there were whole areas of English cultural history which had been ignored in conventional reconstructions of the past, and that the way to breathe life into the culture was by re-establishing relations with this forgotten, 'Gothic' history.

Many of the crucial texts which made this point were written in the 1760s. The most important of all was *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762), by Bishop Hurd. Hurd was a littérateur, an amateur and an antiquarian rather than a serious critic, but he summarized a very widespread flow of thought in his enquiry into the nature and value of the Gothic. Perhaps the best-known passage goes as follows:

> The greatest geniuses of our own and foreign countries, such as Ariosto and Tasso in Italy, and Spenser and Milton in England, were seduced by these barbarities of their forefathers, were even charmed by the Gothic Romances. Was this caprice and absurdity in them? Or, may there not be something in the Gothic Romance peculiarly suited to the views of a genius, and to the ends of poetry. (Hurd 1963: 4)

The arts of our forefathers and the folk traditions on which they drew, Hurd is saying, may have been ill formed and may indeed not have conformed to rules which we have since come to regard as constitutive of aesthetic success

and propriety; but perhaps this very rudeness and wildness can be construed as itself a source of power – a power that Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton saw and which we may not be able to reclaim unless we come to value it and see it more clearly.

It is not simple to pin down precisely who the 'forefathers' were to whom Hurd refers, but critics agree that there were four principal areas of past literature that were brought back into cultural acceptability and prominence under the aegis of this early 'revival of the Gothic'. First, there was the genuinely ancient British heritage, in so far as any of it was available in the eighteenth century. Thomas Gray regarded himself as well read in old Welsh poetry; James Macpherson (q.v.) in his 'translations' of the imaginary Gaelic poet Ossian saw himself as referring back to ancient British 'tradition'; Thomas Percy's important translation in 1770 of P. H. Mallet's *Northern Antiquities* was designed to reacquaint its readers with large areas of the ancient history of northern Europe.

Second, there was a revival of interest in ballads. Percy's crucial collection, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, was published in 1765, and it was the re-establishment of the credentials of this form of 'folk-poetry' which was to lead on to the interest of the major romantics in ballad-like poems, through works like William Blake's 'Gwin, King of Norway', written in the 1770s, to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'Ancient Mariner' (1798), and thence to John Keats's 'La Belle Dame sans Merci' and Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Mask of Anarchy*, both written in 1819.

Third, Gothic was taken to include English medieval poetry. Best known by far were the works of Chaucer, which were given a scholarly edition by Thomas Tyrwhitt in 1775–8. And fourth, Gothic included, at least for some writers and critics, the major work of Spenser and of the Elizabethans, whose strength, it now came to be thought, had been buried under the achievements of the mid-seventeenth century. This shift of value was at its apogee in the 1790s. It was not, of course, the case that Gothic ever became a universal standard of taste, but by that time the arguments that supported it were being given their fullest articulation and the stage was set for Gothic to develop as the basis for a literary form.

As we have said, however, the literary effects of this change in values were by no means the whole of the picture. The other principal application of the term 'Gothic' was, as it still is, in the field of architecture (q.v.), and here it was used to refer to medieval architecture, principally churches and cathedrals, from about the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries. Alongside its taste for 'ancient' literature, the late eighteenth century acquired a pronounced taste for medieval buildings, whether real or fake. Wealthy land-owners even went to the extent of building Gothic ruins, ready-made, in the grounds of

their mansions, and occasionally to the expense of hiring hermits to live in custom-made adjacent cells. The most famous example of Gothic building in the period was Horace Walpole's (q.v.) Strawberry Hill, a Gothic castle in appearance even if surprisingly small in scale. By far the most impressive, however, must have been William Beckford's (q.v.) Fonthill Abbey, which collapsed under the weight of its own vast tower. What later flowed from this taste was to be the 'Gothicizing' mania of the Victorians.

When examining the emergence of the Gothic in the eighteenth century, it is helpful to contrast it with the concept of Augustanism, which took its name from the Augustan period of the Roman Empire. The latter-day, eighteenth-century Augustans saw their period of national history as analogous to this past age in that their own too seemed to them a silver age: that is, they saw it as being poised between splendid, 'golden' achievements in the past and a possible future collapse into a barbarian age, of bronze. According to Augustan theory, the barbarians are forever at the gates; the writer's role must therefore be to maintain cultural defences against this cultural encroachment.

Crucial to the Augustan ideal, as embodied in, to take a major example, Alexander Pope, is that the early classical poets had already found out and indeed described the secrets of the natural world; it would therefore be presumptuous of a poet or any other writer to claim to be discovering novelty; the task was instead to express old truths in increasingly beautiful and arresting forms. But it is also important to notice that as early as the 1740s we can trace the development of a form of poetry which was radically different from anything Pope advocated, and which came to be called 'graveyard poetry'. Graveyard poetry is significant here because it prefigures the Gothic novel in several ways, and its emergence was sudden and dramatic: Edward Young's massive *Night Thoughts* came out between 1742 and 1745; Robert Blair's *The Grave* in 1743; James Hervey's major work, *Meditations among the Tombs*, between 1745 and 1747; Thomas Warton's *On the Pleasures of Melancholy* in 1747; and Gray's famous *Elegy in a Country Church-Yard* in 1751.

What these works focus on, in sharp contradistinction to Pope's, is the severe limitations of human pretensions to rational understanding of the purposes and workings of the cosmos. Graveyard poetry constitutes an implicit attack on those who, like Pope, claim that nature's purpose is merely to serve human needs. For the graveyard poet, the nature of destiny and the evolution of the future are far less comprehensible than this. Although written largely about death, these works also serve a subtly different purpose of challenging the certainties of human progress to which Pope and many of his contemporaries subscribed, and suggest a far more dubious awareness

of the limitations of human knowledge and the necessity of owning to the inevitability of human frailty.

A well-known and typical passage which illustrates the way in which these poets anticipated the evolution of Gothic can be found in Thomas Parnell's 'Night-Piece on Death' (1833, first published 1722):

> By the blue taper's trembling light,
> No more I waste the wakeful night,
> Intent with endless view to pore
> The schoolmen and the sages o'er:
> Their books from wisdom widely stray,
> Or point at best the longest way.
> I'll seek a readier path, and go
> Where wisdom's surely taught below. (1–7)

Quiet though his language may appear to be, Parnell is saying something quite radical for the times. Unlike Pope, he is not impressed with the attempts made by reason to define the limits and aspirations of the human species. To learn wisdom, it is necessary to take a quicker and more frightening path, which is the path not of reason but of intense feeling; one can best – or perhaps only – learn the secrets of life (if one really wishes to, and has the strength to) from prolonged and absorbed meditation on its extreme limit: death. Here we see, among other things, a harbinger of the thrill of entering forbidden, thanatic realms which would later become the province of the Gothic novel.

Thus in Parnell's poetry, in Young's, and indeed in all the better examples of graveyard poetry, the value of reason is replaced by a valuation of feeling, and what this leads to is a sense of the sublime, in which the mind is overwhelmed by, or swoons before, something greater than itself. What is crucial, however, is that this 'something greater' is also inevitably accompanied by terror. The essential text here is the major eighteenth-century treatise on the sublime, Edmund Burke's *Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). It is Burke who first significantly effects the crucial connection between sublimity and terror:

> Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible subjects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. (1958: 39)

In these words, Burke seems even to connect the very nature of mind with the capacity for experiencing terror, so that this capacity becomes an

essential mark of our humanness. The Enlightenment conviction that man can understand his own circumstances has never, indeed, disappeared from the history of ideas; but what the Gothic does is to entertain the fear or rather, to follow Burke, the terror that such an enterprise may not in fact be possible, that there is something inherent in our very mortality that dooms us to a life of incomprehension, a life in which we are forever sunk in mysteries and unable to escape from the deathly consequences of our physical form.

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Gothic and Romantic

The canon of writing during the 'romantic' period has changed radically over recent years (McGann 1994), but most of those writers traditionally considered to be the major romantic poets were influenced by, and played a part in shaping, the evolution of Gothic, and here we give some of the best-known examples. In the case of William Blake (although, of course, his status as a 'romantic' poet is hotly disputed), his early work includes imitations of Spenser and of other writers rehabilitated by the Gothic revival. Blake had a strong interest in the ballad form, as we can see from such conventional works as 'Fair Elenor' (1783) and, rather differently, from the thematically highly complex but formally simple works in the Pickering Manuscript, such as 'The Mental Traveller'. Some of the prose pieces in the *Poetical Sketches* (1783) appear to have been influenced by 'Ossian', and there is also an influence from the graveyard poets, evidenced outstandingly in Blake's illustrations to Edward Young and Robert Blair but also in the constant preoccupation with 'graveyard vocabulary', as strong in *Vala*, *or*, *The Four Zoas* (1795–1804) and *The Keys to the Gates* (*c.*1818) as in his earlier work.

A notable example of this last occurs in a passage in *Thel* (1789), where the eponymous protagonist is exploring the psychic depths:

> The eternal gates' terrific porter lifted the northern bar.
> Thel entered in and saw the secrets of the land unknown.
> She saw the couches of the dead, and where the fibrous roots
> Of every heart on earth infixes deep its restless twists –
> A land of sorrows and of tears where never smile was seen.
>
> She wandered in the land of clouds, through valleys dark, listening
> Dolours and lamentations; waiting oft beside a dewy grave
> She stood in silence, listening to the voices of the ground,
> Till to her own grave plot she came. (4.1–9)

This graveyard language, the emphases on secrets, the 'land unknown', the 'voices of the ground' as well as the focus, throughout the poem, on the innocent, vulnerable heroine who is travelling through dangerous realms clearly point us towards the Gothic in terms of plot as well as scenario. The insistence that wisdom can be learned only from an encounter with death takes us directly back to a poet like Parnell; but the insistence that this is a 'narrative of the psyche', a journey through the mind, moves the reader forward to the psychological nuances of nineteenth-century Gothic.

As frequently in Blake, this Gothic discourse also carries directly political inflections. There are obvious examples in his most direct poetic account of historical events, *The French Revolution* (1791). There is a moment, for example, when the poem depicts the inmates of the Bastille:

> In the tower named *Order*, an old man, whose white beard covered the stone floor like weeds
> On the margin of the sea, shrivelled up by heat of day and cold of night; his den was short
> And narrow as a grave dug for a child, with spiders' webs wove, and with slime
> Of ancient horrors covered, for snakes and scorpions are his companions. (1.38–40)

And around this passage there are references to skeletons, the 'eternal worm' (1.34), a man 'Chained hand and foot, round his neck an iron band, bound to the impregnable wall' (1.27). Here the emphasis, as so frequently in the Gothic novel in the hands of, for example, Ann Radcliffe or M. G. Lewis (qq.v.), is on tyranny and its effects, on the horrific and seemingly limitless powers of the despot.

When we turn to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, we find less emphasis on this political dimension and more on psychological mood, in the characteristically Coleridgean range of dejection, disappointment and melancholy. In more formal terms, we also find Ossianic poetic prose, and a series of ballads, from 'Anna and Harland' (1790) to 'Alice du Clos' (1828). In 'The Destiny of Nations' (1796), another well-known location, the poetry of Gray and Young forms a background to a set of meditations on history inextricably linked to the key Gothic theme of the ruin, in lines like:

> As through the dark vaults of some mouldered Tower
> (Which, fearful to approach, the evening kind
> Circles at distance in his homeward way)
> The winds breathe hollow, deemed the plaining groan
> Of prisoned spirits. (305–9)

This view of the past as peopled by ghosts which haunt the present demonstrates that, although Blake was aware of the antecedents of Gothic, Coleridge was already conscious of it in its more contemporary forms: of Radcliffe's novels, many of whose features appear in 'The Old Man of the Alps' (1798); of Lewis, in 'The Mad Monk' (1800); and, very importantly, of the German father of English Gothic, Friedrich Schiller, to whom he addressed these well-known lines:

> Ah Bard tremendous in sublimity!
> Could I behold thee in thy loftier mood
> Wand'ring at eve with finely-frenzied eye
> Beneath some vast old tempest-swinging wood!
> Awhile with mute awe gazing I would brood:
> Then weep aloud in a wild ecstacy! (9–14)

Whereas Blake is concerned with a way of articulating the effects of social and political repression, Coleridge is in the end more concerned with finding correlatives for his personal psychological predicament, his melancholia. The tone of alienation that pervades his work is struck in the 'lines' written at Shurton Bars (1795):

> And there in black soul-jaundic'd fit
> A sad gloom-pamper'd Man to sit,
> And listen to the roar:
> When mountain Surges bellowing deep
> With an uncouth monster leap
> Plung'd foaming on the shore. (49–54)

The numerous ghosts and spectres in Coleridge's poetry were, critics usually opine, related to his own pervasive feeling of guilt; 'The Pains of Sleep' (1803) is very close to Young's *Night Thoughts* (1742–5), not only in the structure of feeling which it manifests, but also in the exaggerated, lurid terms in which Coleridge tries to objectify his nightmares:

> But yester-night I prayed aloud
> In anguish and in agony,
> Up-starting from the fiendish crowd
> Of shapes and thoughts that tortured me:
> A lurid light, a trampling throng,
> Sense of intolerable wrong,
> And whom I scorned, those only strong! (14–20)

It is perhaps also worth adding that this sense of guilt and persecution, which continues into work as late as 'Limbo' (1817) and beyond, has been seen as distinctively modern in its awareness of its own psychological origins; Coleridge was well aware that the ghosts that tortured him were of his own imagining, but he was equally aware that this in no way lessened their potency. The connection between psychological and political plight typical of the Gothic is none the less evident, in, for example, the poem known as 'The Dungeon' (1797), with its 'savage faces, at the clanking hour / Seen through the steams and vapour of his dungeon, / By the lamp's dismal twilight!' (14–16).

Percy Bysshe Shelley was of all the major romantics the most immersed in Gothic writing, even though from time to time he tries to reject it. Quite apart from his complicated role in relation to Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's *Frankenstein* (qq.v.), he also clearly shows the influences of Lewis, William Godwin and Charlotte Dacre (qq.v.) in the two short Gothic romances, *Zastrozzi* (1810) and *St Irvyne* (1811), which he wrote in his youth. Like Coleridge, he was also heavily influenced – for instance in *The Revolt of Islam* (1817) and *The Cenci* (1819) – by Schiller and the German Gothics, whose works were praised and reviled in England at the time. He was, according to Mary Shelley, 'a lover of the wild and wonderful in literature; but had not fostered these tastes at their genuine sources – the romances of chivalry of the middle ages; but in the perusal of such German works as were current in those days' (*Queen Mab*, n. 9). This was certainly true, but what Shelley found in the Germans was principally a sanction for the portrayal of extreme, 'wild', violent situations, particularly again in *The Cenci*, and a pretext for employing these means for the display of political situations. A crucial text for Shelley, again, was Schiller's *Die Räuber* (1777–80), in which what we might now think of as Gothic or even melodramatic descriptions are used in the service of the directly political lesson that social violence is the product of social injustice. *Queen Mab* (1813), *The Cenci* and *The Revolt of Islam* all hinge on this argument, which becomes part of a broader Gothic and romantic argument that the outlaw, the bandit, is behaving in a justifiable fashion when he is responding to the impositions of an unjust and unjustifiable society. But the conjunction of Gothic vocabulary and political thinking has been seen at its strongest in the poem Shelley was writing at the time of his death, *The Triumph of Life* (1822), and particularly in this passage:

> The earth was gray with phantoms, and the air
> Was peopled with dim forms, as when there hovers

A flock of vampire-bats before the glare
Of the tropic sun, bringing, ere evening,
Strange night upon some Indian isle; – thus were

Phantoms diffused around; and some did fling
Shadows of shadows, yet unlike themselves,
Behind them; some like eaglets on the wing

Were lost in the white day; others like elves
Danced in a thousand unimagined shapes
Upon the sunny streams and grassy shelves;

And others sate chattering like restless apes
In vulgar bands,
Some made a cradle of the ermined capes

Of kingly mantles; some across the tiar
Of pontiffs sate like vultures; others played
Under the crown which girt with empire

A baby's or an idiot's brow, and made
Their nests in it. The old anatomies
Sate hatching their bare broods under the shade

Of demon wings, and laughed from their dead eyes
To re-assume the delegated power,
Arrayed in which those worms did monarchise,

Who made this earth their charnel.

Here phantoms, skeletons, 'the old anatomies' serve to mock the things of this earth, as the graveyard poets had insisted; but Shelley's work moves in a different direction by demonstrating that these typically Gothic phantoms have a specific relation to earthly tyranny and injustice.

Lord Byron's poetry is full of Gothic allusions. The ballad form is represented in 'Oscar of Alva' (1807); the by now almost traditional imitation of 'Ossian' in 'The Death of Calmar and Orla' (1807); 'Chaucerian' medieval archaism in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1813). In fact there is in Byron, in keeping with his consistently ambivalent engagement with the role of the aristocracy, a prevalent concern with the nature of feudalism, and also with monasticism, as in *Lara* (1814) and 'The Song of the Black Friar' from *Don Juan* (1819–24), which reminds the reader again of Radcliffe and Lewis. Many critics have seen Byron himself – or, better, one aspect of Byron or of the Byron myth as developed by himself but equally by others – as the

apotheosis of the fearless, terrifying, outlaw hero who occurs all the time in the Gothic novel from *The Mysteries of Udolpho* to *Dracula* (qq.v.). It needs to be said, however, that Byron's attitude towards the Gothic was frequently satirical. 'The horrid crags, by toppling convent crowned' in *Childe Harold*, and the description of Newstead Abbey –

> Yes! In thy gloomy cells and shades profound,
> The monk abjur'd a world, he ne'er could view;
> Or blood-stain'd Guilt repenting, solace found,
> Or Innocence, from stern Oppression, flew (21–4)

– have been cited as straightforward references to the Gothic conventions, but the famous description of the apparition towards the end of *Don Juan* is clearly intended to provoke a more ironic reaction:

> It was no mouse – but lo! a monk, arrayed
> In cowl and beads, and dusky garb, appeared,
> Now in the moonlight, and now lapsed in shade,
> With steps that trod as heavy, yet unheard;
> His garments only a slight murmur made;
> He moved as shadowy as the Sisters weird,
> But slowly; and as he passed Juan by,
> Glanced, without pausing, on him a bright eye. (16.160–7)

Byron's attitude towards Gothic, then, is complex. On some occasions he uses it for purposes similar to Shelley's, to indict political and religious repression; but Byron's attitude to the past is less certain – some would say less didactic – than Shelley's. There is a sense of aristocratic nostalgia which sits uneasily alongside the political radicalism throughout Byron's work, and which is reflected, among other ways, in his use of the Gothic.

John Keats's relation to the Gothic is in some ways the most marginal, but in others the most simple: where there are Gothic references in his poetry, they tend to be directly to an older world of chivalry, without the dark inflection that more usually characterizes Gothic. He was certainly interested in the 'old Britain' that might be reconstructed from sources as diverse as Spenser and Bishop Hurd. Yet even with Keats we find passages in, for example, *Isabella, or, The Pot of Basil* (1818) which show clearly how deeply rooted some of the darker Gothic assumptions had become:

> Who hath not loiter'd in a green church-yard,
> And let his spirit, like a demon-mole,
> Work through the clayey soil and gravel hard,

> To see scull, coffin'd bones, and funeral stole;
> Pitying each form that hungry Death hath marr'd,
> And filling it once more with human soul? (353–8)

The question for Keats was about how far the apparently pure visible forms of medieval chivalry covered over – or brought with them – a very different vision of the world. He expresses this doubt at greatest length in *Endymion* (1817):

> Groanings swell'd
> Poisonous about my ears, and louder grew,
> The nearer I approach'd a flame's gaunt blue,
> That glar'd before me through a thorny brake.
> The fire, like the eye of gordian snake,
> Bewitch'd me towards; and I soon was near
> A sight too fearful for the feel of fear:
> In thicket hid I curs'd the haggard scene –
> The banquet of my arms, my arbour queen,
> Seated upon an uptorn forest root;
> And all around her shapes, wizard and brute,
> Laughing, and wailing, groveling, serpenting,
> Showing tooth, tusk, venom-bag, and sting!
> O such deformities! (3.489–502)

Such passages as this carry the authentic tone of Gothic nightmare. So indeed do others in Keats, perhaps most enduringly the fearsome revelation of 'La Belle Dame sans Merci' (1820), and they bring us to what was clearly seen in the period as a crucial question about the Gothic and its relation to the past, namely to what extent such terrifying visions are to be taken as necessary correctives to the conventional descriptions of the past.

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Science, Industry and the Gothic

The Gothic novel began to emerge at a time when the forces of industrialization were transforming the very structures of society. As Britain gradually changed from an agricultural into an industrial society, there was a steady movement of the population out of rural areas into the urban-centred industrial world. The traditional social system collapsed as new types of work and new social roles were established. Emergent capitalism led to a growing sense of isolation and alienation, as increasing mechanization divorced workers from the products of their labour, and the urban centres disconnected them from the natural world. The very ideas of what it meant to be human were disturbed in the face of increasing regimentation and mechanistic roles. Notably, as Jerrold E. Hogle remarks, it is precisely at this moment that Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's *Frankenstein* (qq.v.) emphasizes the horror of her creature's artificiality: the human is replaced by an automaton manufactured from fragments (Hogle 1998).

Discoveries in the sciences only served to aggravate a sense of alienation and further disturb notions of human identity. During the later eighteenth century, traditional metaphysical and theological investigations into the meaning of life began to be displaced by secular and materialist explorations of its origins and nature. In 1771, Joseph Priestley observed that placing mice in a bell jar depleted the air and led to their suffocation, while sprigs of mint refreshed the air and made the mice lively; eight years later, Antoine Lavoisier interpreted Priestley's data to provide the first understanding of the processes of respiration. Many scientists, however, remained reluctant to accept a theory that made human life dependent upon the vegetative world; the idea that life might be either maintained or initiated simply through material causes challenged all traditional beliefs about humanity's unique position within the world.

By 1814, a debate over what came to be known as the 'life-principle' had caused a rift in the sciences, encapsulated primarily in the differing positions of John Abernethy, president of the Royal College of Surgeons, and his pupil William Lawrence, appointed as second professor at the college in 1815. Lawrence advocated a strictly materialist position. Abernethy, wanting to retain some metaphysical elements in common with religious beliefs, conversely argued that such concepts as 'organization', function' and 'matter' could not entirely explain life: something else was required, some 'subtile, active vital principle' that might be linked to the concept of the immortal soul.

As soon as science begins to disturb notions of the human, it becomes a site of particular interest to the Gothic writer. The question that preoccupies Mary Shelley's prototypical Gothic scientist Victor Frankenstein, namely 'Whence . . . did the principle of life proceed', was a matter of intense debate during the years in which *Frankenstein* was first conceived and written, and it was a debate with which Shelley was demonstrably familiar. Marilyn Butler (1994) suggests that Victor's reference to infusing 'a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet' may indicate the kind of 'galvanic battery' used in early electrical experiments in which attempts were made to revive dead animals or hanged criminals. Furthermore, she observes, clear signs in the original 1818 text of *Frankenstein* indicate that Shelley sided primarily with Lawrence and the materialist position.

The publication of Lawrence's *Lectures on Physiology, Zoology and the Natural History of Man* in 1819, however, led to a public outcry, and Lawrence was suspended by the Royal College of Surgeons and forced to withdraw the book. During the following years it was repeatedly pirated and reproduced, but Lawrence was unable to claim copyright under a ruling of 1818 that prohibited such claims in cases like Lawrence's *Lectures*, considered to be 'hostile to natural and revealed religion'. The eventual notoriety of Lawrence's work, Butler argues, probably had much to do with Shelley's revisions. What she added to *Frankenstein* was 'usually reverent', and what she cut, including 'doubt thrown on a non-material mind or spirit, and a divine Creator', was precisely what was found most offensive in Lawrence's theories (Butler 1994: li). In its connection to the 'life-principle' debate, therefore, *Frankenstein* can be seen to set out for the first time the concern that dominates Gothic's engagement with both science and industry over the following centuries: the disruption of accepted notions of the human.

As the nineteenth century progressed, the damaging effects of industrialism became increasingly clear and had much to do with the emergence of a new site of Gothic horror: the city. In Victorian Gothic (q.v.), the castles and abbeys of the eighteenth century give way to labyrinthine streets, sinister

rookeries, opium dens, and the filth and stench of the squalid slums. Gothic motifs are appropriated to convey the horror of this world not only in the fiction of such authors as Charles Dickens and G. W. M. Reynolds (qq.v.), but also in the work of sociologists and journalists, including Friedrich Engels's *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844* (1845) and William Booth's *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (1890). The savage and primitive are shown to exist in the very heart of the modern, civilized metropolis.

While capitalism theoretically promotes individual self-improvement – most notably suggested at the time by Samuel Smiles's highly popular how-to book, *Self-Help* (1859), as well as numerous fictional narratives of the self-made man – in practise, such opportunities were by no means available to all. This discrepancy between the ideal and the practise is often considered to account for the high incidence of crime in our capitalist world, and it is certainly notable that with the establishment of a capitalist society a new Gothic villain, the criminal, begins to emerge.

The development of new sciences began to offer possible ways of theorizing deviance, and Gothicized criminality by linking it to the past. In the process, there was a further questioning, even a dismantling, of conventional ideas concerning the human. Most obviously, perhaps, evolutionary theories began to challenge any belief in the integrity and superiority of the human species. With the emergence of criminal anthropology, even more disturbing theories of atavism began to be proposed. The very nature of the civilized was thrown into question as these sciences began to identify vestiges of the past within the bodies of the present. As the Italian criminal anthropologist Cesare Lombroso maintained in 1876, the 'criminal is an atavistic being who reproduces in his person the ferocious instincts of primitive humanity and the inferior animals' (Lombroso-Derrero 1911: xiv). Just as a cultivated garden rose will revert to the original dog rose when neglected, so, he argued, a human may, under certain conditions, revert to a more primitive state, and the savage of the past consequently survive in the midst of civilization.

One of the first works of Gothic fiction to engage with these ideas is Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (qq.v.). As evolutionary theories established that the emergence of the civilized was dependent upon the prior existence of the savage, so Jekyll discovers that the retention of his civilized and respectable exterior is dependent upon the existence of Hyde. The split provides a literal embodiment of the difference between, and mutual dependency of, the civilized and the primitive. Significantly, evil is written upon the face of Hyde and signs of 'deformity and decay' upon his body, pointing to ways in which the developments

of criminal anthropology could be reassuring: they suggested that the criminal or the insane could be identified through physical characteristics or behaviour, and consequently implied the possibility of containing what was deviant.

As he explains in the introduction to his daughter's 1911 English summary of his work, *Criminal Man*, Lombroso's moment of 'revelation' came when, conducting a post mortem on a criminal, he opened up the skull to find a distinct depression comparable to that in lower animal forms: a sign of reversion, a vestige of the primitive. At this moment he realized 'the problem of the nature of the criminal', and saw the explanation for both the distinctive physical traits and the behavioural tendencies that he observed:

> Thus were explained anatomically the enormous jaws, high cheek-bones, prominent superciliary arches, solitary lines in the palms, extreme size of the orbits, handle-shaped or sessile ears found in criminals, savages, and apes, insensibility to pain, extremely acute sight, tattooing, excessive idleness, love of orgies, and the irresistible craving for evil for its own sake, the desire not only to extinguish life in the victim, but to mutilate the corpse, tear its flesh, and drink its blood. (Lombroso-Derrero 1911: xxv)

While this may seem more reminiscent of the werewolf than the vampire (q.v.), in other sections Lombroso pays particular attention to the excessive development of the lateral incisors in criminals, and it is such descriptions that allow Mina in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (qq.v.) to identify the Count as 'a criminal and of criminal type', and consequently to predict his behaviour.

While on the one hand such new sciences offered ways of fixing lines of difference, and consequently of locating and possibly containing the threat of the deviant, at the same time they suggested other less reassuring possibilities. As Kelly Hurley has most notably demonstrated, these scientific discourses emphasized the potential changeability of the human. Numerous Gothic fictions of the Decadence (q.v.) consequently focus on monstrous metamorphic bodies, on what Hurley identifies as the 'abhuman', bodies that have 'lost their claim to a discrete and integral identity, a fully human existence' (2002: 190).

Even in Stoker's *Dracula*, where there is hope that the classifications of criminal anthropology may identify and thereby contain the deviant, categories are repeatedly shown to break down, suggesting the need to move away from materialist explanations and to engage with the more shadowy arena of the mind. 'Mental physiology' or early psychiatry began to emerge during the later nineteenth century, and the growing interest in this field

played a pivotal role in identifying the threat to social and psychic order as internal. Gothic fiction increasingly began to suggest that the chaos and disruption previously located mainly in such external forces as vampire or monster (qq.v.) was actually produced within the mind of the human subject. In Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890, rev. 1891) and Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, it may be the self that is manifest in the double but that double is nevertheless still given a physical and verifiable form. In such works as Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (qq.v.) and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper' (1892), however, and in the stories of Vernon Lee and Walter de la Mare (qq.v.), there is frequently increasing ambiguity and a more sophisticated exploration of psychological processes. Not surprisingly, the scientist who began to appear in twentieth-century Gothic fiction is frequently a psychologist.

There was a return of interest to the more materialist sciences, however, during the second half of the twentieth century as the technological explosion created a new set of anxieties that are reproduced and intensified in the Gothic. With advances in weaponry, for example, the proposition that the end of the world was near no longer seemed quite so fantastical. During the 1950s, transfiguring radiation became a common trope in popular horror, often combined with the idea of the last man on earth, initially used in Mary Shelley's 1826 novel, *The Last Man*. In Richard Matheson's (q.v.) *I am Legend* (1954), for example, the protagonist is the sole survivor in a world of vampires created by an irradiated virus, the product of nuclear testing.

What might appear most notable about Gothic fiction's engagement with technology today is the way in which notions of the human continue to be disrupted. The horror of the artificial human, first proposed in Shelley's *Frankenstein*, re-emerges in an up-to-date form with the possibility of new kinds of simulated life, with cyborgs, animated machines, and reproduction by computer or genetic engineering. 'What is expelled in the fantastic flight to hyperreality', Fred Botting suggests, 'is the "meat", the term employed by cyberpunk writers to denote the formless bodily excess of no use to machines' (1999: 150). In Rudy Rucker's *Wetware* (1994), the drug 'Merge' can not only decompose the body at a molecular level, but also reconstitute genes in order to produce hybrid monstrosities. With the disturbing monstrous transformations of the previous fin de siècle, the abhuman can ultimately be rejected, abjected, and the human recovered, the 'normal' body reinstated as the limit and basis of identity. Now, the 'dominant form and meaning of humanity' is simply 'meat', no more than 'a lumpen mass of consumptive and rotting desires' (Botting 1999: 152). We can be 'meat or machine . . . enjoy the horrors of excessive corporeality or the image-

saturated void of virtuality' (152), Botting concludes. If there is nothing else left to recover or reinstate, science may well have taken the Gothic to its limits.

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Victorian Gothic

It is generally agreed that the period of the 'classic' Gothic novel, narrowly defined as a historical genre, came to an end early in the nineteenth century. The exact moment is variously identified as the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's *Frankenstein* (qq.v.) in 1818 or Charles Robert Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (qq.v.) in 1820. As a mode, however, the Gothic continued to return throughout the nineteenth century, dispersed into a variety of fictional forms, before re-emerging with full force once more during the period identified as the Decadence (q.v.).

Victorian Gothic is marked primarily by the domestication of Gothic figures, spaces and themes: horrors become explicitly located within the world of the contemporary reader. The romantic Gothic villain is transformed as monks, bandits and threatening aristocratic foreigners give way to criminals, madmen and scientists. The exotic and historical settings that serve to distance the horrors from the world of the reader in earlier Gothic are replaced with something more disturbingly familiar: the bourgeois domestic world or the new urban landscape.

This domestication of the Gothic is partly the result of its appropriation by the sensation novel. Beginning in the early 1860s with the publication of Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (qq.v.), Ellen Wood's *East Lynne* (1861) and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's (q.v.) *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), sensation fiction focuses on the bourgeois world and is characteristically preoccupied with domestic crime and disorder. Generally speaking, Gothic sensation novels fall into two main categories. Some novelists, often male, work within the female Gothic (q.v.) tradition of the heroine imprisoned within the home or some substitute institution. These texts demonstrate a particular interest in questions of identity and the transgression of borderlines. In *The Woman in White*, for example, gendered boundaries are explored

through representations of Marian, Fosco and Frederick Fairlie, and definitions of sanity and insanity through the pairing of Laura and Anne.

Transgression becomes even more central to the second main type of Gothic sensation fiction, where it is associated with the sensational spectacle of the mad or criminal female protagonist. The women tend to assume the roles of both heroine and monster (q.v.), and provoke anxieties about the instability of identity and the breakdown of gender roles. Behind the façade of the modest and respectable Victorian woman lurk both the bigamous and murderous Lucy Graham in Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, considered by many critics to be one of the most noxious books of its time, and the even more disturbing murderess, adulteress and forger Lydia Gwilt, of Collins's *Armadale*, clearly a worthy descendant of Victoria in Charlotte Dacre's (q.v.) *Zofloya* (1805).

The primary way in which sensation novelists transformed the Gothic during this period is indicated by Henry James's (q.v.) comments on Collins in an essay entitled 'Miss Braddon'. Collins, James writes, is concerned with

> those most mysterious of mysteries, the mysteries which are at our own doors. The innovation gave a new impetus to the literature of horrors . . . Instead of the terrors of 'Udolpho', we were treated to the terrors of the cheerful country-house and the busy London lodgings. And there is no doubt that these were infinitely the more terrible. (1865: 593)

James's description might equally be applied to another genre with Gothic connections that became popular at mid-century: the ghost story. Victorian ghost stories typically centre on the irruption of the supernatural into the familiar, comfortable and – as suggested by the very titles of such stories as J. Sheridan Le Fanu's (q.v.)'Green Tea' (1869), Collins's 'A Terribly Strange Bed' (1852) and Elizabeth Gaskell's (q.v.) 'The Old Nurse's Story' (1852) – the mundane everyday world. The prevalence of ghost stories at this time was partly the result of the emergence of many new periodicals and literary magazines in the wake of the mid-century expansion of the publishing industry – Charles Dickens (q.v.), for example, published many ghost stories in the magazines he edited, *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*. Their popularity is often attributed to the rise of positivistic science and the decline of religion in the increasingly materialist and secular nineteenth century: ghosts challenge or at least question the authority of science and reason, and as Julia Briggs suggests in *Night Visitors* (1977), could be seen as an oddly reassuring, if nevertheless disturbing, proof of something beyond. A growing interest in spiritualism and the occult, along with a proliferation of societies for psychical research, prompted the publication of numerous stories of

supposedly 'true' hauntings, including Catherine Crowe's *The Night Side of Nature* (1848). Crowe suggested that as evolutionary theory had revealed a new world of marvels, so the fantastic was beginning to appear more and more real, and there is a clear movement towards naturalizing the fantastic in many ghost stories of the time. In Edward George Bulwer-Lytton's (q.v.) 'The Haunted and the Haunters: or, the House and the Brain' (1859), for example, the ordinary London house is not haunted by a conventional spirit. Rather, the haunting is the result of a former disgruntled servant who put a compass into the house with the written instruction 'so moves the needle, so work my will'.

Interestingly, many of the best ghost stories were written by authors, like Gaskell and Margaret Oliphant (q.v.), more usually associated with realism; the intrusion of the supernatural seems to be so much more shocking in a story that exploits realist strategies. And while both sensation and supernatural fiction can be seen to participate in the domestication of the Gothic, this was actually a movement initiated much earlier in the novels of writers who began to appropriate Gothic elements in the service of the realist agenda. William Harrison Ainsworth (q.v.) began the movement towards domestication with a consciously Gothic treatment of England in such historical novels as *The Tower of London* (1840), while Dickens and G. W. M. Reynolds (q.v.) took this one step further by constructing a Gothic England relocated within a contemporary city setting. Reynolds, the author of such melodramatic supernatural tales as *Wagner, the Wehr-Wolf* (1846–7), produced a nightmarish version of what is often termed urban Gothic in *The Mysteries of London* (1845–8). Reynolds's main target is the depraved aristocracy, but he also points to the dismal effects of a corrupt system upon the poor and presents a London marked primarily by disease and dirt and odious stenches, a claustrophobic polluted world of 'everlasting cloud'.

In such novels as *Oliver Twist* (1838), *Bleak House* (1852–3) and *Little Dorrit* (1855–7), Dickens similarly appropriates the Gothic in the service of both realism and polemic. In his 1841 preface to *Oliver Twist*, he rejects the romantic representations of Newgate novels, with their glamorization of the life of the outlaw, in favour of simple depictions of 'the everyday existence of a Thief'. His concern, he claims, is with the lessons taught by the 'cold wet shelterless midnight streets of London; the foul and frowsy dens, where vice is closely packed and lacks the room to turn; the haunts of hunger and disease'. Nevertheless, it is the Gothic that facilitates this realist agenda. The city, with its dark, narrow, winding streets and hidden byways replacing the labyrinthine passages of the earlier castles and convents, is established as a site of menace through the importation of various traditional Gothic motifs and scenarios. This is not to say that the terrors described duplicate those

experienced by earlier Gothic protagonists: they are, rather, quite specific to the modern urban experience. When Oliver is dragged into a 'labyrinth of dark narrow courts', he is trapped within a criminal world that is the product of a Victorian social system.

This focus on the contemporary world does not mean that Gothic relinquishes its interest in the past. At the same time as it is appropriated to represent new social problems, it also offers a space in which the past can persist in a modified form. Indeed, Robert Mighall convincingly argues that Victorian Gothic fiction is 'obsessed with identifying and depicting the threatening reminders or scandalous vestiges of an age from which the present is relieved to have distanced itself'. These reminders or vestiges can be variously found in the prisons, lunatic asylums and slums, and also in the bodies or minds of 'criminals, deviants, or relatively "normal" subjects' (Mighall 1999: 26). He shows how numerous narratives of mid-century, for example, began to concern themselves with the idea of a family curse, a characteristic Gothic motif since Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (qq.v.). Emerging at precisely the moment when contemporary science was looking to hereditary disease to explain moral dysfunction, however, these narratives transform the original motif: in such works as Collins's 'Mad Monkton' (1855) supernatural explanations are replaced by a materialist emphasis on pathological function (Mighall 1999: 78–9).

The past also remains a significant motif in both sensation and supernatural fiction, but again in a slightly modified form, with an emphasis on recent, rather than distant, events. Gothic sensation fiction focuses on family secrets and the immediate past of its transgressive protagonists. In a revision of Collins's plot in *The Woman in White*, for example, the male protagonist of Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* eventually arranges to have Lucy incarcerated in a lunatic asylum. This is not because anyone is really convinced she has inherited a taint of insanity from her mother, but because her criminal past would bring scandal to a respectable family. Hidden away, Lucy herself becomes the secret past of the Audleys.

Ghost stories also frequently focus on the family secrets of a recent past. In Gaskell's 'The Old Nurse's Story', for example, the home of Miss Furnivall is haunted by the phantoms of her sister, her sister's child, and the father who drove them out to meet their death in the snow. But as the re-enactment of past events shows, there can be an even closer relationship between the haunter and the haunted than this. While old Miss Furnivall pleads 'O father! Father! Spare the little innocent child', another phantom materializes, her younger self, looking upon the scene as she once did in approval, 'stony and deadly serene'. Similarly, in *The Haunted House*, included in the Christmas production of *All the Year Round* for 1859, a story

is offered for each room in the house, but all the occupiers turn out to be haunted by nothing more than some troubling aspect of their past selves.

A number of Victorian ghost stories do, however, eliminate the role of the past altogether. In Le Fanu's 'Green Tea' (1869), there is the possibility that what haunts the protagonist is no more than an aspect of his repressed self. Such a change in the ghost story would seem in line with Terry Castle's theory about 'spectral technology'. According to Castle, the development of this technology resulted in a relocation of the supernatural during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The mind itself became 'a kind of supernatural space, filled with intrusive spectral presences' (1995: 164).

This idea is certainly suggested by many of the Victorian writers who appropriated the Gothic in the service of a more powerful psychological realism. Following Robert Heilman's influential article on 'Charlotte Brontë's "New" Gothic', many critics have noted that the Brontës (q.v.) in particular use elements of the Gothic in order to suggest the powerful, irrational and potentially dangerous forces of the mind. Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (q.v.), for example, presents Catherine as a restless ghost, while Heathcliff, a brooding Gothic villain, is variously described as vampire, fiend and ghoul. These Gothic motifs work not so much to suggest the supernatural as to convey a powerful sense of desire and connection in the two characters. In Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) the Gothic emerges primarily in the figure of Bertha Mason, the hero-villain Rochester's first, mad wife, imprisoned on the third storey. Bertha comes to function both as an externalization of Rochester's guilt over a dubious past, and as a double for Jane, an embodiment of her rebellion, and Bertha must consequently be destroyed before Jane and Rochester can be finally united. While such early critics as Heilman saw the Gothic elements in such novels as functioning primarily in the service of the intensification of feeling, later critics have recognized that they also serve other purposes. The Gothic nature of Jane's experiences when she is locked in the Red Room, for example, conveys a powerful sense of her fears, but also dramatically confirms her vision of herself as a victim. Gothic is activated here, as it is repeatedly during the Victorian age, not only to convey a powerful sense of psychological disturbance, but also in the service of a penetrating social critique.

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Art and Architecture

Medieval Gothic Architecture

As an aesthetic term, 'Gothic' was first used by Italian art historians during the early Renaissance to describe European art and architecture from the middle of the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries. The comments of one of these critics, Giorgio Vasari in his *Lives of the Artists* (1550), indicate the main attitude of the time to this 'monstrous and barbarous' style of architecture, which ignores 'every familiar idea of order'. After inveighing against the piling up of tabernacles and pinnacles, ornate decoration and pointed arches, he concludes that this medieval manner of building

> was invented by the Goths, who, after the destruction of the ancient buildings and the dying out of architects because of the wars, afterwards built – those who survived – edifices in this manner; these men fashioned the vaults with pointed arches of quarter circles and filled all Italy with these damnable buildings . . . God preserve every land from the invasion of such ideas. (in Frankl 1960: 290–1)

While Vasari no doubt knew that the Goths (q.v.) were not actually responsible for the buildings he was describing, the terms 'Goth' and 'Gothic' were already beginning to be used to designate anything medieval and to establish through difference the superiority of the classical ideals that the Renaissance world was attempting to re-establish.

In architecture, as in fiction, it is difficult to be precise about what constitutes the Gothic. A style that flourished over four centuries, it is generally divided into three main periods. It began at the monastery of St Denis near Paris with the patronage of the Abbot Suger in the early twelfth century, and

the style soon spread across Europe, being adapted and reinvented in various ways in different countries. The second phase of Gothic architecture was redefined primarily in Italy, and the final phase, which coincided with the beginnings of the Renaissance, was centred mainly on Burgundy, Flanders and Germany.

The origins of the Gothic style are often considered to lie in the problems presented by the vaulting of churches in stone: the weight of the solid vault pushed the walls outwards and resulted in collapse, and so the ribbed vault was introduced. A skeleton structure of rib and shaft was developed to lighten the weight of the vault, and the pointed arch to reduce outside pressure. This use of pointed arches in ribbed vaults then created thrusts at certain fixed points that were neutralized by the counter-thrusts of flying buttresses (arched bars supported by stone columns set outside the walls of the building). A purely mechanical explanation, however, does not account for many other features of Gothic buildings. It does not explain, for example, the attempts to heighten the naves and replace walls with stained glass in order to allow intense light to flood the building. Nor does it explain why buttresses, flying buttresses, shafts, finials and pinnacles are combined to create an impression of infinite subdivisions, or why walls are transformed into complex networks through the use of geometrical tracery (decorative stonework) and stained glass.

Various attempts have consequently been made to suggest the underlying 'meaning' or 'purpose' of these Gothic structures, although many art historians reject such speculation, since there is little contemporary medieval commentary to back up any conclusions (Martindale 1996: 7–13). On the whole, however, these attempts seem – perhaps inevitably – to reveal more about the commentators and their own agendas than about the architecture itself. There is, for example, the early forest theory (Frankl 1960: 275), which connects Gothic with the natural world and argues that the pointed arch and the dematerialization of the stone through tracery give a sense of living growth. For some German romantic writers, Gothic buildings were consequently icons of the primitive and the natural Edenic world. The nineteenth-century Catholic architect Augustus Pugin, on the other hand, considered height or the vertical principle as emblematic of the resurrection. Others more generally identify this vertical principle and the upward thrust of the Gothic as a visual expression of the spiritual quest for heaven. For John Ruskin, Gothic style suggested creativity and freedom of expression and was set in contrast to the soulless mechanical reproductions of the Victorian age. For socialist commentators like Wilhelm Hausenstein in 1916, the Gothic expresses the subordination of the individual to Christian society as a whole and is consequently 'collectivist'.

Attempts have also been made to link a Gothic style of architecture with the Gothic mode in fiction. G. R. Thompson, for example, connects the ideas of terror and horror as described in Ann Radcliffe's (q.v.) 'On the Supernatural in Poetry' (1826) to the effects produced by the Gothic cathedral. According to Radcliffe, '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.' For Thompson, the 'central image for these paradoxes in the Gothic is the cathedral itself, for it has both an outward, upward movement towards the heavens, and an inward, downward motion, convoluting in upon itself in labyrinthine passages and dark recesses, descending to catacombs deep in the earth' (1974: 4).

Gothic Revival

The idea that the classical style of architecture was superior to the medieval or Gothic remained dominant until the eighteenth century, when a revival of interest in Gothic architecture accompanied a more general reassessment of the arts and culture of the medieval world (see 'Gothic in the Eighteenth Century' above). By mid-century, Batty Langley had domesticated the Gothic for eighteenth-century use in such works as *Gothick Architecture Improved by Rules and Proportions* (1747). Despite the reference to rules, Langley tended to focus on reproducible detail rather than structural principles in a manner typical of the approach to Gothic in the early Revival, and as Horace Walpole's (q.v.) Strawberry Hill, usually considered the first domestic Gothic Revival building, well demonstrates, this tends to lead to a sense of theatrical pastiche. While inspired by authentic and primarily ecclesiastical sources, Walpole copies from an eclectic variety of different Gothic styles. There is a reliance on dramatic effect rather than real Gothic structures: pointed vaults and windows, piers and columns and stained glass all combine to create the impression of a stage set. Artefacts are divorced from their foundations and turned into signs disconnected from their original substance, Jerrold E. Hogle (2002) points out, and such insistent counterfeiting is also present in Gothic fiction from the start. Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (q.v.) not only pretends in its first edition to be a translation of an old manuscript, but is also full of ghosts of what is already artificial, such as the walking figure of a portrait. The use of hollowed-out references to the past allows the Gothic to be filled with 'antiquated repositories into which modern quandaries can be projected and abjected simultaneously' (Hogle 2002: 15–16).

Interest in Gothic architecture increased during the early nineteenth century, when attention turned from domestic buildings to churches. The

Church Building Act of 1818 led to the building of many new churches, most of which were in a Gothic style. Study of the origins and principles of Gothic style also intensified, with Thomas Rickman eventually establishing the basic terminology which continues to be used today in his *Attempt to Discriminate the Styles of English Architecture* (1819). Rickman distinguished Early English (twelfth-century: the choir at Canterbury; the nave at Wells); Decorated (*c.*1230–1350: the nave at York); and Perpendicular (1350 to the end of the Middle Ages: chapels at Windsor, Westminster, King's College).

The key player in the Victorian Gothic revival was the architect and designer Pugin, and his attitude towards the medieval world is clearly suggested by the rather lengthy title of his best-known work: *Contrasts: Or a Parallel Between the Noble Edifices of the Middle Ages, and Corresponding Buildings of the Present Day: Shewing the Present Decay of Taste* (1836). Pugin is concerned not just with architecture but with social conditions: insisting on an organic relationship between architecture and social organization, he presents the Middle Ages as an ideal age of faith and social responsibility. In *Contrasts*, for example, a modern utilitarian workhouse is set against a noble monastic building used in the Middle Ages for the relief of the poor, to suggest the clear superiority of the latter, both aesthetically and morally. Pugin also turned the emphasis away from the decorative and towards functionality. There are two main principles in architecture, he claims in *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture* (1844): 'First, that there should be no features about a building which are not necessary for convenience, construction or propriety; second, that all ornament should consist of enrichment of the essential construction of the building.' For Pugin, however, a Catholic convert, the idea of the functional included the doctrinal, and he introduced elements that were somewhat problematic for the primarily Protestant Victorians. Reclaiming the Gothic style was for them reclaiming a national and democratic heritage, but there were nevertheless already anxieties about Gothic's associations with Catholicism that Pugin's designs only intensified. The more elitist elements involved in, for example, high altars and screen divisions between clergy and congregation were particularly worrying for many Victorians. 'They saw mischief lurking in every pointed niche', as Charles Eastlake observed in his 1872 *A History of the Gothic Revival*, 'and heresy peeping from behind every Gothic pillar' (1980: 268).

Ruskin, however, another key figure in the Victorian Gothic Revival, was able to transmit and popularize many of Pugin's ideas by detaching them from Catholic ideology, turning attention more towards secular buildings, and returning to an insistence on the democratic nature of the Gothic. In his essay 'On the Nature of the Gothic' in *The Stones of Venice* (1851–3),

Ruskin insists on imperfection as the sign of life in art, and exploits the Gothic in his attack on modern industrialization. The medieval workman, he argues, is able to express his individuality in a way the modern factory worker cannot. For Ruskin, the Gothic, as the architecture of imperfection, demonstrates signs of life and liberty in those who worked the stone. By the end of the century, however, Ruskin's ideas had been turned completely around by many, and he himself had revised many of his opinions. In the work of Thomas Hardy, most notably *Jude the Obscure* (1895), Gothic buildings are seen as nothing more than signs of an outdated and feudal world, and of the modern world's obsession with this hierarchical past and consequent denial both of progress and of social justice. With the emergence of Modernism, the Gothic Revival in architecture ends.

Gothic Art

If a discussion of Gothic architecture is problematic because of the wide diversity of styles and interpretations, a discussion of Gothic art is even more so and tends to necessitate a shift in emphasis. In the early Gothic period of the twelfth century, there was limited scope for painting. Instead of wall paintings, stained glass windows predominated. Illuminated manuscripts and illustrated romances might be seen to provide evidence of a Gothic art, but many critics suggest the primary influence is Byzantine. Similarly, it is debatable whether the general development of painting, beginning with Giotto in the early fourteenth century, can actually be described as Gothic. While some would link the stylization and linear quality of such early paintings to Gothic, others see in them a new understanding of nature and a striving for the classical ideal that would mark them as early Renaissance.

As a result, when speaking today of Gothic art as opposed to Gothic architecture, we are more likely to be referring to a kind of art that visually engages with many of the ideas and forms associated with Gothic fiction. This is an art that can be seen to originate in much the same period as the Gothic novel, to respond similarly to the emphasis on reason and order during the Enlightenment, and to move into the exploration of psychological states. The best known of these artists is the Swiss-born John Henry Fuseli, who came to London and became a professor at the Royal Academy. While other revolutionary artists of the time reacted against the neoclassical principles of the Royal Academy by returning to the natural world, Fuseli looked to dreams and visions. He distorts and exaggerates form to suggest projections of troubled minds. As one critic famously observed in the *New Monthly Magazine* for 1831, 'It was he who made real and visible

to us the vague and insubstantial phantoms which haunt like dim dreams the oppressed imagination' (quoted in Jasper 1992: 105). The first of several versions of Fuseli's most popular work, *The Nightmare*, was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1782. It depicts a woman stretched out across a bed sleeping, the covers thrown off, and her arms flung up over her head. On her torso crouches an incubus, and peering through the curtain is a horse, the 'nightmare' of the title, with its eyes gleaming and its teeth bared. The painting, increasingly erotic as different versions progressed, suggests both terror and a vague sense of oppression.

Another eighteenth-century painting frequently identified with the Gothic is the Spanish artist Goya's 'The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters' (1799), which depicts a sleeping man slumped over a desk in a posture suggestive of desperation, with his head hidden in his arms. Paper and a pen on the table suggest he is a writer, and bats hover around and above him, appearing simultaneously to emerge from and to threaten him. Goya's own manuscript notes on a trial proof of the work, suggesting a movement towards psychological theories of repression, emphasize the message of his picture: 'Fantasy abandoned by reason produces impossible monsters; united with it, she is the mother of the arts and origin of its marvels.'

During the nineteenth century, the darker side of the psyche continues to be explored by fairy painters like Richard Dadd, in such works as *The Fairy-Feller's Master Stroke* (1864), and by Gustav Doré in the illustrations he did for Dante's *Inferno* in 1861 and for Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' in 1875. On the whole, however, the dominance of genre scenes and romantic historical pieces tended to work against the expression of a Gothic sensibility in Victorian art. In the early twentieth century, Gothic elements could be found in various movements, particularly those that can be seen as a darker underside to and a rejection of Modernism. Surrealism, for example, offered a celebration of irrationality, insanity and hysteria in order to convey or release unconscious desires, nightmares and phobias, and critics of the movement even occasionally even used Gothic as a synonym for Surrealism – usually, it must be said, in a pejorative sense.

In art, however, perhaps the most significant emergence of a Gothic sensibility may be located in the late twentieth century and associated with a more widespread cultural revival of interest in the Gothic. The 1997 exhibition *Gothic*, organized by the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston and curated by Christoph Grunenberg, demonstrated the fascination of contemporary artists with the dark and uncanny side of the human psyche. In his introduction to the book that accompanied this exhibition, a book full of fabulous reproductions of the works discussed, Grunenberg explicitly locates this art in the context of both past Gothic fiction and the current

renewed interest in the Gothic. The production of horror and terror in contemporary Gothic art, he shows, is achieved through a 'plurality of stylistic modes and presentational strategies' (Grunenberg 1997: 168). While some artists exploit crude, fragmented, often repulsive and contorted forms, others prefer detached and controlled form in the service of excessive and violent images. Gothic therefore emerges in both the formless and horrific images of the mutilated and diseased body, as in Cindy Sherman's photographs, and in the reconfigurations of everyday domestic objects or body parts to produce disturbingly uncanny effects, as in the work of Robert Gober. 'The old Gothic themes of the uncanny, the fantastic and pathological and the tension between the artificial and organic are infused with new potency', Grunenberg summarizes, 'as contemporary artists address concerns about the body, disease, voyeurism and power' (Grunenberg 1997: 168).

What seems to link many of the works reproduced in Grunenberg's book is the way in which they produce horror mainly through the disturbance of the mundane and the familiar. Suggesting that something is going dreadfully wrong in the everyday world, they promote fears not about the past but about the future, about the looming prospect of total social and bodily disintegration. In this respect, Gothic art of today participates in much the same anxieties as emerge in many other contemporary Gothic forms: the future has become the primary site of threat and dissolution, as devastating, in its own way, as any sinister Gothic past.

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Gothic and Decadence

The Gothic is frequently considered to be a genre that re-emerges with particular force during times of cultural crisis and which serves to negotiate the anxieties of the age by working through them in a displaced form. Such a theory would certainly be supported by the sudden resurgence of Gothic in the late nineteenth century. The age which produced some of our most enduring cultural myths, including Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (qq.v.), Oscar Wilde's (q.v.) *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890, rev. 1891) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (qq.v.), was also a time marked by growing fears about national, social and psychic decay.

England was an imperial power in decline, threatened by the rise of such new players as Germany and the United States, experiencing doubts about the morality of the imperial mission, and faced with growing unrest in the colonies. At home, the social and psychological effects of the Industrial Revolution were becoming all too clear as crime and disease were rife in the overcrowded city slums. The traditional values and family structures upon which the middle class had based its moral superiority were disintegrating, challenged by the emergence of such figures as the 'New Woman' and the homosexual. Gothic texts of the late 1880s and 1890s consequently come to be linked primarily by a focus on the idea of degeneration.

Anxieties about the nation are both managed and aggravated by the emergence of what Patrick Brantlinger terms 'imperial Gothic' (q.v.), a 'blend of adventure story with Gothic elements' (1988: 227). There is, as in the original Gothic, an interest in the foreign, but rather than looking to Europe, there is a movement out into the Empire. One of the primary anxieties of this imperial Gothic is that encounters between the English and their colonized subjects may well result in the civilized human reverting to the barbaric. A related and equally worrying fear is that England itself will be

invaded and contaminated by the alien world. Such imperial Gothic narratives articulate anxieties about the integrity of the nation, about the possibility of the 'primitive' infecting the civilized world.

But it is not just a matter of some external force infecting England. As in much previous Victorian Gothic (q.v.), the city itself, particularly London, heart of the supposedly civilized world, continues to be represented as a site of cultural decay and a source of menace. William Booth's influential survey of the degraded living conditions of the poor, *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (1890), tellingly echoes the title of Henry Stanley's then recently published *In Darkest Africa*. It was not necessary to travel as far as Stanley, Booth implies, to find a realm of darkness: it could also be found in the heart of the city slums. The presence of the primitive is clearly suggested in Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* as the city resounds with a 'low growl', and when Wilde's Dorian Gray wanders through 'dimly-lit streets, past gaunt black-shadowed archways and evil-looking houses', he is challenged by 'grotesque children' and drunkards chattering like 'monstrous apes'.

In the new fictional Gothic landscape of the city, however, it is not primarily the criminal underworld or the poor that are implicated as a source of horror. The focus is usually far more on the middle classes, and on exposing what underlies the surfaces of the supposedly civilized and respectable world. The crimes of Helen Vaughan, who engineers the suicides of five respectable gentlemen in Arthur Machen's (q.v.) *The Great God Pan* (1894), for example, are significantly labelled the 'West End Horrors'. They are said to be far more horrific than the East End Horrors, the brutal murders of five prostitutes by Jack the Ripper in the Whitechapel area during 1888.

One of many monstrous (q.v.) females with a desire for power in Gothic fiction of the time, Helen embodies not only anxieties about the potential decline of the middle classes generally, but also, more specifically, anxieties about the breakdown of middle-class gender ideology. The emergence and demands of the New Woman aggravated such fears, and Gothic texts of the time repeatedly produce powerful and sexually aggressive females as alien or monstrous, setting them in opposition to the 'pure' woman in an attempt to stabilize gendered identity. Nevertheless, the stability of such an opposition is also repeatedly undermined as the pure woman metamorphoses into the evil. In *Dracula* (q.v.), for example, the naively coquettish Lucy mutates into a 'nightmare' of 'voluptuous wantonness', and the text suggests that Dracula himself is only a catalyst which allows for the release of an uncontrollable and passionate self within.

If, as Robert Miles and other recent critics have suggested, the Gothic generally represents 'the self finding itself dispossessed in its own house, in a condition of rupture, disjunction, fragmentation' (Miles 2002: 3), then

this is a concern which is increasingly intensified in the works of this period. The idea that the supposedly civilized subject harbours something alien within is particularly emphasized by the return of the double or *Doppelgänger* in such works as *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. In both these cases, however, it is suggested that the real problem is not the existence of some more primitive and passionate internal self, but the force with which that self must be repressed in accordance with social conventions. Dorian, who sells his soul for eternal youth while his portrait ages and decays in his place, is warned of the dangers of repression by Sir Henry: 'The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it. Resist it, and your soul grows sick with longing for the things it has forbidden to itself, with desire for what its monstrous laws have made monstrous and unlawful.' As in the case of Jekyll, repression has the potential to produce a split in the psyche. However, although we are encouraged to think in terms of duality by the oppositions of Jekyll and Hyde and of Dorian and his portrait, the texts also imply it is not simply a *split* that is at issue but a more complex fragmentation of the subject. As Dorian suggests, man may well be not a stable unified subject, but a 'complex, multiform creature'.

Multiplicity, an even more disturbing concept than duality, is repeatedly suggested in decadent Gothic texts through the representation of metamorphic bodies or what Kelly Hurley (1996) identifies as the 'abhuman'. The abhuman may be a body that retains traces of human identity but has become, or is in the process of becoming, something quite different. Alternatively, it may be some indefinable 'thing' that is mimicking the human, appropriating the human form. Either way, it is the integrity of human identity that is threatened; these are liminal bodies, occupying the space between the terms of such oppositions as human and beast, male and female, civilized and primitive. Examples of such disturbing bodies abound in Gothic of the time, most obviously perhaps in the beast people of H. G. Wells's (q.v.) *The Island of Dr Moreau* (1896). The protagonist, Prendick, is initially puzzled by their uncanny effect, by a sense of familiarity and yet of strangeness. When he discovers that they are the products of 'Moreau's horrible skill', he becomes increasingly repulsed by these disturbing hybrids, and by what they suggest about the instability of the human subject. Prendick's attempts to reinstate 'sane' and stable boundaries between the human and the beast, however, fail; when he returns to civilization the people he meets appear like beast-people, and he fears that they, like Moreau's creatures, will begin to revert.

The majority of these abhuman bodies are the product not of supernatural forces but of scientifically explainable processes, and it is the scientist who becomes the pre-eminent figure in the Gothic fiction of the period.

Many forms of materialist science, including criminal anthropology, had attempted to provide tools for identifying and categorizing what was alien and abnormal, the agents of dissolution and decline. What we now call criminal profiling was first attempted at this time in the hunt for Jack the Ripper. But science did not just offer reassuring ways of locating and defining difference, it could also function in various ways as a transgressive and disruptive force, challenging the stability and integrity of the human subject (see also 'Science, Industry and the Gothic' above).

Fears about the integrity of the self are forcefully articulated at this time through the emergence of what some critics call 'Darwinian Gothic'. Evolutionary theories had dissolved the previously accepted boundaries between human and animal. Darwin's claim in *The Descent of Man* (1871) that man was descended from a hairy-tailed quadruped which had in turn evolved out of a series of diverse forms, ultimately leading back to a fish-like being, disturbingly challenged any belief in the integrity and superiority of the human species. Furthermore, it led to the conclusion that if something could evolve it could also devolve or degenerate, whether it were individual, society or nation. The destabilizing effects of such thought are at least partly responsible for the body becoming a particular site of anxiety in the Gothic of this time, and the possibility of sliding down the evolutionary ladder is perhaps most horrifyingly suggested by the physical metamorphosis of the dying Helen in *The Great God Pan*. A doctor who witnesses the sight reports how the human body, 'thought to be unchangeable and permanent', begins to melt and dissolve. And what is primarily horrific is not that Helen changes from 'woman to man, from man to beast', but that she then changes from beast to worse than beast, into some 'horrible and unspeakable shape' that lies outside any stable and reassuring binary thought.

Significantly, Helen is the result of experimental neuro-surgery carried out by Dr Raymond on her quite ordinary human mother. Moreau is not only a vivisectionist; he also practises behaviour modification, and is clearly familiar with much contemporary thought in the field of mental physiology. As science moved away from its materialist base during this period to explore the less tangible arena of the mind, it contributed even further to the idea that the threat to order had its origins in human nature. The threat represented by Helen may well have less to do with the supernatural than with the simple liberation from repression. As the operation on her mother Mary allows her to see beyond the veil of this world to the 'real' world it hides, exposes her, perhaps, to the full forces of the unconscious, so Helen seems to have been born without any social or psychic restraints.

In *Degeneration*, one of the most notorious non-fictional texts of the Decadence, Max Nordau proclaimed the end of an era: 'Over the earth the

shadows creep with deepening gloom, wrapping all objects in a mysterious dimness, in which all certainty is destroyed and any guess seems plausible. Forms lose their outlines, and are dissolved in floating mist' (1895: 5–6). Not only does Nordau clearly appropriate Gothic elements to convey a sense of cultural decline, he also precisely puts his finger on what may well be the primary fear that haunts the age, a fear that is simultaneously managed and intensified by the Gothic fiction of the time. Repeatedly, we are offered the spectacle of devolution and decay, of chaos and multiplicity. Forms and boundaries dissolve as comforting certainties mutate into questions. The Gothic horror of the Decadence is the horror of dissolution, of the nation, of society and, ultimately, as we move into the Modernist world, of the human subject itself.

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Imperial Gothic

The concept of 'imperial Gothic' can be – and has been – interpreted in a number of different ways. It can be seen, for example, as a phenomenon occurring within 'imperial fiction' in general. 'Imperial fiction' suggests itself principally as a description of a particular kind of fiction in which imperial exploration and power figure centrally or largely in the text, as they do in the works of, for example, H. Rider Haggard and Rudyard Kipling (qq.v.); alongside these semi-canonical imperial writers one would also need to set an entire subgenre of nineteenth- and twentieth-century fiction, mostly aimed at school-age boys, where themes of adventure and discovery occur in empire settings.

Some critics, however, would want to extend this idea of 'imperial fiction' considerably by drawing attention to the numerous works, from the nineteenth century in particular, where the empire plays a more disguised role; the emblematic text here might be Charlotte Brontë's (q.v.) *Jane Eyre* (1847), where the Caribbean forms the implicit backdrop to the career of Brontë's hero-villain, Rochester, and to the emergence of the figure of his first wife, the original 'madwoman in the attic'. Others would want to broaden the field to include texts, like H.G. Wells's (q.v.) *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), where the connection to concepts of empire – and, inextricably, racial difference – are more complexly symbolically coded. Others, again, would want to focus on the way in which some works with an empire background interrogate imperial values rather than overtly supporting them, although such distinctions have proved very difficult to make; there is, for example, continuing critical discussion about the ideological force of Kipling's stories, and even more about the multiple meanings to be found in rereadings of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902) (Achebe 1977).

The intersections between Gothic and this 'imperial field' are many and various. Most of the Irish author Bram Stoker's (q.v.) books, for example,

have imperial connections in what one might take to be the 'conventional' sense of empire – that is, as relating to what Victorians would have seen as 'far-flung corners of the earth' – even leaving aside the further connections that emerge when one considers the interactions of British and Irish history as themselves imbued with imperial content. This, then, would be a case of an obviously Gothic writer – like M. G. Lewis (q.v.) before him, whose wealth was founded on classic imperial exploitation (Peck 1961) – involved with imperial issues. Another approach would be based on the ways in which many nineteenth-century involvements with empire become themselves 'Gothicized', in the sense that the racial or national 'other' comes to be seen from a Gothic perspective, endowed with diabolical, monstrous or merely melodramatically powerful qualities, as would be the case with Haggard and others.

The Island of Doctor Moreau, to take a first example, is a story that is set on an island where we are introduced to the figure of Dr Moreau, who, exiled from Europe, is apparently undertaking biological experiments. At first the protagonist Prendick assumes that these experiments are designed, by a process of vivisection, to reduce human beings to the condition of the beast; the case turns out to be that what Moreau is actually trying to do is to turn the beast into the human, with limited and eventually terrifying results. What us crucial in the scenario, however, is that there is an emphatic distinction between the white men who are conducting the experiments and the 'beast-men' who are symbolically assimilated to the condition of the 'native'. A well-noted and crucial scene occurs when Moreau, his assistant Montgomery and Prendick, threatened with revolt and accompanied by one of the more 'domesticated' of the creatures, go forth to reassert their control and encounter the beast-men coming out of the jungle towards them:

> As soon as they had approached within a distance of perhaps thirty yards they halted, and bowing on knees and elbows, began flinging the white dust upon their heads. Imagine the scene if you can. We three blue-clad men, with our misshapen black-faced attendant, standing in a wide expanse of sunlit yellow dust under the blazing blue sky, and surrounded by this circle of crouching and gesticulating monstrosities, some almost human, save in their subtle expressions and gestures, some like cripples, some so strangely distorted as to resemble nothing but the denizens of our wildest dreams.

What this passage clearly signifies is a scenario of imperial domination and submission, a fantasy of the 'otherness', familiar to us now from postcolonial criticism, of a primal encounter with the native. It is significant also that

Moreau, throughout the text, is described as 'white', both white-haired and white-faced; Prendick is described as 'chalky'; the 'white dust' with which the beast-men cover themselves can be seen as a sign of racial submission. The anxieties that Prendick entertains throughout about what Moreau is doing have also to be seen in the general context of Victorian anxieties about evolution, or rather about the contamination that might result if less 'developed' races and species are allowed their own self-determination; it is in this way that the 'imperial' themes of *Doctor Moreau* interact with a prevalent set of 'Darwinian' themes.

That *Doctor Moreau* is a Gothic text would seem beyond doubt: Moreau himself can be seen as a Frankensteinian seeker, a man who has, like Victor Frankenstein, put family ties and relationships behind him in the search for forbidden knowledge. Unlike Frankenstein, however, he openly acknowledges that part of the process in which he is engaged necessitates the use of pain, and the status of pain as an instrument of imperial domination becomes surprisingly open within the text. In Moreau's hands the 'other' is reduced to the status of an object, to be formed or reshaped at will. We can see here a metaphor for the ways in which the violence of empire has so frequently been translocated, reterritorialized onto an 'empty' island; this again accords with a certain imperial discourse, in which the land that falls under the rule of empire is perceived as 'empty' because its previous inhabitants – native American, Australian aboriginal – are denied the status of the human. This is a logic that one can compare with a mass of *Boys' Own* stories, where the dangers to be encountered in the name of the spread of 'civilization' may include wild animals or human natives, but no real distinction is made between them.

One of the great models for these narratives is Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885). The opening paragraph, fictitiously penned by the narrator Allan Quatermain, summarizes a host of imperial themes:

> It is a curious thing that at my age – fifty-five last birthday – I should find myself taking up a pen to try and write a history. I wonder what sort of history it will be when I have done it, if I ever come to the end of the trip! I have done a good many things in my life, which seems a long one to me, owing to my having begun so young, perhaps. At an age when other boys are at school, I was earning my living as a trader in the old Colony. I have been trading, hunting, fighting, or mining ever since. And yet it is only eight months ago that I made my pile.

The myth of the imperial adventurer is of an 'unlettered' man none the less finding in the empire ways of advancement that might not be available at

home – it is further suggested (and this is part of the appeal of the genre) that even a boy might be able to succeed in this world. This relates, of course, to a many-sided myth. In the first place, there is the idea that the empire provides a kind of playground and at the same time a source of potential wealth to those not in a position to obtain it at home – the younger sons of noble families, for example. There is also the idea that operating in the empire can become a kind of test, a *rite de passage*, from which the adventurer can return wiser and stronger, having tested out his manhood on a necessary enemy. Over against this, however, but also supporting the 'romance of empire', there is the idea that wealth gained in the empire is somehow disreputable, that even to go to the 'ends of the earth' implies a certain stain on the character, a declaration that one has gone somewhere where not too many questions will be asked.

But what the empire also becomes, in *King Solomon's Mines* and elsewhere, is a site of the at least apparently supernatural. A famous scene takes place in a cave:

> Let the reader picture to himself the hall of the vastest cathedral he ever stood in, windowless indeed, but dimly lighted from above . . . and he will get some idea of the size of the enormous cave in which we stood, with the difference that this cathedral designed of nature was loftier and wider than any built by man.

This site of natural sublimity affects the narrator much as cathedrals and castles have affected characters throughout Gothic fiction, but the reaction is intensified by what is found in one of the side 'chapels':

> There at the end of the long stone table, holding in his skeleton fingers a great white spear, sat *Death* himself, shaped in the form of a colossal human skeleton, fifteen feet or more in height. High above his head he held the spear, as though in the act to strike; one bony hand rested on the stone table before him, in the position a man assumes on rising from his seat, whilst his frame was bent forward so that the vertebrae of the neck and the grinning, gleaming skull projected towards us, and fixed its hollow eye-places upon us, the jaws a little open, as though it was about to speak.

The description becomes even more lurid, but the point is that it portrays precisely the culmination of Quatermain's own fears and anxieties; as in so many Gothic tales, what he is seeing is the projection of his own fantasies, the death, in this case, that is proposed as the doom of the white man who makes a mistake in the 'heart of darkness' – while all the time that 'mistake' is precisely an effect of the white man's misprision of the other, the

impossibility, for the imperialist, of seeing the racial and exploited other as a fellow human being.

A further form taken by the 'imperial Gothic' might be referred to under that catch-all heading, 'The Empire Writes Back' (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1989), and covers that genre of stories in which something from the empire – some artefact, or some half-suppressed memory, or some deed whose consequences have not yet been felt – returns from the 'far corners of the earth' to pursue the adventurer. There are plenty of such stories in the oeuvre of Arthur Conan Doyle (q.v.); an emblematic one would be one of the Sherlock Holmes short stories, 'The Speckled Band' (1892). Here Holmes is called in to investigate a death which could not have taken place through any obvious external intrusion; the dead girl's last word, 'the speckled band', initially mistaken by Holmes as a reference to a group of gypsies, eventually reveals itself as referring to a snake which has been used to kill her and which bids fair to be used again. Holmes, naturally, not only works this out but drives the snake back to destroy its owner.

This owner, the girl's stepfather, the evilly named Dr Grimesby Roylott, is a huge and violent man who has been a doctor in Calcutta but who has been repatriated after a prison sentence for killing his 'native butler'. We know from the outset that he is fond of 'Indian animals', and that a baboon (later mistaken by Holmes and Watson for a 'hideous and distorted child') and a cheetah roam the grounds of Stoke Moran, Roylott's half-ruined Gothic pile. What is crucial in the story, considered as an example of imperial Gothic, is that not only does Roylott therefore use as a means of murder a creature 'reimported' from the empire – a swamp adder, 'the deadliest snake in India', as Holmes claims – but Roylott's violence and indeed partial success as a murderer are attributed precisely to a residual imperial influence: he is, Holmes says, 'a clever and ruthless man who had had an Eastern training'.

Quite what this 'Eastern training' has amounted to is not a question the text is equipped overtly to answer: there is a slippage, ideologically essential in the imperial context, between the idea that Roylott has the necessary 'equipment' to deal with the perhaps desperate exigencies of 'service' in the east, and the rather different, but in the end more convincing, idea that he has been in some way contaminated, infected, penetrated by eastern ideas, that he has himself 'gone native' – the myth of the 'assassin' is not far away. This 'orientalist' vision therefore bears the ultimate responsibility for his own condition and for the death of his stepdaughter; it is as though, mysteriously, the east is to blame for the events. It also ultimately performs an act of narrative dehumanization on Roylott himself: 'I am no doubt indirectly

responsible for Dr Grimesby Roylott's death', Holmes finally says to Watson, 'and I cannot say that it is likely to weigh heavily upon my conscience.'

The empire is thus portrayed here and elsewhere as a place where distorted visions may occur, where the 'normal' boundaries of the civilized world slip away or are constantly under siege. Just as the castles of the 'original Gothic' existed as fastnesses to repel encroaching invaders, so do the colonial enclaves of imperial Gothic exist as outposts in the surrounding dark; but what interests the Gothic is not so much the survival of these outposts as the menaces which may come to destroy them, the 'return' of the imperial repressed.

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Gothic Postmodernism

A story by Russell Hoban called 'The Ghost Horse of Genghis Khan' (1992) begins, like so many ghost stories, in a Gothic study:

> There were shadowy places and lamplit places in the study. There were maps on the wall. There was a human skeleton that made gentle clacking sounds as you moved it. There were three pendulum clocks that struck the hours at different times when they were running. Now they were stopped at different times. There was a model of a Portuguese fishing boat, there was a stuffed barn owl. There were rocks and seashells from many places and a stone from a Crusader fort in Galilee with chisel marks on it.

This realm, however, a realm of the antiquarian or of the reterritorialization of the displaced object, is unable to sustain itself in isolation. It overflows, it crumbles and buckles before a superflux of meaning which we might reasonably regard as postmodern. As John, the young protagonist of the story, reads a further story – one that his father has been writing and has left unfinished in the typewriter – the father lies unconscious in a hospital. Somehow John finds himself both dreaming and carrying on with the writing of this story, which is of how Genghis Khan was saved from death by a ghost horse. There is a sense in which, in a move characteristic of the complex relations between the Gothic and the postmodern, the ghost horse invades the realm of modernity – represented in the hospital, the fibrillators and endotracheal tubes – asserting a connection, through dream and fantasy, that threatens to make a mockery of the precise territorializing of the 'maps on the wall'.

Gothic has always had to do with disruptions of scale and perspective, with a terrain that we might, again following Hoban, refer to as 'the moment under the moment'. No point on the map is exactly where or what it seems;

on the contrary, it opens into other spaces, and it does not even do that in a stable fashion. What might have been an opening last night into another world may now be closed, absent, terrifying in the quality of its unyieldingness. What we find in the numerous conjunctions of Gothic and the postmodern is a certain sliding of location, a series of transfers and translocations from one place to another, so that our sense of the stability of the map is – as indeed it has been since the first fantasy of a Gothic castle (q.v.) – forever under siege, guaranteed to us only by manuscripts whose own provenance and completeness are deeply uncertain.

What we also find is a certain attention to the divisions and doublings of the self. A curious dialogue takes place in Hoban's story, between John and John's mind. John's mind 'was much older than the boy', we are told; 'it was as ancient as the stars, it remembered all sorts of things that John had never known'. Just so, the traditional Gothic castle could be seen as embodying a past that goes back behind – or beneath – the 'moment' of the subject, that asserts a different kind of continuity, even if it is one that can be known only under the sign of the secret, only in the 'shadows' of the darkened study, or, as Hoban puts it, in 'the shadows and the long night and the herds of the dead'.

There is here, then, a double sense of dislocated space and threatened subjectivity. We can find a similar conjunction in an emblematic postmodern text, Paul Auster's *City of Glass* (1985), which will be discussed in greater detail in the section on 'Persecution and Paranoia' below; but to move to a second, and perhaps more obviously Gothic, 'location': Iain Banks's *Complicity* (1993), a postmodern novel of the double and of the draining of identity, is told in a rare mixture of first- and second-person narrative voices. Furthermore, it offers a highly Gothic hotel as one of its central locations. We are introduced to it by a sign, a sign that has 'been there for years, ever since they opened the new road, and it says "Strome Ferry – no ferry", and that just says it all'. What we then have here is a sign that is no sign, a sign – rather like the lost manuscript beloved of Gothic tradition – that cancels itself in the very act of utterance, a sign that depicts, or indicates, a location that is no more, that belongs to a different regime, a different order of the past.

Just so the hotel itself seems to belong to the past, to a ruinous Gothic realm of rot and decay:

> The ballroom smells damp. It is illuminated only by the light shining from the stairwell and the desk lamp on the old trestle table which holds the computer. Torn, bleached-looking curtains hang at the sides of the six tall window bays. My breath smokes in front of me and mists on the cold glass. All the panes are dirty and some are cracked. A couple have been replaced with hardboard. In

> two of the window bays there are buckets to catch drips but one of them has overflowed and caused a puddle to form around it . . . [It] is scattered with cheap wooden chairs, tables, rolls of ancient, mouldy-smelling carpets, a couple of old motorbikes and lots of bits of motorbikes standing or lying on oil-stained sheets.

Somewhere here, as frequently in Banks, the relics of a feudal order remain to haunt the decay of the present in a neo-Gothic reprise. But here the faded curtains are matched by a new, barbaric invasion represented by the motorbikes and, indeed, 'what looks and smells like an industrial-standard deep-fat frier'; the interplay of past and present is further complicated as the past seeks to claim the ruins of the contemporary for its own.

In the novel, it is as if the condition of the ballroom – and of the hotel in general – represents a frozen moment, a moment of incompatibility and conflict. In this context, the subject can gain no firm purchase; all that can be done is to 'take up a position', to insert oneself in one way or another into the contradictory Gothic matrix the room and the hotel represent. But the structure of the text goes further than this, and prevents the reader from knowing exactly who or what it is that is inhabiting – or perhaps being produced by, being given substance by – this haunted place. The passage above suggests a 'first person'; but there is also a 'second person' at large in the hotel (as, in a different sense, there is in the Overlook Hotel in Stephen King's *The Shining* [qq.v.]) perhaps occupying some other set of dimensions, moving on trajectories that never intersect. From this ghostly second-person perspective, for example, the ballroom looks the same yet also different. 'The old motorbikes, tables, chairs and carpets . . . look like forlorn toys in some long-neglected doll's house':

> At one end of the dark corridor . . . a door lies ajar . . . In the corner of the room the dumb waiter contains a selection of logs of various sizes. You take the biggest of the logs, which is about the size of a man's arm, and walk softly across the room to the bedroom door. You go through and stand listening to the rain and the wind, and – just audible – the noise of a man breathing slowly and rhythmically in the bed. You hold the log in front of you as you walk towards the bed.

Complicity, then, is indeed the theme here: what would it be like, the text asks, to be a 'you' formed in the image of the hotel itself, to be an effect of one's own place, to feel no compunction as the log comes bloodily down since all has been already predetermined, staged as the consequence of a specific conjunction in this time and space, a time and space in which the shards and fragments that make up the destroyed hotel prove impossible to hold

together, where the psychoses that these Gothic locations themselves hold close to their hearts detonate?

In these two examples, from Hoban and Banks, as later in the example from Auster, I have tried to show how the complications of postmodern writing, particularly in the areas of subjectivity and location (the inner and outer worlds), reflect back onto and into the Gothic, how the uncertainties of a world in which narrative is never sure or reliable not only suggest an origin in the Gothic but also resort to Gothic means in the development of the texts themselves. The postmodern, one might suggest, is the site of a certain 'haunting', and in this sense can never free itself from the ghosts of the past, even if it takes as its task the constant (and constantly dubious) reconstruction of that past. One might also suggest that the involvement of the postmodern with notions like the Derridean 'trace' and Lacanian '*méconnaissance*' provides further evidence that the distortion of perspective which is a constant hallmark of Gothic fiction finds a further 'home' in the postmodern, and that this twist of history has precisely to do with the advent and fate of modernity; with the Gothic's 'origin' as a counter-discourse to the modernizing impulse of the Enlightenment, and with postmodernism's complex rebuttal and development of Modernism's own post-Enlightenment progressive dictates.

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Postcolonial Gothic

At first glance a connection between the Gothic and the postcolonial might seem difficult to establish, particularly in view of the emergence of the Gothic as a phenomenon specifically within European history, or rather perhaps within certain distorted perspectives on that history. But in fact we could say that 'distortion' is precisely the sign under which we might principally describe a form of 'postcolonial Gothic' that has become increasingly prevalent since the early 1980s.

For it could reasonably be said that the term 'postcolonial' itself has an inevitably distorting effect. In one sense this can be seen as unavoidable in that the postcolonial world itself is distorted; not, that is, in the sense of having been twisted away from some recognizable master-trajectory or severed from an imaginary origin, but in deeper senses to do with obfuscations of desire, impossible hybridities, the haunting ineradicability of paths not taken. The cultures and histories of colonized nations are shadowed by the fantasized possibility of alternative histories, the sense of what might have been if the violence of colonization had not come to eradicate or pervert the traces of 'independent development' – even if, at the same time, we need to recognize that the notion of 'independence' is itself, politically as well as psychologically, a myth.

'Gothic', as we know, is also a 'haunted' term. It is true that there may be dangers in attempting to use the term 'Gothic' in a postcolonial context, but it needs also to be remembered with what alarming frequency the Gothic has called into being its own other. Its very 'European-ness', its embroilment in shifting boundaries, migratory flights, feudal points of order, strongholds of reason falling in a relentless series to the approach of the barbarians, all of this is precisely what produced the American Gothic tradition from Charles Brockden Brown (q.v.) on, just as more recently it has answered, or

been answered by, a call from within the postcolonial – whether one thinks of the crazed and labyrinthine intricacies of Salman Rushdie's architectures, or of the bizarre and claustrophobic worlds of Margaret Atwood.

One way of approaching these issues would be by beginning from the supposition that Gothic represents a specific view of history. One might refer to this view as an 'expressionistic' one, a view that abandons minutiae and details in favour of the grand gesture, history as sublimity, the melodrama of rise and fall, a view in which terror and pity are the moving forces; but it would also be a more troubling view, for it would have to deal with the impossibility of escape from history, with the recurrent sense in Gothic fiction that the past can never be left behind, that it will reappear and exact a necessary price.

We might refer to this, then, as history written according to a certain logic: a logic of the phantom, the revenant, a logic of haunting, and it is here that we might see the connection with the postcolonial coming most clearly into view. The very structure of the term 'postcolonial' itself, its apparent insistence on a time 'after', on an 'aftermath', exposes itself precisely to the threat of return, falls under the sign of an unavoidable repetition; the attempt to make, for example, the nation in a new form is inevitably accompanied by the traces of the past, by half-buried histories of exile, transportation, emigration, all the panoply of the removal and transplantation of peoples which has been throughout history the essence of the colonial endeavour.

One of the most obvious texts here, although it might not at first glance seem to be set in a 'postcolonial' context, would be Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987). *Beloved* is centred on a revenant, the returned figure of a baby that has been killed by its own mother. The reason for this killing constitutes the central conundrum, the enigma, the unanswerable question of the text, for the mother, Sethe, has killed her baby because she thought that death was preferable to the slavery that would be its lot were it to survive. This much is clear; what is also clear is the extended series of descriptions of the state of the slave that take up a large part of the book. Beyond this, however, there is a certain penumbra of unclarity. For example, although there are obvious signs that the strange figure known as Beloved, arriving unexpectedly on Sethe's doorstep, is in *some* sense the phantom of the dead baby, the question remains: in *what* sense? For a ghost, she is extremely physical; there are also suggestions that perhaps the characters' identification of her with the dead baby is a red herring, that perhaps Beloved is simply a sponger, or deranged. To go a little further than this, though, perhaps one might suggest that this does not matter: the logic of the revenant is that it cannot be laid to rest and will return, and whether this is a physical, supernatural or merely symbolic return is in the end not important.

What is important is that the multiple and complex violences and hatreds engendered by slavery – considered here as the most extreme form of the colony – cannot be laid to rest; and that this is where the postcolonial might reasonably remind the reader of the Gothic, which is an arena in which these shadow battles, struggles between versions of history, have been fought out in a European context. *Beloved*, among many other things, insists on the implacability of trauma, on the concept that the damage done to individuals by refusal to treat them as selves in their own right will itself result in a specific version of the general impossibility of escape from the past. Only that which is treated as human, the text seems to say, can be properly buried; if you try to bury that which has been denied its human rights to begin with, then there is no possibility that the stone will remain in place. This then comes as an alternative logic that circumvents the conventional logic of guilt or blame: it does not in the end matter whether or not Sethe is morally responsible for the death of her daughter, for the inexorability of history and the ghost works at a deeper level than this, boring its way up from the sacred ground, insisting on making its presence felt – again – no matter what practises are used, what apologies are issued, in the attempt to repel the Gothic, to lay the spectres of the past.

The past, on this view of history, is of course right in our midst; we see it in the form of contemporary debates around cultural and racial blame and apology, and hence the nature of recriminations and restitutions, the insistence on the memorial, the monument to suffering, even though the only form such a monument perhaps can or should appropriately take is the form of a ruin. To pursue these issues further, we can take a particular example, Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, published in 1988. This is a highly complex book. It involves a nameless narrator who lives his life partly through his fantasies about his older cousin Tridib; these fantasies are so strong for him that he is able to imagine in enormous detail time that Tridib has spent in London, even before he goes there himself. One of the questions behind the book concerns this question of fantasy: the narrator's other cousin Ila has travelled widely but apparently remembers nothing, but behind this there lies the question of what it is that one wishes to remember. For as we learn more about the history of the family, so we see more clearly the multiple deracinations and displacements to which they have been subject, principally of course as the result of the partition of the subcontinent as a final farewell act of the British imperial drama.

If, however, we are to look at *The Shadow Lines* from a Gothic perspective, then these problematic histories come to us in certain recognizable ways. They come, for example, as ruins. Tridib, it seems, has had his own sexual awakening while seeing a couple making love in the ruins of a London

cinema during the Second World War. Later he writes to May, daughter of the English family with whom he was staying at the time; bizarrely, he tells her of this incident. At first deciding that the letter is pornographic, May later accepts his invitation to visit him in Calcutta, and they find themselves going to the Victoria Memorial. May hates it at first glance, presumably seeing it as a symbol of imperial domination. 'It shouldn't be here', she says, 'It's an act of violence. It's obscene.' But Tridib disagrees. 'No it's not', he says. 'This is *our* ruin, that's what we've been looking for.'

An entire postcolonial history is condensed into these phrases. The question put is: if all relationships between cultures, between races, between histories have been ruined – by warfare, by empire, or both – then what is it that might be able to survive such general devastation, what might there be that 'remains' amid these ruins? Ghosh's characterization of the events clearly states that the presence of the Victoria Memorial is 'ruinous', in more than one sense; but the question remains as to what might be born, or reborn, out of these ruins, the 'ruins of empire', what might truly be the possibilities of any 'postcolonial' under these circumstances. But the question also remains of what might be permanently destroyed – for the narrator, at least:

> I never went there again in that old mood of cheerful expectancy. I knew there was something else in that building now, some other meaning, a meaning I couldn't fathom, but which I knew existed, despite me. It became a haunted site: I could not go there without hearing Tridib's soft voice whispering: This is our ruin, this is where we meet.

Of course, the question of *what* haunts this site – the phantom of unexplained sexuality, or the trace of inexplicable foreign domination – is left delicately suspended, as is the origin of most hauntings in Gothic fiction; but in any case the haunting is complete, the shadow lines are drawn. Under these circumstances, the only way the narrator can go in order to understand his own individual and cultural past is, in a Gothic trope, down to the cellar, where he takes Ila in an attempt to understand more by reliving the innocent yet curiously menacing games of their childhood. Once there, however,

> [t]hose empty corners filled up with remembered forms, with the ghosts who had been handed down to me by time . . . They were all around me, we were together at last, not ghosts at all: the ghostliness was merely the absence of time and distance – for that is all that a ghost is, a presence displaced in time.

This 'ghosting' provides a kind of solution: under these conditions the very different material circumstances, the difference of cultural experience,

between the secluded narrator and the materialistic and westernized Ila can be in some sense overcome; but this is a mere phantom victory – a pseudo-'victorious' statue – and the violations of empire cannot be laid to rest so simply. The narrator may assert that the 'difference' of the ghost is simply one of time, and it is certainly true that the notion of the ghost presupposes a displacement in time, but below this there are also other displacements, ones more to do with location and territory than with time, states of the imagination in which the statue of Queen Victoria is absent, or ghosted, a mere spectre that can be blown away at the slightest threat of new-found 'independence'.

This, however, would be an over-optimistic account of the narrative trajectory of *The Shadow Lines*, as it would be of any number of other postcolonial writings, from the fiction of Amos Tutuola and Joan Riley to the poetry of Derek Walcott and Edward Kamau Brathwaite; for as *The Shadow Lines* develops, it becomes obvious that the Gothic process of ghosting has infected even the very process of narrative. 'And what of the story?', the narrator asks, echoing as he does so the words of Tridib as he seeks, against the background of bombs and war-time destruction, the narrative promised him by his English host Snipe:

> And what of the story?
>
> I see it in the mouths of the ghosts that surround me in the cellar: of Snipe, telling it to Tridib, of Tridib telling it to Ila and me, in that underground room in Raibajar; I see myself, three years later, taking May, the young May, to visit the house in Raibajar the day before she left for Dhaka with my grandmother and Tridib.

The story of the postcolonial, then – here as elsewhere – is in the mouths of ghosts; the effect of empire has been the dematerialization of whole cultures, and the Gothic tropes of the ghost, the phantom, the revenant, gain curious new life from the need to assert continuity where the lessons of conventional history and geography would claim that all continuity has been broken by the imperial trauma.

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Goths and Gothic Subcultures

Gothic subcultures have their roots in the Britain of the late 1970s and early 1980s, when a style of 'dark', atmospheric and introspective music began to emerge out of and in opposition to punk, glam rock and new romantic. The 1979 release of 'Bela Lugosi's Dead' by Bauhaus provides the definitive moment, with respect to both sound and image, for the start of the first generation of Goths. At first, the single appeared to escape categorization. It featured high reverb on top of a dub-reggae beat, and the whispered repetition of such phrases as 'Bela Lugosi's dead' and 'Undead, undead, undead', sometimes giving way to a vibrato reminiscent of David Bowie that complemented the glam-rock theatricality of the performance. Punk musical elements such as distorted guitar effects and reggae bass-lines were used, but with a slower tempo and eerie atmospherics (Gunn 1999: 37). Initially it was described as post-punk or minimalist punk, but these labels were soon replaced by 'Gothic'.

Other influential bands of the time included the Cure, the Damned and Specimen, and a London nightclub run by the members of Specimen, the Batcave, began to provide a venue for the new music. Perhaps most influential, however, were Siouxsie and the Banshees, in terms of both what James Hannaham calls Siouxsie's 'powerful vibrato howl' (in Grunenberg 1997: 96) and her appearance – at least after it had shifted from the appropriation of Nazi imagery to a less politically provocative dark femininity. Gothic soon became as easily distinguished as a style as it did as a music, if not more so, a style characterized primarily by black velvets, lace, fishnets, and silver jewellery based on religious and occult themes, and complemented by dyed black hair, white makeup and dark slashes of lipstick.

There are varying opinions about who originally called the music Gothic; Siouxsie Sioux is sometimes said to have first used the term to describe the

new direction taken by the band in the 1981 album *Ju Ju*, but there are many rival claims. It was nevertheless the British music press who popularized the label both to describe and to help construct an emerging music genre. When a new set of bands appeared during the mid- and late 1980s, many decisively aligned themselves with Gothic. The Gothic rock of such bands as the Sisters of Mercy, more accessible and less extreme than such earlier bands as Specimen, soon attracted wider interest. Many of them were given mainstream media coverage and the music became more widely available.

Interest in Gothic declined during the early 1990s as the music press turned their attention to such new movements as the indie scene. Gothic music became increasingly influenced by other styles, and the earlier guitar-based sound, with its emphasis on minor chords, minimalist rhythms and slower tempos, often merged with electronic chords and dance beats. At this point, terminology begins to bewilder. Some commentators today argue that Gothic describes a set of subgenres and subcultures, including Goth, metal and industrial, with common elements, which may sometimes merge musically to produce such hybrid forms as industrial Gothic. Primarily for the sake of clarity, this is the position taken here. Others, however, equate Gothic with Goth, and see this as quite distinct from metal and industrial. At the same time, they introduce such other terms as 'darkwave' or 'ethereal Goth', stretching the boundaries of Gothic, as Joshua Gunn notes, 'to include a wide array of sounds and styles on the basis of some crucial similarity to a more centrist gothic band of the past' (1999: 43). Clearly, any study of Gothic subcultures and their music is at present drastically complicated by an ongoing struggle both to establish and to expand generic boundaries.

The project is further problematized by the way in which, since the 1990s, Gothic music has filtered into the mainstream and became increasingly commercialized. Goth clothes have been similarly appropriated by mainstream fashion and appeared on the catwalk and in national chain shops. One negative effect of Gothic subcultures becoming more high profile is that they are frequently implicated in the moral panic attacks so often directed at youth cultures; when two teenagers opened fire on fellow pupils at the Columbine High School in Denver in April 1999, to give the most notorious example, they were mistakenly identified with a Goth youth culture because of the music found in their homes. As many critics have since pointed out, however, violence and aggression are quite at odds with the values of the Goth scene. This is even indicated by the way in which Gothic music is frequently described in terms that echo academic distinctions between the female Gothic (q.v.) of Ann Radcliffe (q.v.) and the male Gothic of M. G. Lewis

(q.v.). James Hannaham, for example, distinguishes heavy metal, 'aggressive, sexist, and therefore "masculine" ', from Goth, with its 'softer, more accepting, "feminine" cast' (in Grunenberg 1997: 81), while Alicia Porter makes a similar distinction between the feminine of Goth and the masculine of industrial.

Whether there may be further and more significant connections between Gothic subcultures and the academic world of Gothic studies is a question critics are beginning to suggest needs to be explored. Sara Martin, for example, argues that

> if Gothic youth subcultures can be regarded as the practical result of a particular interpretation of the philosophy of Gothic texts, and Gothic texts are the field of research of Gothic Studies, Gothic youth subcultures – themselves producers of new Gothic texts – could (perhaps should) be also part of Gothic Studies. (2002: 28)

Within the popular market, attempts to bring the Gothic tradition together with Gothic subcultures have already been made. Gavin Baddeley, for example, combines a whirlwind tour through Gothic literature and film with a general discussion of the origins and development of Goth music and a section on style. However, although he asserts that Goth is 'much more than an image – it is an aesthetic, a viewpoint, even a lifestyle, its tradition a legacy of subversion and shadow', it is not clear what the 'viewpoint' might be. Claiming that the very name of the Goth subculture 'pays due but ironic homage to the architectural and literary ambitions of Beckford and Walpole' (2002:10, 17), Baddeley ultimately leaves the impression that, for the present generation at least, the relationship of Goth to the Gothic tradition is mainly parodic.

Martin is more specific in her suppositions, and suggests a more serious underlying purpose. Gothic in terms of subcultures, she argues, 'seems to have taken the place of the cultural paradigm usually associated to [*sic*] rebelliousness and youth, namely, Romanticism'. It provides a means of expressing discomfort with 'the realities of the late capitalist, post-modern Western world'. Gothic scholars, she further proposes, may make 'important contributions to the understanding of these social phenomena, for we have been exploring for several decades the metaphorical use of Gothic as an expression of social and political anxieties' (2002: 38).

If Goth is taken as just one of various Gothic subcultures, then the Goth scene itself may not offer the most promising focus for such research. While some commentators suggest there is some kind of underlying Goth ideology, 'mindset' or common 'values', there seems to be little agreement about

precisely what this might involve. Most internet sites tend to define Goth primarily in terms of clothing and musical preference. The insistent artificiality of Goth style might seem to suggest a continuation of the counterfeiting tendency which has characterized Gothic since the eighteenth-century Gothic Revival (see 'Art and Architecture' above), an emptying out of the past in order to produce, in Jerrold E. Hogle's words, 'antiquated repositories into which modern quandaries can be projected and abjected simultaneously' (2002: 15–16). Recent sociological studies of the present Goth subculture, however, have not on the whole supported this idea. Paul Hodkinson, for example, confirms that in 'the case of the goth scene, shared tastes and norms manifested themselves primarily in the arena of style', and his research found 'no underlying shared structural, psychological or political meaning to be discerned from the style' (2002: 35, 62). On the contrary, he adds, responses in interviews and questionnaires demonstrated a 'particular tendency for hostility toward the suggestion that their appearance suggested anything about their character, outlook or behaviour'. It was usually insisted that 'style was held to be significant in and of itself as a set of enthusiastic preferences located within, and not beyond, the sphere of the aesthetic' (2002: 62). In Dick Hebdige's terms, Goth seems to be a 'spectacular subculture', a subculture 'concerned first and foremost with consumption . . . It communicates through commodities' (1979: 94–5). Goth style may externalize a rejection of mainstream society, but primarily in facilitating a sense of consistent and collective distinctiveness, rather than in the service of any coherent social or political statement. Furthermore, the Goth emphasis on commodities would seem to suggest a far closer connection with mainstream society than might initially be apparent.

While the study of Gothic subcultures requires attention to 'both the lifestyle and the textual production – literary and non-literary' (Martin 2002: 29), the study of the former is, at present, fraught with difficulties for academics. As attendance at any International Gothic Association conference would confirm, for most, fieldwork would be, to say the least, difficult. The problem will only be resolved for Gothic studies when more young scholars who are already positioned to some degree within the Gothic scene begin to do academic work. In the meantime, texts rather than lifestyles would seem to offer the most viable focus of research. A number of the writers already beginning to be studied in the universities, including Poppy Z. Brite, Caitlin Kernan and Christa Faust, have, or have had, connections with Gothic subcultures. The graphic novel (q.v.), another new focus of academic study, also has close links with these subcultures, and there is a small but growing industry of graphic novels written by and for a primarily Gothic audience, including those issued by Slave Labour, such as *Gloom Cookie* and *Lenore*,

and most notably Jhonen Vasquez's *Johnny the Homicidal Maniac* and its spin-offs.

It is, however, the music of the various Gothic subcultures, the lyrics and related videos, that may offer the most promising areas of research. Many Gothic lyrics appropriate and reinterpret traditional Gothic texts, often in the service of social critique. Diamanda Galas, for example, reworks Edgar Allan Poe (q.v.) in the trilogy *The Divine Punishment* (1986), *Saint of the Pit* (1986) and *You Must Be Certain of the Devil* (1988), known collectively as *The Masque of the Red Death* (Mute Records), in order to explore attitudes towards Aids, particularly the attitudes of the church. Cultural critics and historians, most notably James Hannaham and Csaba Toth, have already begun the study of Gothic music, and often draw upon the work done in Gothic studies to facilitate their research. Once again, however, Goth does not seem the most promising focus for any exploration of the ways in which Gothic music may express social and political anxieties. As James Hannaham (1997) confirms in 'Bela Lugosi's Dead and I Don't Feel So Good Either: Goth and the Glorification of Suffering in Rock Music', for many of these early bands, Gothic was primarily a matter of style. The privileging of style over substance is certainly both strategy and theme in the seminal Goth song 'Bela Lugosi's Dead', with Lugosi reduced to representation as the distinction between actor and character collapses.

Other early bands, however, often those who retained links to their punk roots and incorporated Gothic less as a matter of style and more as the dominant sensibility in their sounds and lyrics, reveal a clearer political agenda in their rejection of the values of the postmodern late capitalist world. Joy Division's explorations of madness, alienation and isolation in *Unknown Pleasures* (1979), for example, have a strong political engagement. Pioneering the use of echoing reverb as a metaphor for emptiness, Joy Division set their lyrics against the bleak background of a depressed postindustrial Britain. Ian Curtis's lyrics not only describe the alienation of the self from society, however, James Hannaham observes, but also suggest the way in which 'numbness and surrender divide the self' (94), providing a new take on the Gothic motif of the double. Csaba Toth's 'Like Cancer in the System: Industrial Gothic, Nine Inch Nails, and Videotape' (in Grunenberg 1997), drawing partly upon Judith Halberstam's work on the technology of monsters (q.v.), makes some particularly interesting links between contemporary Gothic studies and industrial Gothic. Industrial Gothic videos released by such artists as Nine Inch Nails, Psychic TV and Test Department, Toth argues, show a postindustrial world in which 'boundaries between the "normal" and the pathologized "other" collapse, and the "normal" is often more dreadful than its "unnatural" opposite'. As Toth's reading of the

video 'Burn' interestingly demonstrates, the strategy found in so much contemporary Gothic fiction is also 'a narrative strategy endemic in contemporary industrial art culture' (in Grunenberg 1997: 88). It may well be, then, that the relationship between Gothic studies and Gothic subcultures will become a productive area of research for new Gothic scholars.

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Gothic Film

The enduring – indeed, some would say the growing – appeal of the horror film owes a great deal to its roots in the Gothic: in Gothic fiction itself, with its endless recycling of narratives from Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, Edgar Allan Poe, Bram Stoker, Robert Louis Stevenson (qq.v.) and many others, and also in terms of a kind of melodramatic expressionism of style that is unmistakably Gothic in its cultural and structural force. There are many ways of trying to provide a history of the horror film, but this version is based on David Punter's in *The Literature of Terror*, and seeks to break the history down into seven phases (Punter 1996: II, 96–118, 149–56).

The first wave of popular horror films was made in the US in the 1930s, mostly by Universal Studios, and relied heavily on such directors as Tod Browning and James Whale, as well as the acting of such iconic figures as Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi. The years 1931–3 saw the appearance not only of Browning's version of *Dracula* and Whale's of *Frankenstein*, but also of Reuben Mamoulian's splendid version of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (which remains to date the most frequently filmed of all Gothic fictions); Schoedsack and Pichel's *The Most Dangerous Game*; Erle C. Kenton's *Island of Lost Souls*; Victor Halperin's *White Zombie*; Karl Freund's *The Mummy*; and of course *King Kong*, a key twentieth-century myth, also directed by Schoedsack and Pichel.

One crucial feature which connects many of these films is their dependence on Gothic literary sources; but there are other, more important aspects which justify defining them as a subgenre in their own right. First, there is the genuine complexity of their attitudes towards the monstrous (q.v.). In *Frankenstein* and *King Kong*, of course, we are now all too familiar with the

ambiguous emotional effects which these early directors were able to produce; but the Mamoulian *Jekyll and Hyde* is also complex in terms of audience response, largely because of the sensitive playing of Fredric March as Jekyll and Hyde. *The Most Dangerous Game* is crammed with Gothic echoes as it brings to the screen a fresh and significant image of the displaced, anachronistic and bloodthirsty aristocrat. *White Zombie* is a film with a perhaps appropriately somnambulistic style, yet also, in accordance with its Gothic roots, an insistence on social and political dimensions. These films were also photographically inventive: realistic or unrealistic as the settings may supposedly be, they are linked by their creation of a remarkable set of persistent images of doom, whether in the first graveyard scene of *Frankenstein* or in the endless revolution of the zombie-powered mill-wheel in *White Zombie*.

As a second phase, there is an upsurge of horror films in the 1950s, typically with a science-fiction bias and an all too obvious political content; here the succession of extended images which emerges is designed to encode arguments about the Cold War, about fears of invasion from the east, about the dangers of technologization, and above all about the perceived threat to US individualism from communism. In these films it would be regrettably fair to say that the earlier complexities of style and response seem to come for a time to be systematically eliminated from the genre. The typical product of the 1950s lies on the edge of horror and science fiction: it confronts order with disruption in a simplistic fashion, usually by allowing some kind of generalized human society – or rather, perhaps, a collection of individuals – to stand unquestioned and by putting up against it an alien being or species which never stands a chance. The examples are legion, and include *Flying Disc Men from Mars* (1950), *Radar Men from the Moon* (1952), *War of the Worlds* (1952), *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1953), *It Came from Outer Space* (1953), *Invaders from Mars* (1953), *Killers from Space* (1953), *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954) and *The Monster from the Ocean Floor* (1954). All of these films enact the defeat of an alien power; very often what this alien power comes to offer is interpreted as some form of mind control, which means that the films all serve as exemplars of a specific form of 'freedom', which is shown as inherently strong enough to resist all threat. It is easy to read in this phenomenon a certain defensiveness quite specific to the US, a Cold War paranoia which seems to necessitate a continual acting out of physical, mental or moral invasion and of strategies for resistance; the pleasure of the defeat of the monster is rarely psychologized but left as a way of protecting home, hearth and family.

One of the strands which the horror film pursues in the next decade, the 1960s, is typified in the achievement of Roger Corman, a horror auteur of

enormous significance, who figures among other things as a major reinterpreter of Edgar Allan Poe (q.v.). Corman was one of the most prolific director/producers in the history of cinema, but he turned his hand most consistently to horror between 1960 and 1964. During these years he made a cycle of seven films (*The House of Usher* [1960], *The Pit and the Pendulum* [1961], *The Premature Burial* [1961], *Tales of Terror* [1962], *The Haunted Palace* [1963], *The Masque of the Red Death* [1964] and *The Tomb of Ligeia* [1964]) which are usually referred to as the Poe cycle. But although in each of the films it is true that Corman adapts elements of Poe's stories (except in *The Haunted Palace*, which is based on H. P. Lovecraft's [q.v.] *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* [1927–8]), Corman is forced, by the brevity of the stories themselves and the assumptions audiences make regarding narrative film, to add a great deal to them, and he also makes little attempt, except in *The Tomb of Ligeia*, to invoke the drowsy, opiated tone of Poe, so that the films remain in a very real sense Corman's own. To criticize him as an exploiter of Poe would, however, be beside the point: the cycle is very much a self-consistent set of horror films, with their own detailed and impressive *mise-en-scène*, within which elements of Poe are embedded but remade in ways that specifically resonate with key motifs in 1960s' culture.

It has, however, been said that the initiative with regard to horror film had largely passed in the 1960s to Britain, where the notorious Hammer Studios (named not for a blunt instrument, as is commonly thought, but for the millionaire who was their initial source of financing) began a whole series of further interpretations of the classic Gothic narratives. Hammer Studios also made a less well-known but equally important series of examinations of psychopathology: examples include *Taste of Fear* (1960), *Maniac* (1962), *Paranoia* (1963), *Fanatic* (1965) and *The Anniversary* (1967).

Although Corman's work and the horror films made by Hammer, which were most frequently directed by Terence Fisher, have often been contrasted, there are nevertheless similarities. The mingled response of fear and laughter which marks, for example, Dracula's fifteenth 'resurrection' is the sure mark of a 'Goth' cult; these films reflect a situation where the rules are clearly known, and because of this the film-maker is free to move knowingly among the many variations possible on a theme.

Yet in the long run what has come to seem most remarkable about the Hammer films is their place in a specifically English cultural life. The roots of Hammer's treatment of the Frankenstein and Dracula myths lie directly in the earlier Gothic, considered again from the vantage point of the 1960s. Hammer horror is, like Corman's, self-ironizing; but what is important is that this is only a similarity of means, and the ends of Corman and Fisher remain radically different. Hammer's films do not on the whole embark on

the tricky balancing of good and evil that Corman attempts; what has been more shocking in Hammer films, especially the later ones, has rather been the explicitness with which successive directors presented the connections between violence and sexuality, an explicitness which, within the earlier tradition, might take one back to M. G. Lewis (q.v.) rather than to Poe.

Corman's films and Hammer's, however, remain to a large extent a recycling of old themes, and there is something of a strain evident in their attempts to render their fears and anxieties up to date. A very different kind of horror film was being made at the same time, best represented in the work of Alfred Hitchcock, Roman Polanski and Michael Powell, which might be best described in terms of an emphasis on the revelation of the terror of everyday life. Here we have films – not specifically related to each other, or to the earlier Gothic tradition – that appear initially to turn their backs on explicit Gothic settings and strive to prise apart the bland surfaces of common interaction to disclose the anxieties and aggressions that lie beneath.

Three emblematic films here might be Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), Powell's *Peeping Tom* (1960) and Polanski's *Repulsion* (1965). Each of these three films is, at root, a study in paranoia. Each of them also posits a correlation between paranoia and a thwarting in the relation between the ordered and the chaotic. Each of them, in the search for a visual equivalent for a psychological state, finds a setting which in the end, however, relates closely to traditional Gothic imagery. In *Psycho* it is the house, with its cellars and mysterious doors, which has come down to us as pure American Gothic. In *Peeping Tom* it is the film-processing laboratory which, in a remarkably self-referential trope, becomes a substitute for the hero's homelessness, shot as it is in half-tones and impossible as it is to discern its physical limits; what we have here is the laboratory of generations of Frankensteins, in which the endless attempt is continued to discern the secrets of creation, but here translated into cinema's own concerns and scenario. Catherine Deneuve's apartment in *Repulsion*, albeit outwardly contemporary, is capable at times of sprouting supernatural apparitions worthy of the direst secrets of *Udolpho* (q.v.).

The sixth category, beginning in the 1970s, would be well typified by *The Exorcist* (1973), and would include films which have been widely seen as exploitative yet which, were we to follow through any argument about the social significance of the forms of terror, should be considered in a more detailed way. What is common to these films is an apparent return to age-old themes of satanism and possession. *The Exorcist* itself is visibly a Gothic work in its trappings, and not a Gothic relieved with the ironic spice of comedy. In other words, and in sharp contrast to almost all the other works mentioned, it is a work which professes not knowledge but ignorance, igno-

rance of the psychological ambivalence of the vocabulary of Gothic images. Yet this is itself perhaps a further level of 'forgery', and reminds us of how much Gothic has had to do with forgery and the fake through the centuries (Hogle 1994): W. P. Blatty, the writer and producer who appears to have had most say in the shape of the film, seems in fact to be all too well aware of the manipulative potential of film, but chooses to delude us into believing in what appears on the surface to be a certain literal-mindedness. It is doctors and psychiatrists themselves who in the film recommend that the case of 12-year-old Regan MacNeil be referred to the exorcists; thus the audience is put in the position not of interpreting horror symbolism as commentary on psychological disorder, but of accepting it as the outward and visible sign-system of the Devil.

But perhaps this is to make too much of the text of *The Exorcist*, which might be best viewed as largely a sequence of special effects, the narrative submerged during the actual viewing experience, and deliberately so. The audience envisaged, unlike that of many of the earlier horror films referred to above, is thus a passive one; from being a potential mode of enquiry into the limits and conditions of the human, horror has here become a pure spectacle which demands – and indeed permits – almost nothing by way of judgement on the part of the spectator.

The seventh and final phase of horror film to mention, the most recent, is perhaps beginning to reverse this trend, and shows an ironic self-consciousness at work that none the less does not eschew bur rather glories in film's exploitative potential. In this category would be included several long-running series, including the *Friday the 13th* and *Nightmare on Elm Street* sequences. In *Friday the 13th* (1980), for example, a modernized version of the Gothic panoply is present in full force: the isolated campsite, the mysterious snake under the bed, the dead telephones, the jeep stuck in the swamp, most especially the lashing storm which rages for the whole of the second half of the film. All the key moments involve, as would also be the case in the more recent *Blair Witch Project* (1999), a wandering hand-held camera, familiar from previous generations of Gothic film as representing the vantage point of the killer himself or herself. To say that *behind* this lurks a prurient sexual concern would be to overestimate the film's subtlety; the gloating shots of perfect young flesh, the scene in which one young lover lies murdered in a top bunk while her partner is innocently below, are in no way withheld from view but form, along with scantily dressed bodies, a running refrain to murder by axe, knife and arrow. The wounded mother who is a key protagonist of the film carries around with her an entire arsenal of weaponry, and it could be said that, given the woodenness of the acting and the indistinguishability of the teenagers, the only attempt at differenti-

ation, in this as in so many other contemporary teen-scream films, lies in the choice of the mode of death.

The questions raised by Gothic in film thus seem to be twofold: first, there is the question of the explicit, of what is *shown*, and the extent to which this can be compatible with the issues of secrecy with which the traditional Gothic has always been concerned. Second, there is a question of history, of how far it has proved possible to produce new sources of horror without having recourse to older models.

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Gothic and the Graphic Novel

The graphic novel, it is sometimes said, is no more than an overgrown comic, a regressive and mindless form of entertainment; but this is certainly not true of the best of them. *Watchmen* (1987), by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, is one of the most remarkable achievements to date in this new form, and a highly sophisticated text in its own right, involving a type of 'syncopation' of word and image which slows and complicates the narrative thrust and makes for a genuine depth of reading. This is further enhanced by the way in which the text is a tissue of referentiality, taking us back to William Blake, Friedrich Nietzsche and of course the Gothic and romantic traditions as frequently as to Bob Dylan. The test of such a text might be to ask: could what it does be done in any other way? Is it merely hybridizing existent forms? Here I think it is clear that *Watchmen* has evolved its own form; in the corners of the pictures there are always other narratives, other fragments of story, which are then continually picked up and rethreaded later in the text.

However, it could still be said that this display of technical virtuosity is expended on a topic of scant interest, since the story itself concerns precisely the question of comic-book heroes, especially when they are past their sell-by date. It could alternatively be argued that this is inevitable in the genre; that the question then becomes one of how the text recycles and adapts these pre-existing materials, just as 'literary' texts prove themselves through their reuse and adaptation of the trace, through the way in which they can give added resonance to past texts, the 'manuscripts' of Gothic, which are, at the end of the day, the focus of their interest.

The figure of the news vendor who provides the common man's commentary on events in *Watchmen* is continually falling through the black holes of his own words as he tries to grasp the apocalyptic nature of the political background, which is the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the consequent

fear of global war. 'Don't people see the *signs*?' he asks, 'Don't they know where this is *headed*?', but the visual content makes it clear that we also have to see these 'signs' not merely as social portents but also as material signs and 'headlines', precisely the stuff of the newspapers which he is forever half-comprehendingly reading; and when he adds, '*See*? *Apathy*! Everybody escapin' into comic books an' TV! Makes me sick . . . I mean, all this, it could all be *gone*: people, cars, TV shows, magazines . . . Even the word "gone" would be gone', then we glimpse an intensity of involvement with the spread of media influence in general which would be very difficult to achieve in any other form.

Self-referentiality, a concern with personal and social terror, the shameless exploitation of the exotic and the disastrous: all these give *Watchmen* a distinctly Gothic feel, which is even stronger in a 1994 graphic novel by the master of the genre, Neil Gaiman, called *Brief Lives*. Here we are in a world not of costumed heroes but of the gods, or rather, in a new mythology of the seven 'Endless' who lie even further back behind the gods, and perhaps their names can best give us an idea of the parameters of the world in which they move: Destiny, Death, Dream, Destruction, Desire, Despair and Delirium – although we also note that, at some previous time, before dislocation or before the Fall, Delirium's true name was 'Delight'. The action hinges on Destruction's abandonment of his quasi-divine tasks in the face of the far greater destructiveness unleashed on the world through human scientific and technological discovery, a remake of the Frankenstein myth. Again we have here the highly complex textuality typical of the Gothic (these 'brief lives' are also, for example, those of John Aubrey [1626–95], who made a collection of notes, anecdotes and gossip about his contemporaries, gathered together under the title *Brief Lives*), looking back precisely to the Gothic masters, Blake, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the marquis de Sade among others.

Much as in Blake's *Vala, or, The Four Zoas* (1795–1804), the disappearance or rather dereliction of duty of Destruction unseats the balance of the world. Delirium in particular, the youngest of the Endless, embarks on a search for him, and is assisted by Dream. Dream has his own reasons for embarking on his journey for, as Morpheus, he has unfinished business with his son Orpheus, who exists now only as a severed head in a tiny Greek shrine; Dream knows that he has to complete the task of releasing Orpheus from his bondage into life, into death, and the release of Destruction from the world enables him also to do this.

Brief Lives is a more violent text than *Watchmen*, and yet the stylization of the artwork keeps this within strict boundaries. Certainly neither can be regarded as a 'comic book', if the comparison is supposed to be either with

children's comics or with the 1960s' 'head comix', largely because both graphic novels owe a sombre allegiance to a far wider mythic tradition, and are largely free from the manic glee in destruction large and small which characterizes so much of the 'comic' world. Neither are they in any sense light-hearted texts; on the contrary, one of the faults which both share is an unremitting solemnity which at first sits oddly with the form. At the end of the day, however, perhaps what they remind us of is that a culture which relies on the visual image at least as much as on the written or spoken word, and in which the majority of newspapers are themselves now given over to the image as the amount of newsprint in the tabloids shrinks year by year, is as much in need of applicable interpretation as the more traditional forms; and it is this serious work at the interface of word and image which the graphic novels, at their best, are performing, while at the same time they carry forward an expressionist tradition in which the extreme emotions are personified and thrown into violent interaction.

Another of Gaiman's graphic novels – the ninth volume, in fact, of a much longer work called *The Sandman* – is *The Kindly Ones* (1996), which contains an introduction by Frank McConnell, in which he talks a little about Gaiman's narrative techniques – and in which, it is also fair to say, he takes care to establish a discourse which refuses academic purchase on the text. The 'kindly ones' of the title are the fates, and McConnell draws our attention to the way in which their conversation is *ab initio* constructed to 'refer to the act of telling'. To quote McConnell, partly quoting Gaiman:

> 'What are you making him then', asks Clotho of Lachesis in the third frame of the first chapter. 'I can't say that I'm terribly certain, my popsy', she replies, 'but it's a fine yarn, and I don't doubt that it'll suit, go with *anything*, this will'. The story begins as a story about storytelling . . . In fact, eight of the thirteen chapters begin, in the first frame, with a thread of some sort running across the panel, and with a comment that applies equally to the telling of the tale and to the tale itself.

McConnell's interpretation of this process brings us again face to face with Gothic complexities of tale-telling, and we can see this in more detail in a different work, *Witchcraft* (1996), by a team headed by writer James Robinson. *Witchcraft* is essentially a Gothic feminist revenge story running across different time-frames. In Roman Britain, a group of benevolent witches is set upon by a gang of (male) barbarians. One of those who is raped and killed cries out in the moment before her death to the goddesses. Here the figure of the three-in-one recurs, not exactly the Fates this time but the triplicity that is held to have preceded the Christian usurpation of the trinity

– and they are forced to provide opportunities for revenge, even though this is not immediately possible at the time. The story then unfolds in a variety of different scenarios as the character Ursula and her killer are reborn in various different guises; on each occasion until the last one the achievement of vengeance is thwarted, but finally that vengeance is achieved and the previous aggressor is sent back into the past, to relive endlessly the very pain he has inflicted on others, to endure as the perpetually repeated victim of sexual violence.

One strength of the text lies in the repertoire of delay. By this I do not mean merely the delaying devices conventionally employed to prevent an early denouement, but rather the way in which a parallel is achieved between narrative delay and the delay necessary in the reading process in order to keep our attention moving between word and picture. But it is also true that, like Gothic, this graphic novel weaves its own explanations around historical events. For example, there is a long passage which deals with the life of the adventurer Richard Burton, who is figured as the current reincarnation of Ursula. The violent barbarian figures as a man called Ithal, who is having an affair with Burton's mother. When Burton confronts him he is hideously humiliated by Ithal, and this is seen as the motivation behind Burton's later career; coming across Ithal again in later life, and thereby encountering a further chance of revenge, he again flunks it in favour of fame and fortune, and the vengeance goes unachieved. Yet because, of course, the text does not take linear historical time seriously, these events become merely items or instances in a longer history, in this case of gender oppression.

Witchcraft, we may say, sets out to provide an interpretative master-narrative by means of which particular events can be explained, a typically Gothic alternative to history. Thus the shards and fragments of its dialogue, which operate in a postmodern dispersive fashion at a local level, all tend towards a unification of narrative. The same cannot be said of the many graphic novels that exist in what we have already identified as the aftermath of the superheroes. Another instance of this subgenre would be the series of texts written by Grant Morrison under the title of *The Invisibles.* The Invisibles are, as it were, superheroes for our age, postmodern superheroes who are prone to moments of extreme doubt about what they are doing and why they are doing it. To put it another way, these superheroes are, like so many Gothic protagonists, robbed of narrative agency: as they go about their everyday work of killing and salvation, they are never sure whether in fact they are enacting someone else's narrative: whether, indeed, their story has already been written – and drawn – for them.

The obvious irony of this position – because, of course, their perception is correct – is underlined in a volume of *The Invisibles* called *Counting to*

None (1999) by a character called King Mob, who is looking, for reasons too complicated to explain here, for a time machine. 'Sometimes I wonder if the time machine *causes* the end of everything', he says, and we can hardly fail to pick up the resonance of the time machine as the process of narrative itself, as the process whereby freedom is destroyed in the very act of recounting:

> Maybe it was something that never should have been made, like the *bomb* . . . I'm shooting people and it never seems to *end*. It was all those *Moorcock* books; I wanted to be *Jerry Cornelius*, the English assassin. I wanted the guns and the cars and the girls and the chaos. Shit. I've ended up a *murderer*, my karma's a bloody *minefield*.

But lack of knowledge is not an option, just as unreading Michael Moorcock is an impossibility. Whatever fate is traced in texts like *The Invisibles*, it is ineluctable; like any Gothic hero, the protagonists are doomed by forces beyond their control, and even their self-awareness and scepticism cannot help them to escape from the horror of their position.

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