“With Clotted Locks and Eyes Like Burning Stars”:
Corporeality and the Supernatural on the Gothic Stage, 1786 - 1836

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

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2010

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Abstract

For a period of approximately fifty years in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the British stage was dominated by Gothic drama. Like the Gothic novels whose popularity flourished in the same historical moment, Gothic drama was characterized by its attempt to evoke an atmosphere of mystery, suspense, and terror through the employment of any combination of particular appurtenances: foreboding medieval landscapes; ruined Gothic castles riddled with hidden chambers; a tormented, menacing, yet engaging villain; an innocent, "Enlightened" maiden who is the subject of his advances; an ineffectual if not emasculated hero; a secret whose truth has critical ramifications on the present.

Perhaps most commonly associated with the term “Gothic” is the implicit or explicit presence of the supernatural. However, Gothic drama in its original form did not necessitate supernatural manifestations. What, therefore, inspired Gothic playwrights to defy the threat of censorship and test the public’s willingness to suspend its disbelief by persistently conjuring such entities upon London’s stages?

Gothic drama, obsessed with death and the unknown, originated and attained the height of its importance and popularity in Britain in a moment
marked by tremendous external and internal pressures, an unprecedented string of social developments, and scientific and industrial innovations. These forces challenged, if not threatened, perceptions of the individual, collective, and political body. It is the contention of this dissertation that supernatural figures in Gothic drama, in each of their principle iterations – ghosts, magicians, and monsters - were literary devices by which corporeality could be safely explored in a time of tumultuous change and uncertainty in Britain. Gothic ghosts became signifiers of bodies of literature, political bodies, and female corporeality. Where ghosts are memories, Gothic magicians represented individuals who manipulate memory, in essence making history. These characters call to mind powerful figures like Napoleon even as they engage tensions over changing roles of women in the period. Monsters, both the vampire and Frankenstein’s creation, allowed for the possibility of assimilating others into their corporeality, suggesting the notion that anyone has the capacity for monstrous behavior.

An overarching progression emerges: Gothic drama moves from an obsession with ghosts, to manipulating and consorting with them as magicians, to the possibility of becoming ghoulish ourselves. The study concludes with the assertion that any piece of theatre that engages a memory’s ability to haunt, the manipulation of memory to define or characterize the past, or vexations and anxieties of the body potentially carries with it the vestiges of the Gothic supernatural.
Dedicated to Tory and my family.
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Lesley Ferris, whose guidance and dedication made this project possible. It has been an honor and a total pleasure to work with her.

I would also like to thank Dr. Beth Kattelman, who shared my delight and enthusiasm in discovering forgotten Gothic treasures, and Dr. Virginia Cope, for her invaluable assistance during my writing process.

I am indebted to my family for their encouragement, love, and friendship.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my wife, Tory, whose unfailing support and love give meaning to every challenge and make every day a victory.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The second act of Horace Walpole’s *The Mysterious Mother* describes an encounter with a supernatural entity of ambiguous corporeality. As storm clouds cluster above the forlorn castle of the Countess of Narbonne, the dutiful Friar Martin is ushering a group of orphans to the chapel for prayers, but sends them ahead so that he may attend to the sudden appearance of a young stranger. The children are disinclined to proceed alone:

ORPHAN GIRL. Oh! Father, but I dare not pass without you

By the church-porch. They say the Count sits there,

With clotted locks, and eyes like burning stars.¹

The Count, as it happens, has been deceased for many years. Friar Martin dispels the children’s fears, but not by denying the existence of the Count’s revenant:

MARTIN. My loves, he will not harm such innocents.

But wait me at the bridge, I’ll straight be with ye.²


² Walpole 33.
Florian, the young stranger newly arrived on the scene, rebukes Friar Martin for indulging the children their “baby fantasy.”  But, being the hero, Florian must, according to the conventions established by the very play he inhabits, be a product of the Enlightenment, not given to passion, but tempered with reason. He does not understand that, by contrast, Friar Martin, representative of Catholicism itself, signifies the barbarous setting in which the pair find themselves, a dark fantasia on the Middle Ages. When Florian insinuates that monks are not inherently holy, the world itself retorts with a display of outrage, as thunder and lightning send the frightened orphans back into the scene, exclaiming that a demon rides upon the air. When the superstitious Friar asks them whether they could distinguish this entity, the overwrought children say they could not, though evidence of its attack seems clear enough:

SECOND ORPHAN. I wink’d and saw the light’n’ing
Burnt on the monument. The shield of arms
Shiver’d to splinters. E’er I could repeat
An Ave-Mary, down with hideous crash
The cross came tumbling...  

This apparent demonic assault is enough for Friar Martin to declare the vicinity

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3 Walpole 33.

4 Walpole 35-36.
unholy ground, chastise Florian for his blasphemy, and immediately set off to alert the Countess – the highest authority in the land – of the chapel’s preternatural vandalism.

This dramatic moment is easily overlooked in Walpole’s 1768 tragedy, which is considered the first Gothic drama. It is not critical to the plot, but it is effective in deepening the gloomy atmosphere and particular emotional response Walpole sought to evoke in his readers. The term “Gothic,” whether it pertains to novels, plays, or even films, is a largely arbitrary label. It is used to describe *The Mysterious Mother*, Walpole’s single attempt at drama, because the playwright himself dubbed it a "Gothic Play," and because he also penned *The Castle of Otranto*, the first Gothic novel, four years earlier. Many of the characteristics we might identify as Gothic had occurred in plays prior to *The Mysterious Mother*, such as John Home’s *Douglas* of 1756 and Hall Hartson’s *The Countess of Salisbury* of 1763. But Walpole was specifically interested in crafting a unique kind of thematic extremism and overall sensationalism in his tale of tragic incest. He wrote that his aim was to establish "virtue and vice in the same character," and to set the scene “in what age and country I pleased.” In doing so, Walpole expressed his intent to transpose Enlightenment sensibilities upon the perceived “barbarous” landscape of medieval Europe, and to enliven an

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5 The play was originally intended as a closet drama, written only to be read.

6 Walpole 93-94.
original type of character upon that landscape, the Gothic hero-villain, in whom both virtue and vice reside. This basic formula characterizes the essence of the Gothic dramatic form.

Over a decade passed before Walpole’s specific arrangement of prototypical Gothic appurtenances occurred in another play, but by 1790 a pool of such elements had become “the common property of the age,” and Gothic playwrights contributed to and drew liberally from this collective source. As scholar Bertand Evans describes it, “The identity of the individual contribution was lost in the mass, and precise debts of playwrights and novelists to one another are difficult to trace. We can be certain only that all of them were ultimately indebted to Walpole” (50). The model that Evans and other scholars adhere to identifies Walpole’s simple formula as the seed of the Gothic dramatic species as a whole, which, upon taking root, steadily gathered new elements over time. Gothic drama progressed from strictly literary to increasingly spectacular furnishings, reaching what is considered to be a pinnacle of visual extravagance in the works of Matthew Gregory Lewis at the turn of the nineteenth century. By the 1820’s, melodrama had taken so strong a hold on the London stage that it becomes difficult to distinguish where Gothic drama ends and melodrama begins. The Gothic dramatic mode manifested itself as pantomime, musicals, opera, classical tragedy, comedy, burlesque, and other forms over a period of

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7 Bertrand Evans, *Gothic Drama from Walpole to Shelley* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1947) 49.
approximately fifty years. During this time it enjoyed immense popularity in Britain, creating a fervor in audiences that has scarcely been rivaled among ensuing generations of theatergoers.

While it is relatively easy to identify a piece of literature as “Gothic,” scholars struggle to reach a satisfactory, comprehensive definition of the term. Most resort simply to listing the attributes that characterize whatever aspect of the Gothic they study. While my own such inventory is below, it is important to highlight a particular characteristic that occurs frequently in Gothic literature, something that I will call the Gothic encounter. This is an event in which a character meets a person or object of such unyielding terror that she or he is utterly unable to reconcile it with past experience. It is an encounter that cannot be assimilated into one’s understanding of the universe. Others have invoked Edmund Burke’s concept of the sublime to describe this event, a transcendence that occurs in the face of utter terror. While I would point out that Burke did not have the Gothic specifically in mind when he dissertated on the sublime, I embrace the notion of the transformative power of the Gothic encounter. The manner in which a character reacts to the Gothic encounter, the attempt to assimilate something that cannot be assimilated, is as useful a definition of the Gothic as one is likely to find.

Generally speaking, Gothic plays were characterized by their attempt to evoke an atmosphere of mystery, suspense, and terror through the employment
of any combination of particular trappings. Foremost was the setting itself, typically a foreboding, storm-tortured landscape marked by ruined Gothic structures. The time period of these plays is always vaguely medieval, yet, anachronistically, their most prominent structures are already in ruins, adding to the gloomy atmosphere. More often than not, castles are the centerpiece of a Gothic play’s locale. While earlier pieces, such as *The Mysterious Mother*, could be set outside of the castle, most of the later works took the scene well into its interior, frequently showcasing elaborate dungeons. The intricacy of the castle’s design increased with the popularity of the Gothic play, culminating in Matthew Gregory Lewis’ *Castle Spectre* of 1797, whose vast network of hidden doors and labyrinthine passageways dictates the action of the play. Emerging from the shadows of this dark realm is the tormented, menacing, yet engaging "hero-villain," the signature denizen of the Gothic drama, who delights in the salacious pursuit of young women. This tyrant is typically haunted by a secret whose truth has critical ramifications to the plot and is often intentionally withheld by the playwright until the end of the play for maximum impact.

Thrust into this sinister world is the Gothic heroine, an innocent girl who, in contrast to her environment, is endowed with the sensibilities of the Enlightenment, including a hyper-acute sense of propriety. Audiences of the Gothic theatre watched in horror, then, as one of their own was made to fend for herself in the abominable world of the Gothic vista, with no one to defend her.
Just as contemporary writers of horror films must design ways of occupying valiant heroes in order to give deranged killers sufficient opportunity to hunt leading women, so were Gothic writers required to emasculate heroic male characters. Most often these poor souls are sequestered to dungeons, which they only manage to escape once the villain has been dispatched or has repented of his sins. The luckiest of Gothic heroes are able to escape and spend the better part of a play rallying local bandits into a makeshift army to storm the castle and save the girl.

Perhaps most commonly associated with the term “Gothic” is the implicit or explicit presence of the supernatural. Yet as strong a predilection as Horace Walpole seems to have harbored for the supernatural, (as evidenced by the ubiquitous spectres of all shapes and sizes in The Castle of Otranto,) Gothic drama in its original form did not necessitate such manifestations. In fact, more often than not, supernatural characters and themes were similar to the scene in The Mysterious Mother described above: they were not critical to the plot, but were used to deepen the dusky mood; they are implicit rather than fully realized on stage; and their actual existence is ambiguous in the world of the play. Playwrights who extended the role of the supernatural beyond these parameters met with resistance. An entire play could fail to win public acclaim if an attempt to realize a wraith in but one dramatic moment was in any way less than convincing in its illusory technique. In addition, there is evidence that the
supernatural was subject to extreme censorship. For the most part, the writers of Gothic drama circumvented the wrath of the censor, the venerable John Larpent, the Lord Chamberlain’s Examiner of Plays, by self-censoring. The majority of Gothic plays avoided Larpent’s pen because they were placed in temporally and geographically remote settings (medieval Italy was a favorite), and were therefore not overtly concerned with living monarchs or contemporary political ideologies. However, there is evidence of extreme editing. Larpent did not hesitate to excise an entire series of scenes from Charles Robert Maturin’s *Bertram* (1816) that included a character called the Dark Knight of the Forest, a malevolent spirit. In the final, censored version of the play, the Dark Knight of the Forest, like the Count in *The Mysterious Mother*, became an unseen presence, only mentioned in fearful whispers, yet still extending a measure of influence over the dramatic action.8

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, an age of extreme conservatism in Britain, wherein supernatural themes perpetually struck a collective nerve, what inspired Gothic playwrights to defy the threat of censorship and test the public’s willingness to suspend its disbelief by persistently conjuring ghosts upon London’s stages – and not only ghosts, but magicians, monsters, and devils as well? Walpole’s spectral Count in *The

8 Jeffrey Cox includes the censored version of *Bertram* as well as the Dark Knight material that was excised from the original manuscript in his anthology of Gothic plays. See: Cox, Jeffrey. *Seven Gothic Dramas, 1789-1825*. Ed. Jeffrey N. Cox. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1992.
Mysterious Mother may yield some clues. While clearly a ghost, the literal revenant of a deceased character, the Count maintains an aspect of corporeality. His eyes, “burning like stars,” indicators of the preternatural energies that fuel him, are eyes nonetheless. The entity retains his hair, however “clotted” it may be. Far from hovering above the earth, the Count is said to sit at the church-porch, and Friar Martin assures his orphan charges that they will not be harmed by this spirit. The act of sitting and the potential for bodily violence indicate the Count’s perceived ability to interact with the physical world. Walpole’s ghost, the first in Gothic drama, though unseen, though perhaps not even a reality, possesses a body.

It will be the contention of this study that supernatural figures in Gothic drama, in each of their principle iterations, were literary devices by which corporeality could be safely explored in a time of tumultuous change and uncertainty in Britain. It is not surprising that Gothic drama, so obsessed with death and the unknown, originated and attained the height of its importance and popularity in a moment marked by tremendous external and internal pressures, an unprecedented string of social developments, and scientific and industrial innovations. These forces challenged, if not threatened, perceptions of the individual, collective, and political body. Consider the British government at the turn of the nineteenth century: the integrity of what had hitherto been perceived as a political body in perfect equilibrium, a system of balance between the
monarchy, the House of Lords, and the House of Commons, was being called into question. The American War of Independence challenged British authority, and the French Revolution cultivated in England an atmosphere of national introspection, yielding sentiments that authorities felt were uncomfortably close to revolutionary. Intermittent war with France threatened the geographical body of Britain itself.

Notions of the individual body were also being tested. The Industrial Revolution drew people to cities in unprecedented numbers. This not only severed a bond between the individual body and nature, but the extreme proximity of the resulting urban crowding caused a sudden, jarring awareness of the body: its needs, its desires, its functions, and its limitations. The establishment of the institution of a police force to combat the ensuing criminal activity in the slums created another system – another body – and another level of awareness by which one was acquainted with the activities of the individual body: normative behavior. Those who opted to work in the factories of the Industrial Revolution in a sense traded the individuality of their bodies for membership in a collective body, and routine communion with machines blurred the distinction between the body and the artificial construct it served. Advances in medicine, particularly in anesthetics, allowed living bodies to be probed in new and fascinating, if not disturbing, ways. Similarly, scientific innovations, especially in the areas of chemistry, physics, and electricity, promised to extend
the capabilities of the human body, including its lifespan. With regard to religion, the Anglican Church (the body of Christ) was slowly but steadily dissolving as Britons began turning toward more accessible, evangelical denominations *en masse*, ones that promised to offer renewed life as part of a collective body and spiritual and physical healing to the individual one. Finally, the “bodies” of the patent theatres themselves, Covent Garden and Drury Lane, underwent massive, and I would argue traumatic, renovations: suddenly monumental in scale, the literary drama of past generations was quickly becoming obsolete.

These issues of corporeality took center stage in an age of great conservatism, when there was no recourse but to engage them obliquely. This dissertation will examine the ways in which the supernatural characters and themes of Gothic drama, however superfluous they may have been to the integrity of the plays themselves, were an effective means of exploring these issues. The study will stem from an extensive analysis of representative Gothic plays, as well as from other primary source materials, and will find that, in each of their principal iterations - ghosts, necromancers and magicians, vampires, and artificial beings (specifically, Frankenstein’s Monster) – Gothic supernatural figures were exercises in “ghosting” corporealities. Such supernatural beings, each with ambiguous corporeality, were ideally suited for probing pervasive anxieties about the body.
Despite the fact that Gothic drama was the most popular and important form of theatre on the British stage for a period of decades, there remains a striking dearth of scholarship on the topic. The research is relegated to only a handful of books, some long essays, and a few dozen articles, the most significant of which will be delineated below. There are three major reasons for what has amounted to a persistent academic oversight of Gothic drama. First, it can be difficult to designate a piece of dramatic literature as “Gothic,” since this term denotes such a broad range of characteristics. One could arguably describe *Hamlet* as Gothic for its ghost or *Macbeth* for its witches. Even when the parameters of Gothic drama are limited to the height of its popularity on the British stage, from the late 1760’s through the 1820’s, the problem is compounded by the advent of melodrama. It can be almost impossible to distinguish a purely Gothic play from a melodramatic one, and in fact such a distinction may be moot, as both styles of dramatic literature had essentially the same objective during the period in question: to cater to the tastes of a theatre-hungry public that clamored for sensational, visually arresting dramatic material.

The second reason for the lack of academic attention to Gothic drama has to do with the very fact that it was a primarily visual experience, as opposed to a literary one, and thus played to popular audiences on an unprecedented scale. In its heyday, Gothic drama was ridiculed and largely dismissed by critics for its emphasis on spectacle over language. “Immense popularity and little critical
respect – this might be the epitaph for the Gothic drama,” summarizes Jeffrey Cox, one of the foremost scholars of Gothic theatre. Cox asserts, however, that to disregard the impact of Gothic drama is to “perpetuate a devaluation of the past,” a statement with which I concur. The academic penchant for fixating on the “pillars” of theatre history – the “tentpole moments” – makes it all too easy to overlook popular forms. To alleviate this inclination, I would like to offer the reader a useful image, that of the spandrel. In architecture, particularly of the Gothic school, a spandrel is the space between two arches or between an arch and its rectangular enclosure. It is a space that could easily be dismissed as (literally) marginal or simply the byproduct of the structural intention of the construct in question. However, spandrels are frequently richly decorated, and can in fact become as attractive as the arch or fixture they adorn. A close examination of spandrels will often reveal grotesques and other ornamentation. I submit that Gothic drama occupies such a space in the architecture of theatre history. Because it was chiefly a popular phenomenon, it is challenging to cite Gothic drama as a “tentpole” of theatre history. This does not warrant its utter dismissal. Gothic drama may not be a “pillar,” but perhaps the absence of its “pillarhood,” like the ghost, is its presence. Like the spandrel, Gothic drama is

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10 Cox, Introduction, Seven Gothic Dramas 3.
the dwelling place of grotesques. An ancillary purpose of this dissertation, therefore, is to draw attention to the tremendous amount of untapped potential for research on the topic of Gothic drama in general.

The third major reason that Gothic drama has been neglected is that it has resided in the shadow of the Gothic novel, which has received substantial attention. Many scholars have studied the Gothic novel exhaustively without considering the dramatic form. One could argue that there exists an anti-theatrical prejudice among scholars of the Gothic that extended well into the twentieth century, if not the twenty-first. The title of a 1928 article by Willard Thorp, *The Stage Adventures of Some Gothic Novels*, summarizes this unfortunate point of view precisely; for most of the past two centuries, Gothic plays have been perceived as little more than theatrical translations of Gothic novels, unworthy of study in their own right. Even some of the more prominent studies of Gothic theory and literature of the last decade, including Robert Miles’ *Gothic Writing: A Genealogy*, and Markman Ellis’ *The History of the Gothic*, scarcely give theatre a passing mention.

The notion that Gothic drama is unworthy of independent analysis was staunchly challenged by Bertrand Evans’ seminal and enduring 1947 book *Gothic Drama from Walpole to Shelley*. Pioneering in its defense of Gothic drama as an independent subject of study, the work remains the definitive volume on the topic and an indispensable resource. Evans examines the origins of Gothic
drama, including its antecedents in architecture and poetry, proceeds to the emergence of the first Gothic plays in the 1760’s, and follows the Gothic tradition on the London stage through the triumph of Lewis’ *The Castle Spectre*. He outlines the importance of Gothic drama in the development of melodrama and the Byronic hero, and devotes a chapter to Joanna Baillie, whom he celebrates as a crucial British playwright. Evans’ book also contains a useful appendix of Gothic plays and their original performance dates. As essential a study as Evans’ book is for Gothic scholarship, however, it does not offer much in the way of critical insight into the presence of the supernatural on the Gothic stage. Evans considers ghosts to be just another aspect of the “Gothic machinery,” and discusses supernaturally endowed villain-heroes as simply another step in the evolution of the Byronic hero. Evans’ study ultimately eschews a historiographical perspective for an entirely literary one.

More successful in interpreting Gothic drama from a historiographical standpoint are the works of Jeffrey Cox. Cox’s major contribution is his anthology *Seven Gothic Dramas*, which opens with a lengthy introduction that takes into account the historical context overlooked by Evans. After asserting the importance of Gothic drama in theatre history, as described above, Cox establishes the study of Gothic drama as an alternative tradition in the movement toward realism, one that closes the period’s cultural gap between high and low forms of theatre. A critical point that Cox often reiterates is that
Gothic drama was the drama of revolutionary Europe, and that its most powerful moments – the 1790’s and 1815 – reflect the fall of the Bastille and the fall of Napoleon, respectively. Cox traces the history of Gothic drama, pointing out the expansion of the patent theatres, and devotes a passage to the supernatural and its relationship to censorship, particularly with regard to Maturin’s *Bertram*. Cox concludes with a discussion of the displacement of the Gothic drama that occurred with the advent of the domestic melodrama in the first decades of the nineteenth century. This aspect of Cox’s research will be applicable to the present study in considering the emergence of the “monsters” that populated the stage as Gothic drama’s popularity waned, as found in Richard Brinsley Peake’s *Presumption; or The Fate of Frankenstein* (1823) and James Robinson Planché’s *The Vampire; or The Bride of the Isles* (1820).

Paula Backscheider devotes more than half of her *Spectacular Politics: Theatrical Power and Mass Culture in Early Modern England* to the essay “Gothic Drama and National Crisis.” After surveying the tumultuous political and social atmosphere of the late eighteenth century, something that earlier scholars of the Gothic stage had not engaged sufficiently, this essay approaches Gothic drama as the first form of “mass culture” in the modern understanding of the term. Backscheider’s primary concerns are the emergence of sex as a political category and the increased role and potency of public opinion in the period. She devotes a chapter to the fundamental elements of the genre and offers original insights.
into each: spectacular staging, acting, music, comic characters, lovers, and the villain. She follows this with a look at the varying roles of women and men in the writing, production, and reception of Gothic plays. Throughout the study, Backscheider is unafraid to admit that Gothic drama was a good deal of fun for its audiences, and this refreshing admission offers a unique historiographical perspective.

Paul Ranger’s "Terror and Pity Reign in Every Breast": Gothic Drama in the London Patent Theatres, 1750-1820 includes an examination of Gothic drama in performance. Ranger does not analyze Gothic dramatic literature itself in his study. He is concerned with the inspirations for the “Gothic spirit,” and explores theatre managers’ and designers’ obsession with authenticity in production: architecture was painstakingly reproduced on stage, as was geographical veracity. Ranger argues that the purpose of Gothic drama was to elevate the viewer to a state of emotional sublimity. Ranger offers one of the only conjectures of what audiences could have experienced in the theatre, in terms of the acting style they may have observed, and stresses that each script was a blueprint for a unique technical and performance endeavor.

Among the articles that will inform my study is Diane Hoeveler’s “Gothic Drama as Nationalistic Catharsis.” This examines ways in which social and political ideologies are apparent in a handful of Gothic novel-to-stage adaptations in the early nineteenth century. Hoeveler argues that Gothic plays
were critiques of the British monarchy, given that they typically depicted the
dethroning of aristocrats. This position is one that is commonly adopted by
Gothic scholars, typically with regard to Gothic literature in general. This view
fails to take into account the manner in which aristocrats are removed from
power in most Gothic plays: their authority is usurped by the Gothic villain. In
the aftermath of the French Revolution, when even the semblance of
revolutionary tendencies was scrutinized in Britain, Gothic playwrights used
themes of usurpation to condemn the French Revolution and extol the monarchy
by having their Gothic villains wrongfully seize monarchical authority. As I will
describe in the next chapter, it is in this way that Gothic playwrights – notably
James Boaden – were able to depict themselves as unequivocally patriotic.

The primary objective of this study is to explore the supernatural in
Gothic drama through a lens of issues of corporeality. In conducting research to
this end, I have attempted to achieve a balance between historiography and
literary analysis, and to supplement the study with an examination of pertinent
critical theory. The scope of the project will be restricted to the period between
1768, which saw the publication of the first Gothic play, Walpole’s The Mysterious
Mother, and 1836, the publication date of Joanna Baillie’s Witchcraft. Each of the
following chapters will highlight a particular manifestation of the supernatural
on the Gothic stage, and each of these will be examined through a filter of
notions of corporeality in the period. I have been wary of superimposing
contemporary critical theory over an eighteenth and nineteenth century sensibility, particularly with regard to our current critical considerations of the body. However, a number of modern theorists have successfully posited connections between corporeality and the theatre, and it will be helpful to keep some of these in mind. First is Alice Rayner’s *Ghosts: Death’s Double and the Phenomena of Theatre*, which uses the author’s characteristic phenomenological approach to examine ghosts as analogues of critical theory and of theatre itself. Rayner’s argument that ghosts, when fully materialized, serve as their own negation, is useful in examining the corporeality of the spectres in Gothic drama; the living actors who portrayed Gothic ghosts asserted their presence while their characters simultaneously flirted with absence. In addition, Rayner’s contention that ghosts, like the theatre, have no immediate consequence highlights the ultimate futility of even the most significant of ghostly manifestation on the Gothic stage, such as the sensationalized centerpiece of Matthew Gregory Lewis’ *The Castle Spectre*. However spectacular her glorious appearance may have been, the bleeding shade of the murdered Evelina had little bearing on the plot. I will also call upon Marvin Carlson’s *The Haunted Stage* to consider the ways in which Gothic drama is concerned with memory, recycling meaning, and “ghosting.”

Chapter two will engage the topic of ghosts in Gothic drama. I will probe the depth of the spectral *zeitgeist* that characterized Britain beginning in the late eighteenth century. I will argue that fascination with ghosts stemmed from an
atmosphere of experimentation that was cultivated in the wake of changing perceptions of death and a phenomenon Terry Castle describes as the “spectralization” of memory, the collective endowment of memory with the ability to haunt. Three plays will be the focus of this chapter: James Boaden’s *Fontainville Forest* (1794), Matthew Gregory Lewis’ *The Castle Spectre* (1797), and Joanna Baillie’s *The Phantom* (1836). Boaden’s play is significant for featuring the first fully realized ghost on the Gothic stage, a feat the playwright achieved by recalling the spirits of Shakespeare’s canon. Matthew Gregory Lewis, author of *The Monk*, capitalized on his own reputation as a purveyor of dangerous literature to stage one of the most spectacular ghostly manifestations, and succeeded in creating one of the most sensational and lucrative theatrical franchises of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with *The Castle Spectre*. Joanna Baillie’s *The Phantom*, while never produced in her lifetime, depicts a female stage apparition who, even in death, is the subject of a patriarchal system. Her individuality is substituted with an idealized mental construct, reflecting the realities of gender roles in Baillie’s day. The chapter will find that Gothic ghosts were signifiers of bodies of literature, political bodies, and female corporeality.

Chapter three is concerned with Gothic villains, specifically those endowed with supernatural abilities: magicians, conjurors, and necromancers. These characters emerged as logical extensions of the experimental culture of ghosts that characterized the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century British
stage. Where ghosts are memories, Gothic magicians represent individuals who manipulate memories, in essence making history. This chapter will focus on two representative plays, Matthew Gregory Lewis’ *The Wood Daemon; or The Clock Has Struck* (1807) and Joanna Baillie’s *Witchcraft* (1836). Lewis’ play embraces a typical Faustian approach to the magician theme by having his deformed villain, Hardyknute, obtain political power through an arrangement with a female demon. His regular human sacrifices align him with the horrors of the French Revolution, and his meteoric rise to power invites comparisons with Napoleon. Lewis fashions the Wood Daemon herself from various powerful mythological women, thereby exempting her from male patriarchal authority. I will argue that the mysterious casting of male actors for this role in each of its original productions reflected the shifting perceptions of the role of women in the period. Joanna Baillie once again attends to the topic of gender in *Witchcraft*, the first Gothic play to adopt a sympathetic position on the titular subject. The chapter will explore how allegations of black magic serve to legitimize and reinforce sexual inequality.

Chapter four will discuss Gothic monstrosities on stage, specifically the vampire and Frankenstein’s fiendish creation. Two plays will be the primary focus of this chapter. James Robinson Planché’s *The Vampire; or The Bride of the Isles* (1820) was the first major vampire play in English, an indirect adaptation of John Polidori’s *The Vampyre*, that would ultimately prove to be the most
successful vampire play of the nineteenth century. Richard Brinsley Peake’s *Presumption; or The Fate of Frankenstein* (1823) was the first stage adaptation of Mary Shelley’s famous novel. These supernatural characters represent an interesting turn at the end of the Gothic theatre movement. By the 1820’s, domestic melodrama had superseded Gothic drama on the British stage. Settings of plays moved from the dark landscapes of medieval Europe to Europe of the nineteenth century. This transition rendered the traditional Gothic tyrant impotent, since the source of his power had been the foreboding world of which he had been an extension. No longer perceived as menacing, villains had to be replaced on the waning Gothic stage by literal monsters, whose inhuman nature alone could threaten the domestic order. As both a thief (of blood) and a murderer, the vampire evokes the rampant crime that plagued London at the turn of the nineteenth century. As a potential invader of the individual body, he represents the threat of invasion to the collective, geographical body, which was a pervasive fear at the time. His body contains a mixture of the blood of many, just as the body of Frankenstein’s monster is a composite of the parts of many: as such, the very presence of these beings suggested illegitimacy and a disordered cosmos to a culture that harbored a fearful disdain of mixtures. Further, the possibility emerges of the self becoming a part of the corporeality of these abominations. I will utilize Freud’s concept of the *unheimlich* in this chapter, literally the “un-familiar,” or what has often been translated as the “uncanny,”
that which is simultaneously recognizable and strange. The *unheimlich* includes automatons and robots, dismembered limbs, being buried alive, and anything once thought to be imaginary that is suddenly found to be real.

I will conclude the dissertation with a look at the astonishing Masonic ritual that took place in December of 1808 at the site of the immolated theatre at Covent Garden. Hosted by John Philip Kemble, the theatre’s manager-proprietor, this ceremonial placement of the cornerstone for the intended new structure was attended by the Prince of Wales and a retinue of nobility, members of the theatre company, including the celebrated Sarah Siddons, and a carefully monitored representation of the general public. This ritual, observed at a site that was permeated with theatrical ghosts, not only served as a funeral for the “body” of the destroyed theatre, but an act of conception for its new incarnation, if not an incantation for its resurrection.

At the conclusion of this study, it is my hope that the reader will be left with an understanding of the overall progression that supernatural characters underwent as signifiers of corporeal anxieties at the height of Gothic drama’s popularity. It begins as a cultural obsession with ghosts in the late eighteenth century. The sequence continues with Gothic villains, who are endowed with the ability to manipulate and consort with ghosts at the dawn of the nineteenth century. With monsters, the resolution of this arch represents the inevitable possibility of becoming ghoulish ourselves.
CHAPTER 2

A CULTURE OF GHOSTS

“The Stage and the Closet are very different mediums for our observance of effects.”

James Boaden, *Fontainville Forest*, 1794

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, London fostered a culture of ghosts. It was a period marked by “a growing dissociation from corporeal reality, and a new and unprecedented antipathy toward death in all its aspects.” Once an event characterized by community participation, individual death became something to be treated with discretion, its visible ravages masked cosmetically, and its cemeteries relegated to remote areas. But the segregation of life and death that was imposed by Enlightened Europeans led to a mystification of death, ultimately demonstrating that the dead have a way of resurfacing. Increasing anxieties about what happens to the soul – and the body

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1 James Boaden, *The Plays of James Boaden: Fontainville Forest; The Secret Tribunal; The Italian Monk; Cambro-Britons; Ozym and Daraxa; Aurelio and Miranda; The Voice of Nature; The Maid of Bristol*, ed. Steven Cohan (New York: Garland, 1980). The quote comes from a note in the *Dramatis Personae*.


3 Castle, *Spectralization* 242.
– after death permeated the collective consciousness. Philippe Aries discusses the rampant fear of “apparent death” that emerged in this period, whereby unconscious individuals thought to be deceased were prematurely buried, or regained consciousness to the shock of their mourning relatives. Diane Hoeveler describes the disturbing phenomenon by which corpses would periodically float to the surface among the marshy graveyards on the banks of the Thames, a problem that was emblematic of what she asserts was a distressing vexation at the time, the idea of the co-existence of the living and the dead. Despite the attempt to mitigate the appearance of death and decay, there inevitably occurred a “rising belief in the autonomy of the spirit,” the luminous self that survives the death of the body. This disembodied soul began to invade British culture.

In 1762, the haunted house on Cock Lane was the hottest ticket in London. Curious visitors arrived in throngs to the supposed residence of a recently murdered young woman, “Scratching Fanny,” whose disembodied ghost communicated with the public through a system of audible knocks. It is hardly surprising that Horace Walpole, writer of the first Gothic novel and play,

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6 Aries 457.
participated in this spectral sensation in a much-publicized visit to the Cock Lane house, accompanied by the Duke of York.\footnote{E. J. Clery, The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1795-1800 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 13-25.} Within a few decades, Walpole’s \textit{Castle of Otranto}, and works like it, whether intended for the stage or the reading closet, would become similarly engaging public fixations, and by the 1790’s, the atmosphere was primed for Gothic experimentation. The germ of Gothicism planted in \textit{The Castle of Otranto} began to yield considerable returns, to the degree that thirty percent of all novels published were Gothic novels.\footnote{Jerrold E. Hogle, ed., The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 43.} Paula Backscheider delineates the ways in which Gothic fiction ascended to the status of a mania in this period, arguing that it represents the first example of mass culture, appealing to a hitherto unprecedented range of consumers.\footnote{Paula Backscheider, \textit{Spectacular Politics} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993) 149-150.} E. J. Clery links Gothic fiction in the decade of the 1790’s to the rise of mass consumerism in England, citing its potential identification as the “ultimate luxury commodity,” since it represents an “unreal need for unreal representations.”\footnote{Clery 7.} This consistent demand for Gothic fiction across social and economic classes clearly suggests that such material struck a common nerve among the British populace.

However, the title of this chapter intends the word “culture” not solely to signify the behaviors and beliefs of a population, but also in the scientific sense of
the term, as in a Petri dish; London at the turn of the nineteenth century was a place where ghosts were systematically grown. It was a culture of ghosts in that it was an experimental zone that generated the necessary materials for safely exploring corporeal anxieties. Such materials are to be the focus of this study. In *The Haunted Stage*, Marvin Carlson looks at the experience of theatre as a “memory machine,” examining how theatrical experience is an operation of “ghosting,” the recycling and repetition of memory. According to Carlson’s argument, everything in the theatre, from the bodies of its participants, to the literature being produced, to the space itself, is haunted: it is inexorably linked to memory and therefore in a perpetual process of ghosting. This concept will be of particular use here, considering the changing conception of memory itself in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Britain. Consider the advent of the magic lantern. By 1801, audiences could behold elaborately engineered illusions projected in mesmerizing, often terrifying displays of anything from wraiths to recreations of historical or current events. Imagery depicting the fall of the Bastille and the September Massacres, for example, made for particularly stirring magic-lantern exhibitions in Britain.11 Terry Castle sees the magic lantern as evidence for a “spectralization” or “ghostification” of the imagination at the dawn of the nineteenth century, a major shift in consciousness that has extended

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to the present.\textsuperscript{12} This transition allowed thoughts and memories to be perceived as phantasmagorical shades that can haunt the mind. Castle’s supposition is evidenced by Mary Wollstonecraft, whom Clery indicates may have seen such a spectacle, and who uses the magic lantern as a metaphor for memory in \textit{The Wrongs of Woman; or, Maria}.\textsuperscript{13} Castle links this notion of the affective power of memory with the changing attitudes toward death described above, concluding that “a new mode of thought altogether – a kind of thinking dominated by nostalgic mental images,” emerged during the period in question.\textsuperscript{14} As death became mystified, so memory became spectralized, and thus we have a culture of revenants. It is in this context that the first ghosts of the Gothic drama emerged.

By no means were representations of literal, preternatural spirits universally welcomed, despite their periodically successful manifestations on the London stage. The government’s censor, theatre critics, theatre managers, and even the public could be quick to dispel a playwright’s efforts to conjure ghosts. According to the Licensing Act of 1737, playwrights were expected to self-censor and to have an understanding of what was acceptable to the Lord Chamberlain’s Examiner of Plays and what was not. For a play to be licensed for the stage, it had to avoid dealing directly with the subjects of the monarchy, government, and the church. Playwrights who wished to take up contemporary political

\textsuperscript{12} Castle, \textit{Phantasmagoria} 29.

\textsuperscript{13} Clery 146.

\textsuperscript{14} Castle, \textit{Spectralization} 244.
themes simply had to mask them by giving their works geographically and historically remote settings. Ghosts, on the other hand, being representative of spiritual matters, tested the licenser because they could potentially disrupt conventional religious ideas. Critics objected to ghosts on several levels. In the first place, they simply felt that such superstitious beings should not occur in the theatre of an enlightened age.\footnote{Robert Reno, “James Boaden’s Fountainville Forest and Matthew G. Lewis’ The Castle Spectre: Challenges of the Supernatural Ghost on the Late Eighteenth-Century Stage,” Eighteenth-Century Life 9 (1984): 95.} Akin to the increasingly spectacular nature of a theatre moving toward melodrama, ghosts were symptomatic of what critics felt was the decline and inevitable demise of the literary merits of the English stage. For theatre managers, staging ghosts meant risking the wrath of the censor or losing money; a badly realized apparition that drew more laughs than shrieks from audiences could damage a show’s success.

Given the considerable resistance mounted against them, most Gothic spectres prior to the 1790’s were marginal, as was the case with Walpole’s original Gothic drama, The Mysterious Mother; they were permitted to haunt characters off stage, as well as the imagination of the audience, if not its senses. John Home’s Douglas (1757) does not include a spirit, for example, but its gloomy setting inspires thoughts of the supernatural, and the language of the play does “create an atmosphere into which, in a later decade, genuine phantoms could
stalk without appearing incongruous.” Antecedents of Gothic drama often included ghosts as fodder for visions and dreams, or characters would mistake other living characters for spectres while under the spell of particularly foreboding situations. In The Count of Narbonne, Robert Jephson’s 1781 adaptation of The Castle of Otranto, the playwright removed all genuine supernatural occurrences from Walpole’s original story. Jephson grounded Otranto’s iconic haunted suit of armor in reality by having his young hero dress himself in ordinary armor, only to be mistaken for a ghost.17 McDonald’s Vimonda (1788), Cobb’s The Haunted Tower (1790), Greatheed’s The Regent (1788), North’s The Kentish Barons (1791), and Siddon’s The Sicilian Romance (1794) employ similar schemes by which dramatists could cleverly imbue their works with supernatural flavor, without the undesirable ramifications of writing actual ghostly dramatic action.

Given the popularity of the Gothic novel in the 1790’s, however, it was only a matter of time before ghosts took center stage. The success of Anne Radcliffe’s novels was positively indomitable, and theatrical adaptations were inevitable and highly anticipated. James Boaden was the first to address this demand with Fontainville Forest, based on Radcliffe’s The Romance of the Forest,

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16 Bertrand Evans, Gothic Drama from Walpole to Shelley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1947) 45.

17 Evans 79-83.
which opened at Covent Garden in March of 1794.\textsuperscript{18} One of Radcliffe’s characteristic strategies as a novelist was something she referred to as the “supernatural explain’d,” by which all seemingly paranormal phenomena were eventually revealed to have mundane origins.\textsuperscript{19} Boaden admitted his respect for Radcliffe’s signature approach, which allowed her “to impress the mind with all the terrors of the ideal world” and yet dissolve “all that had excited terror into very common natural appearances.” However, he also wrote that there was “something ungenerous in thus playing upon poor timid human nature, and agonizing it with false terrors.”\textsuperscript{20} James Boaden therefore boldly decided not only to retain Radcliffe’s ghost in his dramatic adaptation, but to allow it to manifest on stage. Bertrand Evans says of this decision that “for the first time, a playwright undertook to out-Gothicize a novelist. The result was a play more elaborately Gothic in its furnishings than any previously acted.”\textsuperscript{21} Critical to the present study, however, even more than the play’s “Gothic furnishings,” was the fact that, from its inception, Boaden’s ghost hinged upon themes of corporeality.

\textsuperscript{18} Evans 122.


\textsuperscript{21} Evans 124.
that were central to the cultural experimentation that permeated this historical moment. “The pen of the dramatic poet,” wrote Boaden, “must turn everything into shape.” 22

Fontainville Forest – James Boaden, 1794

The play is set amidst the dense forests that surround a dilapidated Gothic abbey, in which Lamotte, an exiled man with a mysterious past, has taken up residence with his wife and household servant. Lamotte discovers a distressed young woman, Adeline, in the forest, and decides to shelter her. Secretly Lamotte despairs that poverty is upon his household, and he will soon have no alternative but to resort to robbery. He attempts to burgle a man he encounters the following morning, but this turns out to be the Marquis of Montault, the local lord. Lamotte is foiled when the Marquis’ attendants rush upon the scene, and he flees. When the Marquis tracks Lamotte back to the abbey, his threats to prosecute dissipate at the sight of the beautiful Adeline. The Marquis professes an attraction to her, and promises Lamotte that he will visit her. Thus the Marquis establishes himself as our Gothic villain, while Adeline, of course, is situated as the heroine. The plot thickens in typical Gothic fashion as Louis, the son of Lamotte, suddenly appears to reunite with his parents and also professes

22 Boaden, Kemble 2:97.
love for Adeline. Being a proper product of the Enlightenment, however, she will not entertain premature advances from men. Alone, she discovers a secret room in the abbey, and within, a rusted dagger and tattered text.

Upon his inevitable return, the Marquis seems to profess friendliness to the family, and promises that all will be well with Lamotte if he will support the Marquis’ intentions for Adeline. The lord confesses his feelings to her and asks her to be his, offering riches and fine living, but Adeline rejects him. The Marquis then reveals his true colors, vowing to possess Adeline either by kindness or force.

Reeling from her encounter with the Marquis, Adeline returns to the secret apartment and reads the mysterious manuscript to discover that, years before, the true Marquis, Philip, was abducted and brought to the same “gloomy and rude” chamber in which she now finds herself. Here he was confined and eventually executed. As she reads the disturbing account, penned by the abused Philip himself, a gathering storm adds to the menacing atmosphere. Twice a disembodied voice calls out to Adeline, once to identify the current Marquis as the murderer, and a second time to call out her name. Adeline dismisses the voice, which she attributes first to “fancy,” then to the thunder. When the voice speaks a third time, however, to indicate the spot where the murder was
committed, she cannot deny its objective reality, and a stage direction closes the third act: “The phantom here glides across the dark part of the Chamber, Adeline shrieks, and falls back. The Scene closes upon her.”

“Violent thunder and lightning” shake the abbey at the opening of the fourth act, and as a turret tumbles in the storm, the Marquis is convinced he too sees a phantom, bleeding from a dagger wound. The audience is not privy to this vision, however, and the Marquis soon dismisses it as an illusion, attributing it to his imagination. Adeline is able to smuggle the incriminating manuscript away from the abbey in Louis’ capable hands before the Marquis again approaches her, this time proposing marriage. She refuses more emphatically than before, and the murderous Marquis moves in to claim her by force. He balks upon seeing a portrait on the locket she wears, recognizing it as his own sister-in-law. When Adeline reveals the likeness to be of her mother, the Marquis’ murder of his own brother and usurpation of his title is laid bare, as is Adeline’s true heritage. Lamotte refuses the Marquis’ order to kill Adeline, and ultimately a minister of justice arrives on the scene from Paris with the incriminating evidence against the false Marquis. Foiled, the Marquis takes his own life; Lamotte is pardoned, Louis and Adeline are united in love, and the young heroine’s hereditary rights are restored.

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23 Boaden, Fontainville Forest 40.
Thomas Harris, manager of Covent Garden at the time of its writing, accepted *Fontainville Forest* immediately, but developed serious reservations about the ghost scene during rehearsals. He asked Boaden to consider omitting the ghost or embracing Anne Radcliffe’s trope of giving it a rational explanation. Boaden refused these terms, but was persuaded to excise much of the dialogue from the scene, so that the spirit uttered but a few words. He was convinced that the failures of previous theatrical attempts to realize ghosts were due to ineffective stage techniques, and so became obsessed with creating a believable spectral presence. Boaden’s inspiration for his ghost came from Henry Fuseli’s famous 1789 painting *Hamlet and His Father’s Ghost*. The corporeality of Hamlet’s wraith in Fuseli’s work spoke to the aesthetic Boaden sought to recreate on stage: “It has what seems person, invested in what seems to be armor; it bears the regal scepter; its countenance is human in its lineaments, though it inspires more awe than mere humanity can excite.” Because of the acuteness of the vision he had for his phantom, Boaden became involved in the rehearsal process and the collaborative effort to conjure it. He knew the key was to strike a balance between absence and presence. He sought to avoid what he perceived as the

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24 Evans 132.


“heavy, bulky, creaking substantiality” of ghosts he had seen in productions of *Hamlet*, insisting that it “should look as if it was collected from surrounding air, and ready, when its impression should be made, to melt into ‘thin air’ again.”

Covent Garden’s James Thompson was originally cast as Fontainville’s ghost, and while Harris seemed pleased with the development of the critical scene, Boaden was less than satisfied. The bulky actor was outfitted in the ghost armor from *Hamlet* and wrapped in a crepe, but the lumbering overall effect did not accord with Boaden’s vision. At Boaden’s behest, Thompson was replaced by John Follet, Jr., an actor celebrated for his powerful, muscular physique, which allowed him to perform astonishing feats of acrobatics. Follet had established himself in the 1790’s as the “go-to” performer for “harlequin, pierrot, clown, scaramouche, singing, dancing, miming, and mastering the latest tricks furnished by the devisers of pantomime.” His comparatively tall frame and physical prowess – in other words, his corporeality – won Boaden’s approval and was instrumental in effectively manifesting the ghost. Follet was dressed in a tight-fitting, “dark blue grey stuff, made in the shape of armor.” A screen was constructed in front of the site of the visitation and draped with gauze. James


28 Reno 95.


30 Cohan xv.
Thompson’s services were partially retained, as he provided the spectre’s voice from off stage. Boaden himself best describes the striking final effect:

…and when Follet was thus dressed, and faintly visible behind the gauze or crepe spread before the scene, the whisper of the house, as he was about to enter, - the breathless silence, while he floated along like a shadow, - proved to me, that I had achieved the great desideratum; and the often renewed plaudits, when the curtain fell, told me that the audience had enjoyed “that sacred terror, that severe delight”…for which alone it is excusable to overpass the ordinary limits of nature.\(^{31}\)

The play was a success among the public. Revivals of *Fontainville Forest* over the next two seasons complemented its initial, admirable run of twelve performances.\(^{32}\) The ghost became a major attraction for thrilled audiences, although critics predictably deviated from popular sentiment. Literary historian John Genest wrote that the appearance of the apparition rendered the entire third act “contemptible.”\(^{33}\) Writers from the *Analytical Review* and the *Monthly Review* similarly adhered to standard critical reception of ghosts on stage, rejecting the ghost for its literal reality. Robert Reno describes a 1798 article in the *Analytical Review* in which a writer outlines criteria by which to legitimize theatrical ghosts.

\(^{31}\) Boaden, *Kemble* 2:119

\(^{32}\) Cohan xv.

\(^{33}\) Cohan xv.
One of these is the contention that ghosts may not simply be utilized to enhance a frightening atmosphere, but must advance the plot or contribute to a play’s dramatic action directly. These critical positions are typical in that they do not allow for a symbolic or psychological interpretation of Gothic ghosts, and therefore misinterpret, in my opinion, the intentions of playwrights like Boaden.

While Boaden clearly intended his audience to see and hear the ghost’s presence on stage, Philip’s spirit, like its Gothic forebears, remains essentially outside the dramatic action. The circumstances of Philip’s usurpation and death may be central to Fontainville Forest’s backstory, but within the confines of the play proper, his revenant – and Adeline’s sighting of it – do not have a true bearing on the plot. Consider the same scene without Philip’s apparition: during a violent thunderstorm, Adeline shares a dismal environment with the insidious Marquis, who is perhaps a rapist, and in a moment of delirium discovers that he murdered his own brother, within the same walls, no less. This discovery, even without a ghost, still serves as the climactic moment for the play. While the ghost may not be necessary to the plot, this does not mean it is inconsequential. Boaden could have chosen to have Adeline dismiss the apparition as fancy, but he did not. We know the ghost to be that of Adeline’s father, yet she does not recognize it as such because she never met her father. Therefore she is experiencing the objective reality of the ghost and not a memory. As seemingly

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34 Reno 102.
marginal as the ghost may be in terms of the plot, its purpose is not merely to accentuate the horror of the mood, or Boaden would not have chosen to write it as a literal spirit. I submit that the fact that Boaden insisted on a real ghost, but one that would not have been necessary to tell the story, signals to his audience to pay attention to the role the ghost does play. The scheming Marquis momentarily believes he sees a phantom at the beginning of the fourth act, bleeding from a stab wound. The audience does not see this apparition, however, and the Marquis soon dismisses it, but the fact that he all but identifies it as his brother indicates that Philip’s ghost has the ability not only to manifest, but also to haunt as memory. This in itself is an innovation on Boaden’s part that scholarship has scarcely addressed. According to Alice Rayner, ghosts, like the theatre, have no immediate consequence. But if the theatre is a memory machine and Boaden is handling a culture of ghosts, then perhaps he is experimenting with endowing cultural memory with its own affect.

Boaden anticipated the critical reception of Fontainville Forest’s ghost and preemptively addressed it in the play’s epilogue, which was composed to be read by Elizabeth Pope, who played Adeline. Referring to Boaden, the opening stanza echoes hesitations about the playwright’s decision to include a ghost,

35 Alice Rayner, Ghosts Death’s Double the Phenomenology of Theatre (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).
asking whether late eighteenth-century audiences will accept one in a play not by Shakespeare:

Our vent’rous bard has often heard me say –

Think you, our friends, one modern ghost will see,

Unless, indeed, of Hamlet’s pedigree:

Know you not, Shakespeare’s petrifying pow’r

Commands alone the horror-giving hour?

The second stanza, which is Boaden’s response, extols Shakespeare in a resplendent eulogy. The third stanza continues the dialogue, first with Mrs. Pope:

You mean to sanction then your own pale sprite,

By his ‘that did usurp this time of night:’

“I do, he answer’d, and I beg you’ll spare

“My injur’d phantom ev’ry red-sea pray’r:

“Why should your terror lay my proudest boast,

“Madam I die, if I give up the ghost.”36

Boaden, who deeply revered Shakespeare, claims legitimacy for his “pale sprite” by identifying it as stemming from the tradition of Shakespeare’s ghosts. This may seem innocuous to modern readers, but Boaden wrote in a time when even the propriety of Shakespeare’s ghosts on stage was called into question. John

36 Boaden, Fontainville Forest, epilogue.
Philip Kemble’s 1794 production of *Macbeth* at Drury Lane, for example, famously omitted Banquo’s ghost, a choice that was highly praised by critics, even if audiences seemed unsatisfied with the less than spectacular result. By boldly connecting his ghost with those of Shakespeare, Boaden was subtly asserting his own considerable ambitions as a dramatist, striving for a measure of respect within the body of British literature. Calling the ghost his “proudest boast,” Boaden begs “red-sea pray’rs,” expressing his hope that ghosts other than Shakespeare’s alone will be permitted to cross the line of acceptable dramaturgy. He is not only aligning his ghosts with Shakespeare’s, but himself with the Bard.

Further evidence for this assertion lies in the fact that he was also responding to the literary trope perfected by Anne Radcliffe, by which the presence of ghosts is explained rationally. This too was an audacious decision, given that *Fontainville Forest* was an adaptation of one of Radcliffe’s immensely popular novels, *The Romance of the Forest*. As a result of this decision, Boaden’s ghost is *ghosting* Radcliffe’s ghosts; it is invoking the idea of the “supernatural explain’d” without imitating it. Therefore, by simultaneously recalling Shakespeare and Radcliffe – both the time-tested and the trendy – Boaden’s ghost is representative of the body of British supernatural literature, even as Boaden sought a place within it.

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37 Reno 97.
To begin to decipher the politics encoded within *Fontainville Forest*, one need look no further than Boaden’s prologue to the play, part of which reads:

Caught from the Gothic treasures of Romance,
He frames his work, and lays the scene in France.
The word, I see, alarms – it vibrates here,
And feeling marks its impulse with a tear.
It brings to thought a people once refin’d,
Who led supreme the manners of mankind;
Depraved by cruelty, by pride inflam’d,
By traitors madden’d, and by sophists sham’d.
Crushing that freedom, which, with gentle sway,
Courted their revolution’s infant day,
‘Ere giant vanity, with impious hand,
Assail’d the sacred Temples of the Land.\(^3\)

That these sentiments were inspired by the French Revolution is obvious and not a new observation. Scholar Jeffrey Cox offers suppositions as to Boaden’s motivations for affixing such politically charged ideas to the prelude of his piece. Since the Licenser of Plays would have banned any play that dealt directly with contemporary events in France or engaged revolutionary principles, and given that his play is set in France, it may be that Boaden simply wanted to address

\(^{38}\) Boaden, *Fontainville Forest*, prologue.
these concerns in a forthright way, or “to appeal to the patriotic sentiment of his audience in the early days of England’s war with France.” Cox contends that Fontainville Forest criticizes the ancien regime, and that Boaden is trying to contain the play’s radical potential at its onset. However, Cox fails to consider the role of the ghost in this reading of Boaden’s politics. The document discovered and read by Adeline indicates that Philip, the rightful Marquis, was abducted, imprisoned, and executed. Philip’s authority was usurped by one who was not morally prepared to satisfy the responsibilities he seized, and so is corrupted by newfound power. Furthermore, the rightful Marquis was killed by his brother. This usurpation and murder can be read as a metaphor for the French Revolution. The traditional regime was forcibly removed, the corpus of its authority was left to languish before being executed outright, and it was replaced by a new authority, one unused to power, and one perhaps seemingly incapable of governing properly. As Boaden puts it in his prologue:

The regal source of order, once destroy’d,

Anarchy made the fair creation void.

This “void” is occupied in the play by Philip’s ghost, a “regal source of order” that has been reduced to a memory.

One of Jeffrey Cox’s principal tenets is that the French Revolution is reflected in Gothic drama through themes of movement from spaces of

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confinement to spaces of liberation. This is undeniable in many Gothic plays, such as *The Castle Spectre*, which will be analyzed below. But there is a distinct lack of themes of confinement in *Fontainville Forest*. Lamotte and his household are taking refuge in a ruined abbey, one at least partially open to the elements. Adeline is a willing recipient of Lamotte’s hospitality, not a prisoner, one who is free to leave of her own volition. I interpret this as a valorization of traditional constructs of power; political bodies need not be confining, Boaden suggests, but can be sanctuaries, shelters from the unruliness of the world beyond national borders. The Marquis, in this light, becomes the revolutionary, violent and immoral. Philip’s ghost, then, as a representation of a murdered political body, however powerful he may seem, is of a benign disposition, reaching out to a living body to warn of sharing a similar fate. Boaden’s ghost is post-revolutionary France cautioning Britain against entertaining any errant revolutionary notions.

Boaden appreciated the symbiotic relationship between politics and the theatre, writing, “The present was the age of revolutions. The most surprising events had occurred on the stage of real life, and the mime world followed.” In addition to being the year of *Fontainville Forest*’s writing, 1794 marked the treason trials, a political witch hunt that stemmed from the British government’s paranoia of revolutionary inclinations, whereby even authors, publishers, and

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40 Quoted in Cox, “English Gothic Theatre” 134.
booksellers could be targeted and tried for “seditious libel.” In the context of this charged political climate, Boaden’s attempts to depict himself as staunchly British make sense; his prologue, therefore, which distanced him from revolutionary notions, and in particular his ghost, representative of traditional political bodies, served him well in this regard.

The Castle Spectre – Matthew Gregory Lewis, 1797

Matthew Gregory “Monk” Lewis is perhaps the most important figure in Gothic drama and certainly among the most critical purveyors of the Gothic in general. His novel The Monk is the quintessential Gothic novel, just as his Castle Spectre represents the pinnacle of the Gothic’s popularity on stage. In an era when a typical theatrical production ran for a week or ten days in the patent theatres, The Castle Spectre reached a stunning forty-seven performances in its initial run alone, and remained in the repertoire throughout the nineteenth century. Its signature component, the main attraction for frenzied audiences, is its female ghost, who manifests not once, but twice during the course of the play.

Lewis originally set out to write a romance in the vein of Anne Radcliffe’s The Mysteries of Udolpho, but decided to dramatize the text in 1797, and the final result clearly reflects the influence of Walpole, Radcliffe, and German dramas he

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had experienced while traveling abroad; as Evans phrases it, Lewis attempted to “out-Gothicize” them all.\textsuperscript{42} The Castle Spectre’s popularity can be ascribed in part to the fact that Lewis made no pretense of adhering to high literary standards – although too little has been made of the richness of his language – but instead catered to an audience that was beginning to value spectacle over literary merit. The play made bolder use of Gothic elements than any had before: the conspicuous ghost was vividly realized with the aid of striking technical effects. Fully orchestrated music accompanied the changing moods and action of the piece, heralding the advent of melodrama. In fact, so successful was The Castle Spectre that it elevated Gothic drama as a whole to a popular status on par with the Gothic novel. The play went through seven print editions within a year of its premiere, eleven by 1803, and was adapted into a prose novel by Sarah Wilkinson in 1829; though Lewis is most identified with The Monk, The Castle Spectre was in fact the more popular work at the time.\textsuperscript{43}

The success of The Castle Spectre convinced Lewis to write several other plays, and emboldened him to continue to innovate in ways that greatly contributed to the development of Gothic drama. His Adelmorn, the Outlaw continued Lewis’ practice of writing spectacle for the stage, and for the first time cursed the hero with a tortured past instead of the villain. The Captive, a one-act

\textsuperscript{42} Evans 177.

\textsuperscript{43} Evans 177.
monodrama, is an undervalued early representative of feminist theatre. Lewis’ *Timour the Tartar* called for spectacle on a tremendous scale, thrilling audiences with actual floods and burning forests on stage. As Cox points out, Lewis provided London theatres with a steady stream of plays for ten years in a variety of genres that included tragedy, melodrama, comedy, and farce, as well as translations and adaptations.\(^4^4\) Perhaps his most singular trait as a writer of Gothic drama was a device by which he would continually promise the spectacular, the dangerous, and the horrific, only to withhold them each time. The result of this restraint was a house full of spectators on the edge of their seats, so that when Lewis did deliver extraordinary moments, they left a resounding impact. This technique saturates *The Castle Spectre*.

The play opens with Percy, the aristocratic and typically ineffectual Gothic hero, disclosing that he has been courting a lovely peasant girl, Angela (our heroine), while disguised as a peasant himself (“Edwy, the low-born and the poor”). On this particular morning, however, Percy arrives to woo Angela only to find that she has been abruptly ushered away from her cottage by the same individual who deposited her there sixteen years earlier. Percy tracks her to Conway Castle, ruled by the mysterious and gloomy Earl Osmond. Osmond’s brother, sister-in-law, and their infant daughter had been the previous owners of the castle, but were mysteriously slaughtered when Osmond became Earl. Some

strange secret seems to gnaw at Osmond, which identifies him as the Gothic
villain. Osmond leaves little room for suspicion when he appears at the
beginning of the second act: believing himself alone, he recalls with anguish how
he murdered his own brother, Reginald, and his brother’s wife, Evelina, when
she did not reciprocate his passion for her. The only balm for his afflicted soul is
now the beautiful Angela, whom he pursues aggressively. She spurns his
advances, of course, and only Percy’s timely intervention saves Angela from
Osmond’s wrath. Percy is tossed in the dungeon, and a bumbling priest takes it
upon himself to lead Angela to safety through the labyrinthine castle.

In the course of her prolonged escape, Angela learns that Osmond’s
brother, Reginald, is still alive and languishing in a secret chamber of the castle,
unbeknownst to Osmond. Furthermore, Angela is told that she is Reginald’s
daughter and not a peasant at all. Plotting to free her father, Angela prostrates
herself before a portrait of her mother and prays to her for aid. In reply, a
disembodied voice offers her comfort in the form of a lullaby. The ensuing stage
direction describes one of the most memorable moments in all of Gothic drama:

The folding doors unclose, and the Oratory is seen illuminated. In
its centre, stands a tall female figure, her white and flowing
garments spotted with blood; her veil is thrown back, and
discovers a pale and melancholy countenance; her eyes are lifted
upwards, her arms extended towards heaven, and a large wound
appears upon her bosom. Angela sinks upon her knees, with her eyes riveted upon the figure, which, for some moments, remains motionless. At length, the Spectre advances slowly to a soft and plaintive strain; she stops opposite Reginald’s picture, and gazes upon it in silence. She then turns, approaches Angela, seems to invoke a blessing upon her, points to the picture, and retires to the Oratory. The music ceases. Angela rises with a wild look, and follows the Vision, extending her arms toward it.

Angela begs the spirit to stay another moment.

The Spectre waves her hand, as bidding farewell. Instantly the organ’s swell is heard; a full chorus of female voices chaunt ‘Jubilate!’ a blaze of light flashes through the oratory, and the folding doors close with a loud noise.45

Angela faints, closing the penultimate act.

She eventually finds and frees her father in the fifth act, but their escape is foiled by Osmond, who demands that his brother force Angela to marry him. When Reginald refuses, Osmond prepares to run him through, but Evelina’s ghost again enters the scene and “throws herself between them.” Osmond starts at the sight of the phantom, and Angela takes advantage of this hesitation by plunging her dagger into Osmond. “The Ghost vanishes in a flash of fire, and a

loud clap of thunder is heard.”  At this moment, just after the danger has passed, Percy, the hero, enters. He managed to escape imprisonment by leaping from his tower cell, and though he was able to assemble a small army at the gates of the castle, decided to wait outside for Angela to escape on her own. Now seeing no other course of action to pursue, he promptly asks Reginald for her hand in marriage. Perhaps not surprisingly, Reginald evades the request, and closes the play by ruminating on the hope one garners from religious faith.

Like that in Fontainville Forest at Covent Garden three years prior, the ghost scene in The Castle Spectre met with resistance from its producers at Drury Lane. John Philip Kemble, who played Percy, and Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Drury Lane’s manager, did not find much redeeming value in the play as a whole, and Lewis’ oft-quoted lament for Evelina’s ghost, published in the second edition of the play, is worth repeating: “The Friends to whom I read my Drama, the Managers to whom I presented it, the Actors who were to perform it – all combined to persecute my Spectre, and requested me to confine my ghost to the Green-Room.” Perhaps the theatre managers’ fears were justified; Lewis had boldly scripted the literal reality of his spectre in the world of the play as few had done before. Unlike Boaden’s ghost in Fontainville Forest, Lewis’ Evelina distinguished herself by directly impacting the dramatic action of the play.

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46 Lewis, Castle Spectre 219.

47 Quoted in Reno, 100-101.
While her first appearance could conceivably be regarded as nothing more than Angela’s anguished delusion, the ghost’s final appearance is, presumably, witnessed by all characters present. Lewis insisted on the ghost’s inclusion in the production, and his faith was well founded. Actress Jane Powell became famous for playing the role of the disembodied Evelina, and the play was, of course, a popular sensation, earning over fifteen thousand pounds at the box office in its first season alone.48

As one might expect, critics lambasted the play, its ghost scenes in particular. John Genest once again wrote that the spectre rendered the entire play “contemptible,” and this was not an uncommon response.49 A major critical campaign erupted in reaction to the play, whose vanguard was the underlying conceit that ghosts were inappropriate for the stage and the reading closet, because they were “exploded superstitions forbidden by the Church of England, and to be laughed at by the enlightened.”50 Lewis addressed this line of criticism in a note to the reader he wrote for the second published edition of the play, arguing that the fact that many did not believe in the existence of ghosts “is the very reason why she may be produced without danger, for there is now no fear of increasing the influence of superstition, or strengthening the prejudices of the

48 Reno 101.


50 Gamer 52-53.
weak-minded.” Like Boaden, Lewis was capable of recognizing the potential for ghosts as encoded signifiers, and I will demonstrate that we can derive meaning from the corporeality of Evelina’s apparition at every level.

Without claiming so high a pedigree as Shakespeare, Lewis’ spectre, like Boaden’s, nonetheless recalls the body of British supernatural literature, albeit of a particular sort. Evelina’s apparition is bleeding from her breast, just like the infamous Bleeding Nun character from The Monk. Lewis had been acquainted with notoriety since the publication in 1796 of his novel, which, although a sensation, was perceived by many as morally degenerate. Conservative reviewers cited The Monk as “proof that the Gothic was blasphemous, licentious, and ideologically suspect.” In addition, frequent accusations of plagiarism, many of which Lewis admitted to, only propagated his reputation. In a sense, Lewis guaranteed the commercial success of The Castle Spectre by programming his notoriety as an author upon the ghost of Evelina. The powerful image of the apparition bleeding from the breast ghosted the Bleeding Nun from The Monk, and by extension, the infamy of the Lewis literary “brand.” In this way, Lewis not only demonstrated his marketing savvy, but also his command of the

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51 Quoted in Reno, 102.

52 Jeffrey Cox, “English Gothic Theatre” 139.
changing nature of the London theatre; sensation and spectacle were in demand, not poetry. It was this understanding that enabled his works to dominate the stage in the first decade of the nineteenth century.

Much has been written on the politics Lewis embedded in *The Monk*, from its anti-Catholic proclivities to its undeniable parallels with the French Revolution. Political analogues can also be drawn to *The Castle Spectre*, particularly, I would argue, with regard to the ghost of Evelina. Lewis had firsthand experience with the French Revolution, having travelled to Paris in 1791, and having served as a diplomat in The Hague three years later. In Holland, Lewis became acquainted with the “Terror narratives,” literature published and circulated by French exiles that was intended to outline the horrors of the French Revolution. These writings were concerned with conveying the atrocities visited upon French aristocrats, including the dungeons in which they were imprisoned and the humiliations they suffered during incarceration. Graphic accounts of death sentences as carried out by mass executions and the swath of the guillotine were also circulated. In The Hague, Lewis was tasked with assembling information on the French, and would have had easy access to these reports. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that themes of violence and imprisonment closely resembling these accounts found their way

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53 Ellis 82.

54 Ellis 104.
into *The Castle Spectre*. In addition, Lewis became personally acquainted with exiled members of the French aristocracy in Holland, and one can read the ghost of Evelina as a body in exile. The character is an aristocrat whose authority has been usurped, and whose physical displacement – death – threatens to dislodge her identity. She is an absent body in that she no longer occupies her former political or corporeal space, yet her conscious presence is undeniable: she can process information and communicate, albeit nonverbally. Her momentary acknowledgement of her husband’s portrait indicates that she is haunted by memory, even as she haunts others as a memory. These characteristics apply, in essence, to exiled representatives of the *ancien régime* Lewis encountered in Holland. Geographically displaced and bereft of their former station, its members were nonetheless capable of communicating and educating others about their experiences. Evelina interjects herself at a critical juncture in the play’s fifth act, allowing Angela to save herself from a grisly death at the hands of Osmond: a spectralized memory was Angela’s salvation. Displaced exiles, from Lewis’ perspective, similarly interjected memories, in the form of propagated Terror narratives, to warn of the ramifications of revolutionary activity.

Unlike James Boaden, Lewis was less concerned with exhibiting his own patriotism than with exploiting the complexities of Revolutionary anxieties in Britain. While cautioning audiences on the dangers of revolution, as described
above, Lewis simultaneously designed his ghost to invoke the very iconography of the French republic itself. This emerging political body “identified itself through female representations which routinely...exposed a bare breast – an allegory from the Roman goddess of liberty.”\textsuperscript{55} While Lewis does not expose Evelina’s breast on stage, he does call for her blood – life – to flow from her bosom, inviting the same notions of fecundity and generosity that were intended by the French icon.

There was an erotic component to this image as well, which Lewis embraced. For the emerging French republic, the bared breast was an object of desire, just as liberty was something to be desired.\textsuperscript{56} Aries notes that, in the late eighteenth century, death and violence began to merge with sensuality and desire in an aesthetic that would one day be referred to as sadism.\textsuperscript{57} Thus Osmond in \textit{The Castle Spectre} has conflated the violence he perpetrated on Evelina with his desire for her, and her apparition in the final moments of the play represents an idealized spectralization, an objectification, of the real woman he once knew. Paula Backscheider writes that the Gothic villain’s conception of victory depends on the sexual possession of the heroine.\textsuperscript{58} In the case of \textit{The Castle Spectre}, of course, Osmond’s desire for Angela is an unresolved, displaced

\textsuperscript{55} Ellis 93.

\textsuperscript{56} Ellis 94.

\textsuperscript{57} Aries 270.

\textsuperscript{58} Backscheider 195.
yearning for Evelina. Their final encounter becomes a confrontation between eye and breast, a recurring theme in climactic scenes on the Gothic stage, according to Backscheider, representing a blending of intended violence, passion, and possession on the part of the villain.\(^{59}\) Osmond’s eye takes aim at Angela’s breast, his target, upon which is superimposed the already bloodied breast of his former victim, Evelina, when she comes between the two. Osmond’s attempt at possessing Angela is foiled by the jarring, spectralized memory of a previous attempt of masculine “possession” of female property, which overwhelms him.

It is reasonable to read Lewis’ writing of a disembodied woman as a meditation on the uncertainty of the role of women in general during this period. Biological discoveries of sexual difference in the late eighteenth century were being circulated in defense of the traditional system of social inequality between men and women.\(^{60}\) At the same time, Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Women* and similar literature was beginning to permeate the consciousness, and there is evidence that Lewis was inclined toward this latter perspective. Lewis’ 1798 Gothic monodrama *The Captive*, concerning a woman wrongfully incarcerated by her husband in a dungeon-like mental institution, despite being perfectly sane, is an emphatic indictment of the subjugation of women in eighteenth-century society. *The Captive* is a far more acute, although

\(^{59}\) Backscheider 195.

no less powerful demonstration of the feminist sensibility Lewis first experimented with in *The Castle Spectre*. As a ghost, Evelina cannot speak directly to other characters, suggesting that she has no voice. Though she is able to contribute to the dramatic action of the play, she can assert herself in appearance only and is unable to interact with the material world in any true sense. She is deprived of agency, and acts only by influencing the actions of others. While it may appear that she has the ability to protect her family, given that she guides and assists Angela, in fact she does not directly intervene. This is odd, considering that her corporeality is not ambiguous. She leans over her daughter and offers a blessing, bleeding from her breast all the while in a stylized illustration of maternal nurturing. Despite all of her apparent spiritual power, she remains powerless. This reflects Drew Leder’s notion of social dysappearance, the incorporation of the alien gaze, “away, apart, asunder, from one’s own,” which renders the other, in this case the female, as the powerless subject of the male gaze.61 A similar model of a female situated in a patriarchal system is masterfully explored further in the next play to be considered.

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The Phantom – Joanna Baillie, 1836

Jeffrey Cox writes that Joanna Baillie was nothing less than the “most respected and arguably most important playwright in England” for a period of over fifty years, from 1798 to 1851.62 She wrote some twenty-six plays, seven of which were produced in her lifetime, and her signature Plays on the Passions have continued to be published extensively. Cox’s esteem for Baillie stems primarily from the fact that she was much admired by writers and dramatists of her day, those belonging to the Romantic movement in particular.63 Though she has been largely overlooked in the ensuing two centuries, recent scholarship has finally begun to recognize Baillie’s ideas on theatre, gender, and psychology amid the rediscovery of female Romantic writers and dramatists.64 Baillie was a prolific theorist as well as playwright, who believed that theatre should edify its audience. Her philosophy, “sympathetick curiosity (sic),” was based on the notion that individuals can learn from the mistakes of fictional characters who allow passions to dominate their decisions.65 Her Plays on the Passions were programmed to anatomize emotion, and thus favored character psychology over the spectacular conventions of the Gothic stage. Productions of her works were

62 Cox, Introduction, Seven Gothic Dramas 50.

63 Cox, Introduction, Seven Gothic Dramas 51.


65 Colón xxi.
therefore less commercially successful than were those of many of her contemporaries, such as Matthew Gregory Lewis. *The Phantom* is a unique example of Gothic drama, in that is free of the spectacle, machinery, and recycled contrivances that caused the genre to stagnate in its waning years. Published in her second volume of *Dramas* in 1836, although perhaps written much earlier, this two-act “musical drama” was not intended for the stage, and did not receive a production in the nineteenth century. It is nonetheless worthy of critical attention and is useful to the present study.

Set in Scotland, the play opens with Allen, a highlander, arriving late to a wedding, complaining that a local witch magically immobilized his horse, forcing him to make the journey on foot. Meanwhile, the local lord, Dunarden, discusses his son, Malcolm, with his daughter, Marian. Dunarden suspects his son’s frequent visits to Glasgow involve a secret lover, which is a most disagreeable prospect to the lord, who insists that Malcolm marry nobility. Alice and Claude, children of the Provost of Glasgow, arrive at Dunarden’s manor and are welcomed as guests. In addition to praising the beauty of the highland landscape, Alice almost immediately reveals a compulsive tendency to extol the unmatched feminine grace of her dearest friend in Glasgow, Emma Graham:

Whose beauty changes every other face
To an unnoticed blank; whose native grace
Turns dames of courtly guise to household damsels;
Whose voice of winning sweetness makes the tones

Of every other voice intruding harshness.\textsuperscript{66}

Alice soon receives a letter from Emma, who reports that a terrible fever has erupted in Glasgow, devastating the population. Malcolm nearly trumpets his own feelings for Emma by taking an unnaturally enthusiastic interest in the letter. A feast ensues as the wedding celebration arrives at the manor, and Malcolm, who is expected to dance with Alice—a suitable matrimonial prospect for him—all but shuns her, further suggesting that his heart is elsewhere invested. Marian and Claude dance together a great deal, and while they would seem to make a suitable union to ensure the future of their households, it is secretly whispered otherwise. Marian, though still young, is already a widow and older than Claude; it is implied that he must find a better match.

While preparing for bed that evening, a lone Alice concedes that Malcolm is probably in love with Emma. No sooner does the thought escape her lips than Emma herself enters the room. Startled, Alice’s excitement over seeing her friend is quickly curtailed upon realizing that something is amiss. Wondering at Emma’s face of “ghastly paleness” and her incredible distance from home, Alice almost intuitively asks, “Art thou alive?” Emma, who is referred to in the text as “Phantom,” reveals that she is, in fact, dead, and wanted to see her friend one last time before passing into eternity. She entrusts Alice with an important task:

\textsuperscript{66} Joanna Baillie, \textit{Six Gothic Dramas: De Monfort; Orra; The Dream; The Family Legend; The Phantom; Witchcraft}, ed., Christine A. Colón (Chicago: Valancourt, 2007) 291.
The room in which I died, hath a recess
Conceal’d behind the arras, long disused
And now forgotten; in it stands a casket,
The clam shell of our house is traced upon it;
Open, and read the paper therein lodged.
When my poor body is to earth committed,
Do this without delay. And now, farewell!67

As the phantom disappears, “From sin, and fear, and doubt, released for ever,”
Alice swoons. Awakening in the midst of her loved ones, she incoherently
relates her vision. Malcolm immediately assumes that Alice must have seen
none other than Emma’s ghost, and departs immediately for Glasgow to
ascertain the truth.

At the opening of the second act, Claude, Alice, and Marian arrive in
Glasgow in the midst of the funeral procession for Emma. The entire community
mourns her loss and universally praises her virtuous nature. Malcolm, in the
throes of grief, mourns alone at Emma’s grave, fully disclosing his feelings for
Emma and begging somehow to receive word from her departed soul that she
reciprocated his love. To complicate matters, Claude reveals that he too had
been in love with Emma. Encountering one another in the cemetery, the friends
quarrel over who loved Emma more, nearly coming to blows before they are

67 Baillie 305.
separated. They are reminded to report to Emma’s apartment for the unveiling of the secret item Alice was instructed to locate by Emma’s ghost. With a large group of relatives and friends gathered in Emma’s room, the mysterious object is discovered to be a certificate of betrothal between Emma and Basil Gordon: a member of a rival household, a Catholic, and a Highlander, a man of lower social station. Beautiful, virtuous Emma, it turns out, had a will of her own, and planned to marry a man for love, one who defied every quality she was expected to seek in a husband. Malcolm and Claude forgive their differences as the assembled company learns of a final irony: Basil Gordon covertly wooed Emma even in her final days, caring for her during her illness, and ultimately contracting the deadly fever himself. A bell tolls as the curtain falls, and word arrives that it is Basil Gordon’s death knell.

Joanna Baillie’s enthrallment with ghosts began in childhood, but as a playwright she developed a keen appreciation of their usefulness as a tool for pursuing her philosophy of theatre. In her “Introductory Discourse,” Baillie writes of the fascination people have with watching others endure horrific events to observe how they will respond. Baillie writes that the most extreme form of this voyeuristic tendency involves observing the human mind “holding intercourse, real or imaginary, with the world of spirits: of finding itself alone with a being terrific and awful, whose nature and power are unknown…”68

68 Quoted in Colón, xxiii.
Gothic drama, writes Christine Colón, provides a perfect medium for Baillie to “enact her theories of moral reform by combining the audience’s fascination with terror and interest in the workings of the mind.”  

Baillie had used ghosts before *The Phantom*, but typically in the Radcliffean manner of having them prove nothing more than products of characters’ own minds. However, in *The Phantom*, Baillie establishes within the first few lines that the play takes place in a world in which the supernatural is an everyday reality; recall Allen the Highlander’s account of a run-in with the local witch that leaves his sorry horse cursed. With doubts of the ghost’s authenticity thus dispelled, like Evelina in *The Castle Spectre*, Baillie is free to use her disembodied Emma to make a statement about the role of women in the early nineteenth century.

Terry Castle’s concept of spectralized memory is useful in interpreting Emma’s phantom. With the spectralization of memory and imagination that emerged in the late eighteenth century, argues Castle, comes the process by which an individual creates living mental images of others that become more real and meaningful than the true person. Eventually the other ceases to matter as an actual individual and is wholly replaced in the mind by the spectralized

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69 Colón xxiv.

70 Michael Gamer writes that Baillie took this device to a new level by “making the mind the sole source of Gothic effects, rather than having her characters misinterpret ambiguous stimuli outside of themselves.” See Gamer, “National Supernaturalism: Joanna Baillie, Germany, and the Gothic Drama,” *Theatre Survey* 38.2 (1997): 57.
construct. Emma is a victim of this process, a *spectralized other*. Everyone in Emma’s life idealizes her: women prize her friendship and idolize her feminine grace; authority figures and community members praise her virtuous behaviour; men, of course, worship her. These parties also heap their idealized expectations upon the real woman. Malcolm and Claude each elevate Emma to the status of a goddess in their minds, and each assumes that the real Emma will comply with their matrimonial aspirations. Emma’s father likewise has specific designs for his daughter’s future, all of which revolve around the continued survival of his lineage and household. No one, not even her dearest female friends, deign to ask after Emma’s true thoughts or feelings. This deepens the irony of the ultimate revelation of Emma’s agency, the fact that she had already chosen a path based on love, involving a future husband who does not represent an acceptable or even logical selection.

Furthermore, after her death, Emma appears to Alice as a ghost, charging her to retrieve her secret betrothal document. This instruction is striking, considering that Emma’s ghost could just as easily have told Alice the truth of her betrothal, rather than send her on a quest for the hidden document. Even after death, Emma is compelled to provide physical evidence of her feelings and intentions in order to be heard. This implies the troubling possibility that, had she chosen to manifest before her father and reveal the truth to him, he may not

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71 Castle, *Spectralization* 249.
have believed or listened to her, even in her luminal glory. Consider too that if Emma’s ghost had simply told Alice the truth, there is a chance that Alice – a woman – would not have been believed when relaying the news to others. These observations invite us to consider that women had little faith in their own individual voices during this period.

Ignorance of the reality of the spectralized other is magnified when the other is female and subject to a patriarchal system of social order. The king is the father of a nation according to the rules of such a system, and the father is the lord of the family. Emma is a victim of this patriarchy, even in death, and thus *The Phantom* becomes an exploration of how a woman acts independently in a society that does not offer her “agency, freedom of movement and liberty of sexual choice.” Under this scheme, in which the female body is reduced to an object of male social advancement, there emerges the very real danger of what Mary Wollstonecraft described as being “Bastilled in marriage.” A woman’s own body becomes her prison, her inescapable dungeon, her personal Gothic horror, even as her individuality becomes lost or idealized as the subject of the male gaze. Accompanying the reevaluation of the status of women in this period were new societal constructs of femininity, reinforced and widely available in the form of conduct books. A complex system of “emotional signifiers such as tears,

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72 Ellis 52.

blushes, and swooning” required a woman to use her body as a “signifying surface.” Emma, as a disembodied spirit, is liberated from this lexicon of sensibility. Baillie describes her phantom as remaining still during her manifestation before Alice, and so her voice and will alone are heard. Emma Graham has escaped from the prison of her body, is no longer subject to the “Bastille” of marriage, and has found a voice, only at the cost of her very life.

As this chapter has demonstrated, ghosts on the Gothic stage emerged from a culture of ghosts, an experimental atmosphere that resulted from changing perceptions of death and the ensuing spectralization of memory beginning in the late eighteenth century. Playwrights exploited this atmosphere to probe corporeal anxieties that characterized the period. First, as a memory machine, the theatre enabled ghosts to represent bodies of literature. James Boaden's phantom in Fontainville Forest recalled Shakespeare's canon and the popular works of Anne Radcliffe. Matthew Gregory Lewis used his bleeding Castle Spectre to invoke his own literary works and reputation as a purveyor of dangerous and morally ambiguous material. Secondly, Gothic ghosts signified political bodies. Boaden used his dead aristocrat to depict himself as a patriot; as a victim of usurpation, his ghost can be read allegorically as post-Revolutionary France cautioning Britain against its own flirtations with sedition. Lewis' ghost of Evelina also invokes Revolutionary tensions by representing a body in exile,

74 Ellis 54.
capable only of asserting memory as propaganda. Furthermore, Lewis fashioned his ghost after the iconography of the emerging French republic by "exposing" her breast. Finally, female Gothic ghosts invited comparisons with the changing role of women in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Europe. Lewis' eroticized, idealized spectre is a target of male aggression, something to be possessed, a concept treated in a similar manner by Joanna Baillie. As a spectralized other, the ghost of Baillie’s Emma Graham represents a female subject of a patriarchal system: her individuality is dismissed in favor of an idealized mental construct. She is taught to have little confidence in her individual voice. Her body becomes an object of male social advancement, an inescapable prison that is expected to conform to societal representations of femininity.

One final observation on ghosts and ghosting is in order. A considerable number of Gothic plays comprise a subgenre of parody and pastiche that emerged as early as the 1790's. Dennis Lawler's *The Earls of Hammersmith; or The Cellar Spectre* (1813) includes a menagerie of clownish ghosts, one of whom dispenses deep family secrets in hysterically rapid succession, mocking the Gothic convention whereby spirits guide the living to secret truths.\(^{75}\) Similar shenanigans mark the stage adaptation of Sir Walter Scott's *The Doom of Devorgoil* by Daniel Terry (1822), which includes a haunted bedchamber and a benevolent

\(^{75}\) Evans 211.
ghost who aids the living.\textsuperscript{76} Plays such as these suggest the use of ghosts as representatives of the body of Gothic drama itself. The inherent nature of parody necessitates a process of ghosting in that its audience must be familiar with the form on which the burlesque is based. This applies to the Gothic dramatic form as well as any other, and one can imagine how London theatregoers must have welcomed the occasional humorous wraith to defuse the horror inspired by so many others.

\textsuperscript{76} Evans 267-68.
CHAPTER 3

MANIPULATORS OF MEMORY

“Malignant gratifications are what they delight in, and nothing else is of much value to them.”

Joanna Baillie, *Witchcraft*, 1836

The villain is the signature element of all Gothic fiction, including Gothic drama. Bertrand Evans writes that this character type was the most valuable contribution of Gothic literature to the Romantic movement, and that its development owes more to Gothic drama than the Gothic novel. The original Gothic villain was Manfred from Horace Walpole’s 1764 novel *The Castle of Otranto*, and it is on this model that later Gothic villains were primarily based: once the gloom of the setting is sufficiently established, the villain emerges almost as an extension of the Gothic castle and the dusky atmosphere itself. Attractive yet repulsive, menacing yet himself haunted by some torturous memory or obsession, this character became representative of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century writers’ perception of a barbarous medieval world, as vicious

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1 Joanna Baillie, *Six Gothic Dramas: De Monfort; Orra; The Dream; The Family Legend; The Phantom; Witchcraft*, ed., Christine A. Colón (Chicago: Valancourt, 2007) 342.

and beautiful as the dark landscape he inhabits. His deviance is exercised in striking contrast to the virtue of the Gothic heroine, whom he typically pursues with unseemly fervor.

The original dramatic Gothic villain was in fact a woman, the Countess from Horace Walpole’s 1768 tragedy *The Mysterious Mother*. Walpole writes that his objective in creating the Countess was to establish “a contrast of virtue and vice in the same character.”³ To do this, Walpole endowed her with a characteristic that would become a staple for Gothic villains: a secret too terrible to name, usually concerning a past injustice, whose gravity is almost unbearable to the conscience. While the Countess is charitable and a devout Christian, she is haunted by the knowledge that she had sexual intercourse with her son years before the events of the play. Though she was aware of what she was doing at the time, she failed to desist, and the girl she eventually gave birth to is a sister, daughter, and wife to her son by the end of the tragedy. The misery caused by her secret seems to meld with the already dark environment of her fortress and the landscape itself, which determines the emotional timbre of the entire world of the play. By 1781, when Robert Jephson scripted *The Count of Narbonne*, the first adaptation of *The Castle of Otranto* for the stage, the Gothic villain was generally a male character.

³ Walpole 93-94.
This is probably due in part to the rise of the celebrity actor at the end of the eighteenth century, and the fact that most of these performers were male. Since the Gothic villain occupied the dominant position in the plot, such characters became choice roles for actors. With actors who once clamored for heroic, typically Shakespearean parts now vying to play morally ambiguous villains, there should be little wonder as to why Gothic drama was considered dangerous by its dissenters. Let us imagine for a moment a new trend in Hollywood that sees our most revered contemporary actors portraying terrorists. If a beloved actor like Meryl Streep or Tom Hanks announced their next roles to be zealous suicide bombers, for example, and the purpose of their project to glorify mass murder, the outcry would be deafening. Many would fail to see the merit in such an undertaking, but others would undoubtedly cheer for the characters their screen idols depict. The notion of American moviegoers rallying for terrorists’ success on the silver screen is disturbing. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, with revolution in the very air and celebrity actors seeming to espouse horror and romanticize terror, it is not surprising that Gothic plays were often dubbed “Jacobinical dramas,” a term that affiliated them with revolutionary sensibilities.4

However base his morals, however human his drives, it was not long before the Gothic villain became something more than human. As Bertrand

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4 The Jacobins were the most famous political enclave of the French Revolution.
Evans writes, “The Gothic urge, requiring ever greater applications of ever more potent kind, compelled an expansion beyond the ordinary properties and forces of earth.” Villains, in other words, became supervillains. They were endowed with supernatural abilities, including knowledge of arcane arts, mind control capabilities, and the power to conjure and consort with spirits. In a culture of ghosts, this quantum leap makes sense: if ghosts are memory, then it follows that those who are able to manipulate memory are, in fact, manipulating history, and therefore wield the most power. Manipulators of memory – supervillains – are the subject of this chapter.

If Gothic villainy is about power gone berserk in the hands of those who manipulate memory (history), it is arguable that some of the most theatrical villains of the age were living persons. In Spectacular Politics, Paula Backscheider compares “Mad” King George III to a Gothic protagonist. During the advent of the Gothic villain in the 1780’s, “George III’s strong demands for respect for royal prerogative and his willing assertion of the power of the throne” characterized his reign. He authorized troops to open fire on citizens during the Gordon Riots, exhibited frequent fits of violent rage, and was occasionally under the delusion that he was married to someone other than his wife. The King, like the Gothic villain, represents monolithic patriarchal authority and utter control of his

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5 Evans 182.


7 Backscheider 160-161.
subjects. I will invite a similar comparison between the Gothic magician of Matthew Gregory Lewis’ *The Wood Daemon* and Napoleon, another manipulator of history. In a period when direct depictions of powerful political figures were prohibited in the theatre, Gothic playwrights veiled such representations with the paraphernalia of their genre; Napoleon’s meteoric rise to power and unearthly control of others become supernatural in the hands of Lewis’ magical miscreant, Hardyknute.

Where many of the ghosts of Gothic drama owe their lineage to *Hamlet*, Gothic magicians are, in the main, of a Faustian pedigree, and range from the implicit to the wildly spectacular in their treatment of the subject. Often themes of magic are incidental to the plot, as in John Tobin’s 1807 play *The Curfew*, in which a woman is accused of witchcraft as a minor plot device. The titular villain of Charles Robert Maturin’s 1816 *Bertram; or the Castle of St. Aldobrand*, embarks on a quest for vengeance with spiritual support from none other than Satan, who goes by the moniker The Dark Knight of the Forest. What would have been one of the more explicitly Faustian Gothic dramas was severely edited, however. Sir Walter Scott, the play’s producer, fearing a negative reaction from audiences and critics, had The Dark Knight completely excised from the play before its premiere.\(^8\) Other works were far less reserved in their representations of magicians and conjurors. Matthew Gregory Lewis’ *The Wood

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 Daemon; or The Clock Has Struck of 1807, which will be examined in depth here, relished in the sort of Gothic spectacle for which its author had become famous. Joanna Baillie, in her usual fashion, eschewed Gothic spectacle for Witchcraft, published in 1836, yet once again managed to elevate Gothic drama to new levels of sophistication. Below I will examine the ways in which Baillie challenges audiences to cast a critical eye toward the role of women in the patriarchal society of the early nineteenth century.

The Wood Daemon; or The Clock Has Struck – Matthew Gregory Lewis, 1807

As described in the previous chapter, the success of his first dramatic endeavor, The Castle Spectre, encouraged Matthew Gregory Lewis to write more plays, each pushing the envelope to new and unprecedented levels of Gothic spectacle and sensation. One such innovation was The Wood Daemon; or The Clock Has Struck, billed as a “Grand Romantic Melo Drama” (sic). The play opened at Drury Lane on April 1, 1807, and had a commendable initial run of thirty-four performances.9 It enjoyed considerable popularity and several revivals throughout the nineteenth century. In August 1811, Lewis expanded his originally two-act play to three acts, added songs, and produced the resulting

9 Jeffrey Cox, Introduction, Seven Gothic Dramas 39.
“Grand Musical Romance” at the Lyceum Theatre under the title One O’Clock; or The Knight and the Wood Daemon. This revised version retained the essence of the original and was equally well received.10

Bertrand Evans notes that the major contribution of The Wood Daemon to the development of the Gothic movement was Lewis’ effective use of numerous supernatural entities, including a giant, zephyrs, furies, and the Wood Daemon herself, which serve to enhance the essential Gothic formula without losing sight of it.11 In fact, the scale and complexity of The Wood Daemon’s special effects were so great and so integral to the plot that the production’s opening was postponed by two days when Mr. Johnston, the theatre’s chief technical operator, took ill.12 Most crucial to the present study is the play’s contribution to the development of the Gothic stage villain and the fact that Lewis endowed him with magical abilities. In creating the scheming Hardyknute, Lewis once again demonstrated his considerable marketing acumen, luring theatre audiences with a character evocative of the protagonist of his immensely popular novel, The Monk, who, like The Wood Daemon’s Hardyknute, consorts with a female demon. The Castle Spectre had demonstrated Lewis’ understanding of the overwhelming popular demand for spectacle over poetry in the theatre. By the time he penned The Wood

10 Due to their similarities, this discussion will refer to both iterations of The Wood Daemon indiscriminately, unless otherwise stated.

11 Bertrand Evans, Gothic Drama from Walpole to Shelley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1947) 184.

Daemon, as well as Adelgitha, another Gothic tragedy that opened simultaneously at Covent Garden, it is clear that Lewis not only understood popular taste, but in fact influenced it profoundly.

Unlike The Castle Spectre, which forced audiences to wait the duration of three acts before treating them to the spectacle they craved, both versions of The Wood Daemon open with supernatural extravaganzas. The original 1807 version begins with an elaborate dream sequence in which the slumbering heroine, Una, is granted a prophetic vision by Auriol, a benevolent spirit. Una – and the audience – are given a foretaste of the final scene of the play, in which the Wood Daemon, a female spirit draped in “magical robes,” threatens to stab a shackled child. Auriol, a pair of ghosts, and a choir of cherubim, all of whom populate a fortress of clouds, proclaim that Una alone is capable of saving the child. The 1811 iteration of the play opens with a less hopeful, but equally resplendent scene, wherein a veritable army of mischievous wood spirits summon their sovereign, the Wood Daemon, whose name is Sangrida. This character makes an entrance worthy of her terrible power when she emerges from a flaming cloud that descends in the midst of a violent thunderstorm. Like the prophetic dream of the 1807 version, Sangrida’s solo points to a bloody purpose:

Hither I shaped my progress airy,

Lured by the hopes of forfeit blood!

Still on this night, to claim my right,
Hither I speed when a twelvemonth’s run:

You shall have part, the head and the heart!

Then spirits, rejoice, when the clock strikes one!\textsuperscript{13}

Storm clouds and spirits alike disperse with the encroaching light of dawn.

The play proceeds with expository dialogue, in which we learn that the region of Holstein is rumored to be plagued with a curse. A child disappears each year on the sixth of August, and is said to be kidnapped by the dreaded Wood Daemon and her minions. One such victim was believed to be the rightful ruler of Holstein, and so in his absence a knight, Hardyknute, has assumed the rank of Count. Despite a mysterious past, Hardyknute is almost universally praised for his courage and nobility, and is noted for his ability to remove supernatural threats from the land. He recently saved Una – our heroine – from a murderous giant, and insisted on her hand in marriage. Una has accepted the proposal, despite already being engaged to Oswy, a heroic peasant. Una and her sister, Clotilda, have now taken up residence in Hardyknute’s castle, and an elaborate pageant is being prepared in honor of the Count’s heroism and impending nuptials.

Clotilda is the adoptive mother of a young boy, Leolyn, who she claims is the son of the rightful Count and the intended ruler of Holstein, as evidenced by a hereditary birthmark on his arm. Leolyn was not taken by the Wood Daemon

\textsuperscript{13} Matthew G. Lewis, One O’Clock; or The Knight and the Wood Daemon (New York: Longworth, 1813) 5-6.
as rumored; it seems Clotilda was charged with hiding the boy from Hardyknute, who may have achieved his station through murder and treachery. Despite Clotilda’s suspicions, Una feels an inexplicable attraction to Hardyknute, and uncharacteristically expresses little remorse for abandoning her previous beau. By the second act, however, Una has begun to regret breaking Oswy’s heart, and admits as much to Hardyknute. The Count begins to reveal his true colors to the audience at this point, and becomes recognizable as our Gothic villain. An aside betrays his secret superhuman abilities: “Confusion! In vain does the magic charm exert its influence: in vain does her sex’s vanity dazzle and mislead her senses. Her heart is still faithful, and bids defiance to my spell.”

When Oswy suddenly arrives, Hardyknute’s spell seems to fail entirely, and Una’s love for Oswy becomes plain. Hardyknute discovers the lovers in an embrace, and banishes Oswy as punishment.

Leolyn is recruited to be a dancer in the magnificent pageant that is presented for Hardyknute’s enjoyment. When Leolyn approaches the Count to present a gift, however, Hardyknute notices the birthmark on the boy’s arm that identifies him as the rightful Count. Hardyknute’s obvious distress at the realization disrupts the celebration, and in the ensuing disarray, the Wood Daemon makes an astonishing entrance. Recalling that it is the sixth of August, Hardyknute tears open the curtain before the window of the Gothic hall: “it

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14 Lewis, One O’Clock 32.
thunders violently, and the Wood Daemon is discovered mounting into the air, in a chariot drawn by griffins, and enveloped in a shower of fire.”¹⁵ In the 1811 version, Sangrida appears in a chariot drawn instead by dragons, and, pointing at Leolyn, cries, “Remember!”¹⁶

As the final act opens, Hardyknute has ordered Leolyn to be locked in a bedchamber, ostensibly for the boy’s safety. The crooked Count, masked and cloaked, then absconds with the helpless youth through a secret recess in the bedchamber. Alone in the same room, Una observes majestic portraits of Leolyn’s parents, and recognizes them as having been part of the coterie of spirits in her prophetic dream. The figures in the paintings suddenly come to life, stepping from their frames to show Una how to access the secret chamber. Armed only with a blazing firebrand and the knowledge that she alone can save him, Una sets off to rescue Leolyn, proclaiming, “Leolyn, Leolyn! I will rescue thee or die!”¹⁷

The final scene of the play takes place in a “necromantic cavern.” Lewis sets the stage thusly:

In the center is an altar, round which curl two enormous snakes, on whose heads rests a large golden platter. On the altar stand several candlesticks, not lighted – on one side is an open pedestal, the


¹⁶ Lewis, One O’Clock 51.

¹⁷ Lewis, One O’Clock 56.
height of a man, on which kneels the brazen statue of a giant, who supports a clock on his left shoulder, and points to it with his right hand. The clock marks half-past twelve – on the other side is a rock with a grated entrance below fastened by an enormous padlock and a chain, which hangs from a brazen pillar on the top of the rock. To this pillar Leolyn is seen chained...

Una swipes Hardyknute’s massive, magical key, and manages to liberate Leolyn from his mystical bonds, but the pair are unable to escape before the Count returns. Concealed, they observe Hardyknute as he “arrays himself in a magic bonnet and robe, takes a wand from the altar, and performs incantations.” Sangrida and her minions begin to materialize around him, and warn him of the presence of the intruders. Discovered, Una listens as Hardyknute bares his chilling secrets. Born a deformed peasant, Hardyknute suffered a lifetime of abuse and rejection, until a pact with Sangrida forever altered his miserable existence: “She chained success to my footsteps; she rendered me invulnerable in battle; she endowed me with perpetual youth and health; and she cast over my person a magic charm to dazzle all female eyes and seduce all female hearts.”

In exchange, Hardyknute is expected to sacrifice a human victim upon his subterranean altar each year before the clock strikes one on the seventh of

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18 Lewis, One O’Clock 61.
19 Lewis, One O’Clock 62.
20 Lewis, One O’Clock 64.
August. With Leolyn seemingly escaped, Hardyknute now has no choice but to sacrifice his beloved Una, or the Wood Daemon will claim the Count himself. With only moments to spare, Leolyn scales the altar, and using Hardyknute’s magic wand to extend his reach, manages to force the hand of the great clock forward so that it strikes the critical hour prematurely. Sangrida rushes forward and stabs Hardyknute:

He falls into the arms of four fiends, who come from behind the altar, to which they bear him, the snakes twist themselves round him; Sangrida stands over him, and they, all sink, – the statue and the rock disappear; the cavern vanishes; and Leolyn and Una find themselves in the great hall of the castle, which is illuminated.21

As Oswy and Una celebrate their love, a diadem is placed on young Leolyn’s brow, marking the return to power of Holstein’s long lost prince.

The Wood Daemon resonated with critics and audiences alike. The decade that separated it from the groundbreaking supernatural plays of the 1790’s, such as Fontainville Forest and The Castle Spectre, seems to have born witness to a radical shift in critical reception of the supernatural on stage. Recall that as sparingly as “real” ghosts were utilized in these seminal plays, they inspired an overwhelmingly negative critical response, however titillating their presence was for the general theatergoing public. By contrast, the abundant assortment of

21 Lewis, One O’Clock 66.
supernatural species that populate 1807’s *The Wood Daemon* received little negative press, and the play was widely praised for its spectacle. Comparing it with Lewis’ earlier works, the *London Times* wrote that “the entrance of the Wood Daemon is as awful as any of its predecessors; for it is in the midst of one of the grandest and gayest pageants ever seen upon the stage.”

The *Monthly Mirror* extolled, “The confusion and apparent horror which ensued after the appearance of the spectre [Sangrida] combined to form perhaps the most terrific and sublime scene ever beheld on the stage.” Despite its popularity, the play was not published in its initial iteration. A thirty-page prospectus that recounts the plot in narrative form was published and sold at Drury Lane, beginning in 1807.

This publication was the basis for a successful American adaptation by John Turnbull in 1808. The libretto for Lewis’ expanded musical version of 1811, *One O’Clock; or The Knight and the Wood Daemon*, was published and widely available.

Evidence of the popularity and proliferation of *The Wood Daemon* at the time of its composition highlights the deficit of scholarly attention it has received in the ensuing two centuries. Where the play has been addressed, scholars have focused on its spectacle and contribution to the development of the

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22 “Drury-Lane Theatre,” *London Times* 2 April 1807: 3C.

23 Quoted in Cox, Introduction, *Seven Gothic Dramas* 40.

24 Manuscript copies of the 1807 version of *The Wood Daemon* from which the play was originally produced seem to be no longer in existence. I would submit that they likely expired in the fire that destroyed Drury Lane in 1809.
Gothic. The fact that *The Wood Daemon* is concerned with political bodies has been ignored, as have themes of male and female corporeality. I will address these oversights below.

As with *The Castle Spectre*, Lewis embedded issues of contemporary politics within the plot of *The Wood Daemon*, once again exploiting the tensions with France and revolutionary anxieties that characterized early nineteenth-century Britain. Like *The Castle Spectre*, *The Wood Daemon* is concerned with a tyrant who interrupts a line of monarchical power, usurps that power, and regularly exercises violence to maintain it. But unlike *The Castle Spectre’s* Osmond, Hardyknute’s corporeality itself identifies him with ascendant French political authority. In *The Body and the French Revolution*, Dorinda Outram argues that a major challenge for the French in the aftermath of the revolution was reimagining a public sphere whose authority had hitherto been characterized by the image of the king’s body. In order to assert political dominance, the emerging French middle class had to solve the problem of “redistributing various attributes of the king’s body throughout the new body politic.”  

25 Those who sought to occupy the vacuum of power left by the monarchy had to learn to play a role, to adopt the “physical behavior once associated with the *uctoritas* of

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The first action Hardyknute takes when he assumes power is to literally – supernaturally – refashion his misshapen body to make it reminiscent of the image of monarchical authority he wishes to evoke.

In *Representations of Revolution*, Ronald Paulson describes the pervasive mythology of sacrifice and cannibalism in the wake of the French Revolution, which held that the shedding and consumption of blood were necessary for remaking the body politic and preserving power. The notion of dismembering and reabsorbing the human body reflected the actual dissemination of sovereignty after the Revolution. This accorded with a pre-existing thread of French folklore which connected the rending of the body with a magical procurement of monarchical power. Hardyknute is likewise required to conduct regular human sacrifices to maintain his power, which further identifies him with the perceived tyranny of the French Revolution. Just as the guillotine served as an altar for the blood of its victims, whose deaths were justified as a means of shedding an old political body, so does the blood upon Hardyknute’s ritual altar secure his continued contract with the Wood Daemon, the source of his authority.

*The Wood Daemon* was written at the height of Napoleon’s power, and it is difficult to consider Hardyknute in the light of French tyranny without making a

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26 Outram 78.

direct comparison to the Emperor. Hardyknute too is a man at the apex of his power, who exercises utter, life-and-death control over individuals as well as sovereignty over a political region. His supremacy is of an unearthly nature, and he is seemingly unstoppable. The same might have been said of Napoleon in the early nineteenth century. It would be difficult for modern readers to imagine the degree to which the figure of Napoleon loomed over the collective British consciousness if we did not have a contemporary analogue. Terrorism has established itself as the major threat to Western civilization in the early twenty-first century, and the media warns of terrorist action on a semi-regular basis, feeding a perpetual sense of danger and helplessness. While the source of these fears are somewhat nebulous today, only occasionally and tenuously connected to specific individuals in the mind of the public, terror and the threat of invasion were inexorably linked to Napoleon in early nineteenth-century Britain. His aptitude for conquest and almost boundless ascent to new heights of power became grist for the mill of British popular culture.

An 1805 British political cartoon depicts Napoleon at a dinner table, using his sizeable sword to carve away a generous portion of the main course, which is the globe itself. The impish caricature greedily seizes the entirety of Europe, far more than his diminutive frame could possibly swallow. The image is tantamount to propaganda, and typical of representations that were widely circulated at the time. This general anti-Napoleonic sentiment manifested itself
in the theatres primarily as large-scale re-enactments of British military victories, but according to the Licensing Act, explicit depictions of political figures were not permitted in plays. In the character of Hardyknute, Matthew Gregory Lewis created a Napoleonic analogue, a villain capable of soaring to power with Napoleonic velocity. To evoke the mystique of the French Emperor, Lewis endowed Hardyknute with a power of mysterious, unearthly origin. Hardyknute carries a magic wand, with which he summons spirits. If ghosts equal memories, and memories are the stuff of history, Hardyknute is a manipulator of history, just as Napoleon is a maker of history. Even in the hands of the young Leolyn the wand is a source of power, a phallic indicator of the indomitable male will upon history; Leolyn, a child of nobility, is literally able to manipulate time – history – by adjusting the giant clock’s hands with the aid of the wand in the final scene of The Wood Daemon.

Furthermore, Hardyknute is possessed of a key which can magically shackle his victims, giving him the ability to rob anyone of their liberty. Lewis wrote the play at a moment when invasion fears were prevalent, with Napoleon having attempted to invade England as recently as 1805, a move that ended with the British victory at Trafalgar. When the freedom of the British people is at stake, the body of the nation, like young Leolyn, is threatened with confinement.

In addition to political anxieties, evidence of Lewis’ feminist sensibilities discussed in the previous chapter is again apparent in The Wood Daemon. Given
that the playwright makes his demon a female, one may be inclined to think that Lewis used the play as an opportunity to literally demonize women or to illustrate the potential danger in allowing women unrestricted freedom and mobility. However, Lewis’ rudimentary feminist proclivities, as evidenced in his monodrama The Captive, suggest that he was interested in writing a strong, independent female character that rejects traditional female roles. Lewis names the character Sangrida, after a figure from Scandinavian mythology. According to this tradition, Sangrida is one of the three chief valkyries, the fierce preternatural women who determine which warriors are to die in battle and who escort them to the afterlife. Lewis also evokes Greek mythology by identifying Sangrida with Medea: she possesses magical abilities; she carries a knife, with which she is prepared to slay her victims, even children; she rides a chariot driven by dragons. By aligning Sangrida with these mythological traditions, Lewis endows her with a legacy of independence. She has complete freedom of movement to the point of omnipresence. She rejects any identification with a maternal role through her demand for the sacrifice of children. Like her Norse namesake, she has power over men, forcing even Hardyknute – a monarch – to do her bidding. Unlike the ghostly Evelina in The Castle Spectre, an absent body starved of identity and devoid of agency, Sangrida’s identity is inherent to her disembodied existence. And while Evelina was stripped of power when forcibly removed from her political and corporeal space, Sangrida is empowered by her
lack of physical corporeality: she is omnipresent and sovereign over an array of
nightmarish spirits that are bound to her. Far from being unable to communicate
verbally, Sangrida, unlike Evelina, speaks to denizens of the human and spirit
worlds with equal authority, and in fact has the power to command Hardyknute,
a man.

It is interesting to consider the fact that a male actor played Sangrida in
the original 1807 version of The Wood Daemon, as well in as the 1808 American
adaptation by John Turnbull and the revised 1811 musical iteration. In the
original version, Sangrida was played by a Mr. Montgomery, a performer known
for his skill as a dancer, choreographer, and clown, who frequently appeared at
the Royal Circus. This implies that Sangrida was expected to embody a certain
athleticism or agility, although why theatre managers did not seek a female
performer possessed of those qualities is unknown. A Mr. Caulfield played the
demon in the American adaptation, whose manuscript betrays confusion as to
the character’s gender. Sangrida is described as a female in the stage directions
at the start of the play, as well as in her spectacular appearance in Act two, scene
three, wherein she confronts Hardyknute and rides the infernal chariot. When
the character appears in the final scene to claim Hardyknute, however, Sangrida
is referred to as a male: “Loud thunder is heard – the altar sinks, and discovers

28 Philip Highfill, Jr., et al, eds., A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dance,
Managers, and Other Stage Personnel of London, 1660-1800 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois

29 John Turnbull, The Wood Daemon; or The Clock Has Struck! (Boston: B. True, 1808) 5, 23.
the dreadful Wood Daemon in its place. – He seizes the Count – stabs him – and they both sink amid sulphurous flames.”

Though this perhaps amounts to no more than a typographical error, the consistent casting of a male actor as a powerful female character has a couple of implications. First, the perception that a male body was required to facilitate the qualities of independence, strength, and mobility, despite Lewis’ intention to ascribe these characteristics to a female character. Second, casting a male as Sangrida intimates the notion that the above qualities are unnatural occurrences in women. At any rate, the ambiguity of Sangrida’s gender is further evidence of the anxieties that characterized changing perceptions of the role of women in the period.

**Witchcraft – Joanna Baillie, 1836**

Published in her second volume of *Dramas* in 1836, Joanna Baillie’s *Witchcraft* was inspired by a scene from Sir Walter Scott’s play *Bride of Lammermuir*, in which a group of women wonder why the devil has never attempted to coerce them into serving him. Baillie developed the idea into a five-act tragedy when she failed to persuade Scott to do so himself. The play

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30 Turnbull 33. Emphasis added.


32 Colón xxxiii.
represents a departure from Baillie’s typical style of writing, in that it is written in prose and liberally laced with the distinctive dialect of her native Scotland.

Though the play was not produced in Baillie’s lifetime, Finborough Theatre in London mounted a production in 2008.\(^{33}\) *Witchcraft* is another of Baillie’s examinations of women in a patriarchal society, and explores the consequences of unchecked superstition.

Baillie hailed from a family of renowned physicians and anatomists. Her brother, Matthew, would become the personal physician of King George III, and authored *Morbid Anatomy*, which was considered the first systematic study of pathology.\(^{34}\) Baillie was profoundly influenced by her family’s medical innovations, and considered her own *Plays on the Passions* to be among them. The purpose of this extensive dramatic endeavor was to anatomize the passions in the form of two plays each, which would theoretically allow audiences to observe and comprehend the consequences of unmitigated emotion, and “to diagnose themselves before those passions wrecked physical damage on their bodies.”\(^{35}\) As Nathan Elliott points out, for Baillie, “the passions were not simply psychological states, but physical states, with unique and particular dangers.”\(^{36}\)

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\(^{35}\) Elliott 86.
Though *Witchcraft* is not designated as one of the *Plays on the Passions*, there can be little doubt that its intended purpose was to encourage audiences toward the same critical introspection. Baillie challenges her audience to observe not a single Gothic villain, but a range of villainous behaviors, and to evaluate the social and political circumstances by which such villainy is realized. In doing so, Baillie elevates the Gothic drama to a new level of sophistication.

Superstition permeates *Witchcraft* like a fog over the Scottish moor on which the play is set. It creeps even into the first scene, in which two noblewomen, Lady Dungarren and Annabella, attend to the precarious health of Jessie, the youngest member of the Dungarren house. Lady Dungarren, the matriarch, is convinced that Jessie’s feverish state is the work of supernatural forces, owing to the mysterious noises, voices, and other strange phenomena that the Lady believes to have experienced:

> I verily thought to see some elrich form or other make its appearance...the curtains of the bed began to shake as if touched by a hand, or the motion of some passing body. Then I knew that they were dealing with my poor child, and I had no power to break the spell of their witchcraft, for I had no voice to speak.\(^{37}\)

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\(^{36}\) Elliott 86-87.

\(^{37}\) Baillie 341-342.
Whispers of witchcraft begin to spread, and a group of peasant women are suspected. Their leader, Grizeld Bane, is rumored to have cursed a local woman, killing her before her wedding day. Privately, Annabella is intrigued; she is in love with the lord of the house, Lady Dungarren’s son, but he has already given his heart to the lovely Violet. “If there be a spell to break wedlock,” reasons Annabella, “and to break affection also, it were well worth its purchase at any price; yea, though the soul’s jeopardy were added to the gold.” Annabella sends for Grizeld, in the hopes of magically redirecting Dungarren’s affections from Violet to herself. Dungarren loathes Annabella’s advances to the extent that he is tempted to leave the country, but decides to stay “and contend with the termagant, as I would with an evil spirit.”

Grizeld leads the other two peasant women suspected of witchcraft, Elspy Low and Mary MacMurren, to a wild moor on a violently stormy night, where they attempt to conjure the devil with incantations. Far from denying their rumored affiliation with black magic, the women are actually desperate to become genuine witches, and dream what they will obtain with their powers: ample food, drink, and revenge on those who neglected and mistreated them in

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38 Baillie 344.

39 Baillie 347.
their poverty. As Mary MacMurren declaims: “They refused us a han’fu’ in our greatest need, but now it wull be our turn to ha’ fou sacks and baith cakes and kebbucks at command, while their aumery is bare.”

Murrey, a man who happens to be passing by, is drawn to the women’s outlandish ritual, and decides to play along when they mistake him for Satan. They commit their eternal souls to the astonished man in exchange for magical power, and he pretends to indulge them. Murrey, it turns out, is in hiding for a crime he did not commit, but one for which he is believed to have been executed. He returns occasionally to rendezvous with his daughter, Violet, which is his purpose on this particular night. A local priest observes the happily reunited father and daughter, however, and, recognizing Murrey as a supposedly deceased man, assumes him to be a ghost. The priest supposes that Violet must have conjured the spirit of her departed father, and therefore suspects her of witchcraft. He passes this suspicion on to a devastated Dungarren, and advises him to stay away from Violet. When Dungarren interrogates Violet as to her whereabouts on the stormy night, she finds that she cannot answer without revealing the fact that her father yet lives, and her reticence distresses her lover.

Mary and Elspy, two of the would-be witches, bitterly complain that they have not received any of the power they crave, despite their satanic devotion. Grizeld, meanwhile, claims the ability to see an invisible spirit world that teems

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40 Baillie 349.
with dark denizens, and she seems to retreat ever further into this alternate reality. However impotent these women’s magical abilities have proven to be, everyone continues to voice suspicions when the sheriff arrives to investigate the rampant talk of witchcraft. The latest report has it that a witch assaulted the ailing child, Jessie, who was able to tear away a piece of the hag’s garment. Jessie cannot verify this story, since her fever renders her unconscious for the duration of the play. In the third-act climax, Annabella takes advantage of the hysteria by procuring one of Violet’s dresses and passing it off as the one worn by the witch that allegedly attacked Jessie.

As the final act opens, the sheriff has arrested Violet on charges of witchcraft, and the priest is prepared to testify against her. Though Grizeld and Elspy are nowhere to be found, the authorities have arrested Mary MacMurren, who is violently accosted. Violet and Mary are to be burned at the stake, and Annabella, thrilled at this prospect, anxiously secures a bird’s-eye view of the execution from a neighboring window. Here she expresses jealous admiration for Violet’s virtues, which circumstances have distorted in Annabella’s mind to resemble a kind of witchcraft: “Her arts, her allurements, her seeming beauty, her glamour, and her power, – what will they all amount to when the noon of this day shall be past? A few black ashes, and a few scorched bones.” Grizeld suddenly enters this garret and applauds Annabella for her scheme. She claims that Satan and his chief attendant, the spirit of Judas Iscariot, are present in the
very room, waiting to claim a fair lady. Annabella asks whether the lady Grizeld refers to is Violet, to which Grizeld replies: “Yes, dearest, if he can get her. If not, he will have someone else, who is worthy to bear him company. He must have his meed and his mate: he will not return empty-handed, when a fair lady is to be had.”

Murrey appears at the last moment before the execution, risking incarceration to reveal that he still lives. This prompts the priest to rescind his testimony that Violet conjured a ghost. Tortured with guilt, the servant who stole Violet’s dress at Annabella’s behest confesses to his part, and so Violet is freed. In a deft stroke of timing, an officer of the king arrives and declares that witchcraft is no longer punishable by law, thereby acquitting Mary MacMurren and the already twice-reprieved Violet. At this moment, Annabella is discovered to have been brutally strangled in the neighboring house, presumably at the hands of Grizeld. The king’s officer recognizes Grizeld as a mentally “distracted” woman who escaped from her caretakers years before, and she is unceremoniously led away to be returned to them. Dungarren closes the play by meditating on the fate of Annabella, saying, “Those who have felt the tyranny of uncontrolled passions will think, with conscious awe, of her end.”

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41 Baillie 403.

42 Baillie 415.
Like *The Phantom*, which explored the concept of women as prisoners in their own bodies, Baillie uses *Witchcraft* to examine the extremes to which a group of women will go to test the resilience of the dysfunctional patriarchal structure in which they are lodged. Each of the major female characters experiments with the dynamics of personal advancement in her individual way. It becomes immediately clear that these women have a profoundly acute understanding of the way their world functions and their respective roles in that world. Unlike the male characters, who come and go freely, avenues for female advancement cannot be traversed without paying heavy tolls, and each female character must ask herself what she is willing to sacrifice to gamble for progress. The three peasants affiliated with witchcraft are willing to sacrifice their eternal souls for a modicum of corporeal power, however modest: the guarantee of basic sustenance, justice, and a measure of control over their lives. Violet is willing to surrender the prospect of marriage to Dungarren, her freedom, and even her life for the restoration of her father. Annabella seeks to join the house of Dungarren through marriage to its young lord, and, it would seem, is also willing to wager her salvation. Yet for each of their considerable ambitions, these women bear a closer resemblance to the ailing Jessie than they would care to admit. For under the strictures of the patriarchal system to which they are subject, these women, like the fevered girl, do not have voices.
In the late eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, advances in biology and anatomy evidenced the physiological differences between men and women, differences that were cited as “proof” of the physical and intellectual inferiority of women. From the very fields of science to which Joanna Baillie’s family contributed immensely, there emerged a “physiology of incommensurability,” as Thomas Laqueur calls it, which was cited whenever “a preexisting transcendental order or time-immemorial custom became a less and less plausible justification for social relations.”43 In other words, in a historical moment characterized by shifting gender roles, evidence of biological divergence became a weapon used to defend traditional notions of sexual inequality. This is the atmosphere in which Baillie wrote Witchcraft. It is precisely this concept of sexual inequality that allows for a patriarchal system to be constructed on a foundation of “social dys-appearance,” Drew Leder’s idea of viewing the other with an alien gaze, “away, apart, asunder” from the self.44 In the play, propagating superstition and suspicions of witchcraft becomes a means of legitimizing social dys-appearance, and while it is enforced by men, such as the sheriff, the magistrate, and the priest, it is practiced by both sexes. When female characters such as Lady Dungarren fuel the atmosphere of hysteria, they are


indirectly defending the status quo. This system guarantees that women will not have a voice, agency, or freedom of movement, except where these qualities serve to reinforce the system.

As the Gothic heroine, Violet is inexorably tethered to the men in her life, and desperately restricted. She is ostracized by her community and relegated to a lower social status by virtue of the fact that her father supposedly committed a violent crime. She is unable to marry Dungarren for this reason, and so must meet her lover in secret, just as she must see her father surreptitiously. Violet is wedged between these men in a kind of limbo, attached to both, but receiving genuine support from neither. When the priest observes her meeting her father on the stormy moor, it never occurs to him that Murrey could simply be alive. Based on the fact that Violet is a woman, he arrives at the illogical conclusion that she must be a witch in congress with a spirit. The priest’s testimony and a scrap of cloth are enough to condemn her to death, and her voice carries no weight toward her defense. On the other hand, Mary MacMurren “confesses” to being a witch at trial, and is condemned by her own word. A woman’s word is not enough to liberate her in this world, therefore, but enough to condemn her for fabricated transgressions.

After spending the duration of the play yearning for Dungarren, Annabella meets a grisly demise. It might seem that her death would liberate her from her body-prison, but even this freedom is suspect. Before strangling her,
Grizeld details the Hellish horrors that await a woman as beautiful and devious as Annabella in the afterlife. And if we consider the conventions of the Christian mythology that dominates the world of the play, we can assume that Annabella’s soul is condemned and becomes a subject of Satan after her murder. As with the ghost of Emma in *The Phantom*, Baillie suggests that not even death would afford Annabella escape from her female corporeality.

What appears to be a dramaturgically satisfying conclusion to *Witchcraft* actually documents a menagerie of injustices tied to the male-dominated society (and afterlife) in which the play is deeply rooted. The women who sought power through supernatural means are no better off than they were in the beginning, and no one has bothered to wonder or ask why they attempted to resort to such ends in the first place. Grizeld, a murderer who, of all the characters, should have been tried and convicted for her crime, is essentially let off the hook, abruptly and unceremoniously relegated to her caretakers. Violet, though exonerated and free to live with her father and Dungarren, is now completely subject to the will of these men. While no longer in prison and dislodged from her previous state of limbo, she has simply traded one kind of confinement for another. This remains a patriarchal society that would rather see destitute women burn as witches than allow them the agency they lack; agency for which they would willingly exchange their souls. Baillie’s purpose is not to write yet
another stock, flamboyant villain, or to resort to overused Gothic contrivances and spectacle. She demands that audiences cast a critical eye on society and the self. Unlike most of her Gothic forbears, Baillie does not savor in the villainy, but, in keeping with her family’s proud tradition of medical practice, prescribes a means of diagnosing it.

As this chapter has demonstrated, supervillains are Gothic villains endowed with supernatural abilities, logical extensions of the experimental culture of ghosts that characterized the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century British stage. Where ghosts are memories, Gothic magicians represent individuals who manipulate memories, in essence making history. In the first place, magicians, like ghosts, could represent political bodies. Hardyknute, the Faustian villain in *The Wood Daemon*, takes advantage of his supernatural skill to reshape his deformed body into one that evokes an image of monarchical authority. Having usurped power from the rightful Count, Hardyknute must conduct regular human sacrifices to maintain his rule, which identifies him with the perceived tyranny of the French Revolution. As a Napoleonic analogue, Hardyknute reached heights of power in an extraordinary fashion, exercises unearthly control over others, and brandishes a magic wand, a phallic signifier with which he summons spirits – manipulates history – even as Napoleon imposes an indomitable male will upon history. Supervillains and their otherworldly consorts also speak to the changing role of women in late
eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Europe. Sangrida, the titular character in *The Wood Daemon*, is derived of mythological sources and rejects traditional female roles. She possesses independence and mobility, and is not subject to male patriarchal authority. This is a supernaturally procured position, however, one that is sought after to no avail by the women of *Witchcraft*. Superstition and allegations of black magic become ways of legitimizing sexual inequality in a play that evokes the realities of gender roles in the early nineteenth century.
CHAPTER 4

ABOMINATIONS

“I never saw a ghost except once in a dream.”

Mary Shelley, *On Ghosts*, 1824

1816 was called “the year without a summer.” What we now understand to have been the freakish result of historically low levels of solar activity, coupled with a sequence of violent volcanic eruptions in Indonesia, was not perceived as such by a group of British expatriates sheltering from unseasonable rains in a resplendent villa on Lake Geneva. Lord Byron, the renter of the chateau, played host to Percy Shelley; Shelley’s lover, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin; Mary’s stepsister, Claire Clairmont (who was Byron’s lover); and Byron’s personal physician, John Polidori. It was June, but due to the aforementioned cataclysms, the weather was evocative of winter and all but prohibited outdoor activity. The group’s energies were therefore famously invested into exercises of the imagination, the products of which have become among the most enduring inventions of nineteenth-century literature: the gentleman vampire and

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Frankenstein’s creature, both of whose theatrical counterparts would define the last chapter of the age of Gothic drama. Polidori’s Vampyre, founded on an idea of Byron’s, would inspire James Robinson Planché’s The Vampire; or The Bride of the Isles in 1820, while Mary (Godwin) Shelley’s Frankenstein would become the basis for Richard Brinsley Peake’s 1823 Presumption; or The Fate of Frankenstein. Both plays owe their Gothic lineage to a game played among Byron and his friends, an amiable exchange of horror stories in that Swiss villa in the “ghost summer” of 1816, and both plays are the focus of this chapter.

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the figures of the aristocratic vampire and Frankenstein’s monster have become so iconic, so ubiquitous, as to be dismissed by many as sources of genuine terror. One purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to identify the corporeal anxieties that may have been enlivened in the minds of audiences when they first experienced these characters on stage in the early nineteenth century. What does it do to the nerves of one who had previously relished Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein in the privacy and relative comfort of the reading closet, to encounter for the first time Shelley’s fiend in the flesh in a darkened theatre? What is it to behold the substantial corporeality of actor Thomas Potter Cooke in a persona that would shape his career, as it would for Boris Karloff a century later, a character at once alive and dead: animated, but comprised of dead parts? And what of The Vampire? James Planché’s Lord Ruthven – also played by T. P. Cooke – left audiences swooning,
but not in the same manner as much more recent teen idol bloodsuckers.

Monsters have lost a considerable measure of their power as engines of horror in recent decades. Even the impact of the word monster itself has eroded in the modern lexicon. Therefore I am taking for the title of this chapter a word that better embodies the attitude with which nineteenth-century theatergoers may have characterized these Gothic menaces: they were abominations.

By 1820, the overall conventions of the melodramatic mode had become a bigger attraction for audiences than the specific Gothic formula pioneered by Horace Walpole approximately fifty years earlier. While the fervor for the sensation of the Gothic began to decline, the spectacle of melodrama remained in demand, and thus the domestic melodrama began to supersede the Gothic drama in popularity. As scholar Jeffrey Cox explains, domestic melodrama rejected the supernatural in favor of everyday concerns, turning from the themes of confinement and liberation that characterized the Gothic of the 1790’s and focusing instead on “the celebration of domestic, familial, and patriotic virtue.”

Because traditional Gothic villains were extensions of the untamed medieval landscapes they inhabited, they began to lose their power as the focus of plays shifted from the castle to the household. The stage was set for monsters, whose literally inhuman nature alone could threaten the order established by the domestic sphere.

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To the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century sensibility, which regarded everything as having a proper place, abominations were fundamentally disruptive because they allowed for the possibility of a chaotic cosmos. This was a period that harbored a “fearful disdain of mixtures.” The very idea of the corporeal realities of such beings as the vampire and Frankenstein’s monster necessitated what Barbara Stafford describes as a “chaotic mixture” – a grotesque: such “monsters and hybrids . . . all dwelled in the limit of light and dark, at the boundaries of natural viability and social acceptability. Aberrations in language, body, and imagery incarnated unenlightenment in an Age of Enlightenment.” The vampire possesses the blended blood of many victims in his veins, while Frankenstein’s creation is composed of the parts of multiple corpses. Nineteenth-century audiences could scarcely have ignored the question: could these beings at once embody bits of the rising middle class as well as the overcrowded masses of the London poor? Both characters are others, foreign bodies seeking penetration into, if not acceptance within, their respective communities, and both reflect the xenophobia and immigration anxieties that lingered in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars. As murderers and thieves, both figures evoke the widespread crime that plagued London in the period. As living bodies composed of dead tissue, both characters recalled fears of

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3 Barbara Maria Stafford, Body Criticism: Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1991) 211.

4 Stafford 213.
“apparent death,” as described in Chapter 2, the unfortunate possibility of being buried alive. Most startling of all, both creatures threaten to assimilate their victims into themselves, as they are composed of the blood and tissue of others. This suggested to audiences the unsettling notion that anyone has the potential capacity for monstrous behavior.

An idea that will inform the direction of this discussion is Freud’s concept of the unheimlich, literally the “un-familiar,” or what has often been translated as “the uncanny,” that which is simultaneously recognizable and strange. Freud outlined this phenomenon in his essay of the same name first published in 1919.5 Freud delineates the triggers of the unheimlich experience: automatons and robots, the sight of dismembered limbs, the notion of being buried alive, and encountering a doppelganger. Freud states that unheimlich is more typical in literature and drama than in real life, and often occurs when a person pursues evil intentions with the aid of special powers, and when something previously thought to be imaginary is suddenly found to be real. The Uncanny has been widely used in Gothic criticism that tends to read texts “as codified forms of instinctual drives and mechanisms of repression,” since Freud links the origin of unheimlich to infantile narcissism.6 I will use the concept of the unheimlich to

5 For an excellent deconstruction of Freud’s essay, see Hélène Cixous’ “Fiction and its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud’s Das Unheimliche” in New Literary History 7.3 (1976): 525-548.

further an understanding of audience reception of Gothic abominations as something whose existence, physical corporeality, and behavior are at once familiar (human) and unrecognizable (monstrous).

The Vampire; or The Bride of the Isles – James Robinson Planché, 1820

By the time the vampire debuted as a literary figure in the late eighteenth century, it already enjoyed widespread recognition as a folkloric motif and carried political connotations. The vampire originated in the folk traditions of Eastern Europe, where it bore little resemblance to the aristocratic figure that would later grace the Gothic stage. In its earliest incarnations, the fiend was typically a deceased individual who returned from the grave to prey on the blood of immediate family and neighbors. This crude revenant “exhibits a swollen, bloated body and displays a ruddy or livid face, discolored through the posthumous accumulation of blood. The canine teeth, too, are seldom described as prominent,” in marked contrast to the iconographic significance they lend to the vampire of contemporary popular culture. According to the folklore, one joined the ranks of the undead by being an apostate or excommunicated

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7 Mulvey-Roberts 242.
Christian, by being murdered, or by dying very suddenly.⁸ Suffering the bite of a vampire also meant certain vampirism, as did death by suicide and, in some traditions, a lifetime of prostitution.

Reports alleging genuine vampirism were prevalent in Continental Europe in the eighteenth century. In 1755, for example, the villagers of Hermersdorf, in what is now the Czech Republic, exhumed the corpse of a supposed female vampire by the name of Rosina Polakin. Despite its expiration, the body was in remarkably robust condition, with blood apparently still flowing through its veins. According to custom, Polakin’s family was obligated to eradicate the menace their relative had become. They ritually dragged the corpse through a gap in the graveyard wall, beheaded it, and burned it.⁹ Cases like this inspired a vampire mythology that began to consolidate in the eighteenth century and was propagated by travel journals and “behavioral studies of the peoples of Eastern Europe, published for a Western European readership.”¹⁰

Vampire anecdotes first reached Britain in March of 1732, when a report of a Hungarian vampire attack was published in the London Journal, which happened to be the primary channel of propaganda for the prime minister,

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⁸ Mulvey-Roberts 242.


¹⁰ Mulvey-Roberts 242.
Robert Walpole.¹¹ Walpole’s opponents immediately seized upon the vampire as a metaphor for what was perceived as the Prime Minister’s corruption of the British economy. Walpole became the subject of political satire, “frequently depicted as a kind of monster or leviathan, swollen with power and wickedness, or as a vast caterpillar consuming the life-blood of the country.”¹² Walpole was not the exclusive target of the vampire metaphor, however, as demonstrated by no less than Voltaire, who wrote:

One does not hear about vampires in London nowadays. I can however see merchants, speculators, tax-collectors, who have sucked the blood of the people in broad daylight, but who were definitely not dead, although they have been corrupted quite enough. These real bloodsuckers do not live in cemeteries but in very pleasant palaces.¹³

Thus by the time it became fodder for British poetry, fiction, and drama in the early nineteenth century, the vampire was well established as an object of fear and a signifier of greed, overindulgence, and corruption.

It was the aforementioned pastime of ghost-story writing among Lord Byron’s circle of expatriates that inspired the first major work of vampire fiction

¹¹ Sir Robert Walpole was, of course, the father of Horace Walpole, author of the first Gothic novel and play.


¹³ Quoted in Ankarloo and Clark, 216.
in the English language, John Polidori’s *The Vampyre*. Polidori, Byron’s personal physician and an aspiring writer, traveled to the Continent in 1816, along with Byron, Shelley, and Mary Godwin, the future author of *Frankenstein* and future wife of Shelley. That summer, Byron began a story about a man who befriends a vampire and is inadvertently tricked into keeping the fiend’s monstrous identity a secret. Byron never finished the story, but appended it to his novel *Mazeppa* as *Fragment of a Novel*, and Polidori adapted the idea into his own work. Polidori’s novella was eventually published as *The Vampyre; A Tale by Lord Byron* in *The New Monthly Magazine* in 1819, despite the fact that both Polidori and Byron denied Byron’s connection to it.\(^{14}\) Byron resented the fact that his name was associated with a work that he did not write, one that he considered beneath his abilities, while Polidori was incensed that the tale was not credited to him. The Byronic affiliation proved a successful marketing device, however, and the novel enjoyed immense popularity. The plot centers on Aubrey, a young Englishman who travels to the Mediterranean with the charming but licentious Lord Ruthven. When they are waylaid by bandits, Ruthven is seemingly killed, and forces Aubrey to swear an oath that he will not speak of Ruthven's death. Aubrey is astounded to see Ruthven alive and well in London some time later, and is powerless to stop him when Ruthven begins seducing Aubrey's sister. Aubrey finally attempts to warn his sister about Ruthven, but it is too late:

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Ruthven marries the girl, drains her blood on their wedding night, and vanishes. The character of Lord Ruthven was ripe for the theatre, and would ultimately prove to be the most prolific stage vampire of the nineteenth century.

Theatrical adaptations surfaced almost immediately. An anonymously written “Dramatic Sketch” of the novel ran for four days at the Pavilion Theatre in New York City in 1819. Though this version was never revived and no extant copies of the script remain, reviews suggest that the play may have been closer to the source material than were subsequent adaptations.15 An 1820 French version of Polidori’s novel, Le Vampire, by Charles Nordier, is noteworthy because its success inspired British playwrights to bring Lord Ruthven to the London stage.16 Theatre producer S. J. Arnold charged the prolific British theatre artist James Robinson Planché to adapt Le Vampire, and so the second English-language stage iteration of Polidori’s novel amounted to little more than a translation and revision of Nordier’s play.

Like the musical version of The Wood Daemon, The Vampire opens with an “Introductory Vision” that lays out the major dramatic conflict of the plot. Set within the Basaltic Caverns of Staffa in Scotland, the scene discovers Margaret, the heroine of the play, asleep in the dead of night. Unda, a water spirit, and Ariel, a spirit of the air, meet to confer about events that are to unfold. Margaret

15 Partin 164.
16 Partin 165.
is the lovely and virtuous daughter of the local Baron, and is scheduled to marry Lord Ruthven, an earl, the following day. Little is Margaret aware that Ruthven is a vampire, a “wicked soul” who is able to possess the bodies of dead men and “assume their speech, their habits, and their knowledge,” thus attaining immortality. A periodic ritual is required of the vampire, however, and failure to execute it will result in total annihilation of the malignant soul:

...they must wed some fair and virtuous maiden,

Whom they do after kill, and from her veins

Drain eagerly the purple stream of life;

Which horrid draught alone hath pow’r to save them

From swift extermination.

Unda reveals that this particular vampire is the spirit of “Cromal the Bloody,” a vicious tyrant of centuries past, remembered for his “reign of fear” and countless murders. To warn Margaret of the danger awaiting her on her wedding day, the two spirits perform a magical ceremony that causes her to see a nightmarish likeness of Lord Ruthven in her dreams. It is their hope that Margaret will recognize Ruthven’s true form when she meets him in the flesh and not be deceived by his charms.

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As the first act opens, wedding preparations are under way in the Baron’s house, and the servants pass the time by exchanging vampire stories. These superstitions are linked to the Basaltic Caverns of the “Introductory Vision,” in which Margaret sheltered when separated from a hunting party the previous night. The caverns, it seems, are the final resting place of the vampire’s original body.

Margaret’s father, the Baron, describes the merits of her intended husband, Lord Ruthven. The Baron had met Ruthven on his journeys abroad, and Ruthven had saved the Baron’s life by throwing himself in the path of a sword intended for the Baron. Though Ruthven had apparently died, he has resurfaced in Scotland months later, safe and sound, and the Baron wants nothing more than to unite him with Margaret in marriage. When Margaret meets Ruthven, however, she is repulsed, for she recognizes him from her tortured dreams of the previous night. Ruthven then exhibits a penchant for empathetic manipulation, confounding Margaret with his charms and persuading her to consent to the marriage. But for all of his power, Ruthven privately wallows in the remorse that is characteristic of all Gothic villains:

Daemon, as I am, that walk the earth to slaughter and devour, the little that remains of heart within this wizard frame – sustained alone by human blood, shrinks from the appalling act of planting misery in the bosom of this veteran chieftain. Still must the fearful
sacrifice be made! and suddenly; for the approaching night will find my wretched frame exhausted – and darkness – worse than death – annihilation is my lot! Margaret! unhappy maid! thou art my destined prey! thy blood must feed a Vampire’s life, and prove the food of his disgusting banquet!\(^{20}\)

Robert, one of the Baron’s attendants, anticipates his own imminent wedding to a young woman named Effie, and seeks the honor of Lord Ruthven’s presence at the ceremony. Seeing an opportunity to spare Margaret, Ruthven goes to Robert’s wedding and attempts to kidnap Effie. Robert pursues the vampire and shoots him before he can siphon Effie’s life. Dying, Ruthven makes a desperate last request of the Baron: he is to conceal Ruthven’s death until nightfall, when he is to cast a particular ring into a sacred pool. The Baron swears an oath to accommodate this strange appeal, and Ruthven dies.

The Baron fulfills Ruthven’s unusual task as the second act opens. Thunder and Ruthven’s voice resound as the mysterious ring is tossed into the water: “Remember your oath!” Having now observed his death on two occasions, the Baron begins to suspect that something is amiss when Ruthven later returns to the castle and casually resumes making arrangements for his wedding to Margaret. Conscious of his fleeting opportunity to bolster his immortality with blood, Ruthven insists that his betrothed marry him

\(^{20}\) Planché, Vampire 56.
immediately. The Baron attempts to disrupt the nuptials and reveal the truth about Ruthven, but Ruthven accuses the Baron of lunacy and orders him to be restrained. With only moments to spare, Robert and the Baron wrestle with Ruthven to prevent the infernal union, and the vampire’s time expires. “A terrific peal of thunder is heard; Unda and Ariel appear; a thunderbolt strikes Ruthven to the ground, who immediately vanishes.”

Though almost entirely forgotten today, James Robinson Planché (1796 – 1880) was the writer of nearly two hundred works of drama of a variety of forms, many of which were commissioned while he was occupied as a resident playwright at various London theatres in the course of his fifty-year career. His plays enjoyed productions at most of the major London houses, and he also distinguished himself as a stage manager, a scenic design consultant, and an accomplished costume designer. The Vampire; or The Bride of the Isles opened at the English Opera House on August 9, 1820, and was well received by audiences and critics alike. The play was performed over thirty more times in the same season and was frequently revived throughout the nineteenth century. Planché himself remarked on the success of the play’s original production and its enduring legacy in his memoirs:

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21 Planché, Vampire 68.


23 Partin 173.
The result was most satisfactory to the management. The situations were novel and effective; the music lively and popular; the cast strong, comprising T. P. Cooke, who made a great hit in the principal character . . . . The trap now so well known as “the Vampire Trap” was invented for this piece, and the final disappearance of the Vampire caused quite a sensation. The melodrama had a long run, was often revived, and is to this day (1872) a stock piece in the country.

The play’s success inspired several imitations on the stages of London throughout the 1820’s, most of whose texts have been lost. As Bruce Partin remarks, “little can be determined about most of those plays beyond their titles and initial performance dates, but they are of interest nonetheless as evidence of the continuing fascination that the presence of vampires on the stage held for audiences during the period.”

In the first place, there is evidence that the stage vampire of the nineteenth century was a political analogue, in much the same way that folkloric vampires became political metaphors beginning in the eighteenth century. Planché frequently designed costumes for his characters, and gives us a clue in the

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24 The “Vampire Trap” is one whose doors close instantly once an actor has passed through the stage floor, conveying the effect of sudden disappearance.


26 Partin 187.
following description of Lord Ruthven’s attire: “silver breast-plate, studded with steel buttons, plaid kelt (sic), cloak, flesh arms and leggings, sandals, gray cloak, to form the attitude as he ascends from the tomb...”

Planché intended Ruthven to evoke the image of a medieval lord, which identifies the character as a classic Gothic dramatic villain, aligning him with the likes of the Marquis from *Fontainville Forest*, Osmond from *The Castle Spectre*, and Hardyknute from the various iterations of *The Wood Daemon*. Beyond his vampiric physiology, which compels him to pursue young women and drain their blood, Ruthven possesses the soul of a feudal Scottish lord, “Cromal the Bloody,” and therefore belongs to a Gothic medieval landscape. Ruthven is tyrannical and monarchic like the villains examined in previous chapters. As with Hardyknute, Ruthven has power over life and death, and must make regular human sacrifices to fuel the source of his power, his immortal soul. He also exhibits a form of empathetic manipulation over the women he seeks to seduce: he confounds Margaret with his charms and persuades her to consent to marriage despite her innate revulsion of him, and is almost successful in doing the same to Effie, whom he has only just met. Like other villains, he embodies outmoded medieval ideologies that were abhorrent to the sensibilities of early nineteenth-century audiences. But unlike his predecessors, Ruthven emerges not only from the Gothic landscape in

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which the play is set, but from the even darker, more primitive world of its distant past. His behavior is medieval because his soul is medieval: he is an ancien régime.

The vampire’s inherent otherness magnified the xenophonic inclinations of a British public still reeling from long years of war with France. As Deborah Lutz elucidates on the vampire tradition, “those who were already marginalized figures in society were thought to return as vampires after death. In medieval Eastern Europe alcoholics, thieves, excommunicated people, non-Christians (specifically Jews), those who died under a curse, and suicides were some of the excluded who might not stay dead.” 28 The notion of being stalked by such a marginalized figure would have greatly augmented the horror of the vampire in the minds of his audience. In addition, The Vampire’s 1820 audiences were not far removed from the ever present threat of invasion that hovered over the late 1790’s and the first decade of the nineteenth century. The danger of geographical invasion from a foreign menace is paralleled in the vampire’s attack. Being a world traveler, Lord Ruthven’s blood would be mixed with that of his many foreign victims. His bite, therefore, becomes an invasion of the individual body by an othered, alien enemy, with the aid of a superior predatory technology, his infernal teeth.

28 Deborah Lutz, The Dangerous Lover (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006) 85.
Wariness of foreigners was not the only public sensitivity tested by the corporeality of the stage vampire, but the integration of disparate classes as well. As discussed above, the early nineteenth-century worldview, to which everything and everyone had a proper place, was highly suspicious of mixtures. We can assume Lord Ruthven does not share this particularity, given that he has no reservations about indulging in the blood of women of different nationalities, and this social tolerance extends to class. Desperate for his blood regiment in the play’s first act, the vampire has no choice but to attempt to take it from Effie, who is of a lower social stratum than his intended bride, Margaret. We can infer, therefore, that the vampire has within him the mingled blood of different social classes. This characteristic would be egregious to the middle and upper-class nineteenth-century mindset. The vampire, a grotesque, allowed for “the low to assume equal status with the high and threatened to crowd the latter out of existence.”

Class discrimination was not merely an ideological distinction in the first decades of the nineteenth century, but a prejudice based on fear. This was a moment emblazoned with remembrance of the French Revolution, and gentry continued to fear the possibility of danger from revolution-minded members of the working class. The year 1820, in which the vampire made his

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29 Stafford 279.
London stage debut, was the very year of the so-called “Cato Street Conspiracy,” for example, a plot partially inspired by the French Revolution to assassinate all members of the British cabinet and the prime minister.

A subtler but no less potent threat from the poorer factions of London society came in the form of disease. The overcrowded, filthy slums populated by the industrial working classes were breeding grounds for a veritable encyclopedia of ailments. Oversized families were packed into tiny living quarters without running water, proper sewage, and adequate ventilation. Outhouses and wells were brimming with rubbish in these areas, while “breweries, tanneries, dye works, and factories polluted the rivers and added their odors to an atmosphere already heavy with the stench of animal and human excrement.” 30 Contaminated water was rife with cholera, typhoid, and diphtheria bacteria, and the “proximity of outhouses and courtyard excrement to wells, streams, and cisterns made the working-class slum a deathtrap.” 31 Those who were removed from this environment did their best to maintain their health, and the upper classes developed a collective obsession with purity. But even the healthy and upper-class were not spared from the perpetual sight of the ravages of disease. As Barbara Stafford writes, “the malodorous urban setting thus became the prime locus for posing the ancient problem of the barbaric invasion


31 Roberts and Roberts 485.
of a lethal and impecunious otherness…”

Joseph Adams, a British physician and the author of *Epidemic Diseases* (1809), believed that particular maladies were in fact the product of the “volatile urban poor in recent times.”

The vampire, as an *othered* carrier of the blended blood of diverse classes, is inherently impure, and it is reasonable to consider that audiences, particularly of the higher echelons of London society, might have perceived him as a host of dreaded contagion.

Before the advent of internal medicine, disease was primarily understood for its effects on the skin. Londoners of every level of society in the early nineteenth century were accustomed to seeing the epidermal manifestations of an array of diseases, from measles to leprosy, as well as the disfiguring ravages of running sores, ulcerated scabs, and fungous infections. Often these disorders were treated with severe chemicals such as mercury and iodide which themselves eroded the skin.

According to Stafford, these severe blemishes and their defacing “cures” would have had a dehumanizing effect on their victims. This helps to explain the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment emphasis on immaculateness and purity. The idealized visage, consisting of an oval shape with regular features, “a white, flawless complexion, and lightly carmined cheeks - was as rare and mythic as the ideal work of art.”

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32 Stafford 291.

33 Stafford 291.

34 Stafford 283.
vampire becomes even more offensive, therefore, when one considers that it disfigures the exceedingly uncommon occurrence of natural corporeal perfection. Even if the vampire does not kill his victim, his bite leaves a scar that blemishes the body, robbing it of its impeccability and simultaneously dehumanizing it. The vampire makes his victim like himself: an abomination.

As a thief of blood and corporeal purity, a murderer, and a kidnapper, the vampire capitalized on fears of the rampant crime that plagued London at the turn of the nineteenth century. A stalker of young women, Ruthven is a sexual predator. He woos and seduces his victims, penetrates them with his teeth, and finally engages in a forced exchange of bodily fluid. This *modus operandi* evokes another common and distressing reality in the early nineteenth century, that of sexually transmitted diseases. Venereal disease was widely believed to originate from foreign sources, France in particular, as well as the poor, and another *othered* sexual deviant, the prostitute.

By the nineteenth century, asserts Thomas Laqueur, prostitution was “*the* social evil, a particularly disruptive, singularly threatening vice.” 36 Within the home, the “economy of sex” is “quintessentially social and productive,” serving the integrity of the household; intercourse with a prostitute serves no legitimate

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35 Stafford 283.

social purpose.\textsuperscript{37} Like the Gothic monstrosity, therefore, the prostitute had the potential to invade and subvert the sanctity of the domestic sphere. Warped with immoral function, prostitutes’ \textit{othered} bodies existed outside the social order, “because in them the semen of so many different men was mixed, pell-mell,” just as the vampire’s body contains the blood of his many lover-victims.\textsuperscript{38} Herein lies perhaps the most potent of the vampire’s threats, one he shares with the common prostitute. Referring to the vampire that Polidori originally wrote, Deborah Lutz muses:

Lord Ruthven, like all vampires, is a dangerous lover of the melodramatic villainous type, and he eroticizes a sexual cannibalism, an act that involves violent, sadistic seduction. Because the vampire must always be invited in, he represents the paradoxical fascination and repulsion of sex that is desirable because it is dangerous, because it might lead to pain, expulsion, and/or death.

The vampire evokes a “desire to be ‘taken,’ to be greedily consumed . . . .”\textsuperscript{39} Like the prostitute, he possesses the perceived ability to entice others to submit to their baser passions, corroding the moral integrity of his victims in an act of intercourse which ultimately serves no measurable social purpose.

\textsuperscript{37} Laqueur, \textit{Making Sex} 232.

\textsuperscript{38} Laqueur, \textit{Making Sex} 230.

\textsuperscript{39} Lutz 85.
I would be remiss not to mention another literary vampire who has arguably attained the distinction of becoming the most perfect Gothic villain and supernatural manifestation ever conceived, Count Dracula. Though he did not rise from his grave until the twilight of the nineteenth century, when he was created by Irish novelist Bram Stoker, and though his stage presence was not asserted in a serious way until the 1920’s, Dracula embodies each of the supernatural character types addressed in this study. He ascends from his sepulcher nightly, the revenant of a forgotten class of aristocratic warriors, making him akin to the monarchical ghosts that so frequently haunted Gothic plays. He commands dark magical forces, like the magicians discussed in the previous chapter, using them to alter his shape into whatever countenance will most effectively advance his fiendish designs. Like the Frankenstein monster, which will be discussed presently, Dracula’s body is composed of preternaturally reanimated dead tissue. As a vampire, he regularly engages in the criminal acts described above, including theft, kidnapping, assault, and murder. Supernatural abilities aside, Dracula is arguably the quintessential Gothic villain in that he dwells in a gloomy, “exotic” castle where he imprisons unsuspecting, “enlightened,” Western Europeans. What makes Dracula so frightening, so

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40 Bram Stoker himself wrote the first stage adaptation of his novel, and produced it at Henry Irving’s Lyceum Theatre in May of 1897 (Partin 214). The purpose of this production was to secure dramatic copyright of the material, and it was little more than a staged reading of the novel. Dracula’s first viable and commercially successful stage foray was written by Hamilton Deane and premiered in 1927. The American production of this adaptation starred Bela Lugosi. The play would later be the blueprint for the first major film version of Dracula in 1931.
potent, is that, unlike earlier Gothic villains, his story recounts his monumental
efforts to extend his power beyond the castle to which he is bound at the
beginning of the novel. He crosses oceans to pursue young women to their very
bedrooms, where, in an intimate exchange of bodily fluids, he transforms them
into his own kind, making them his simultaneous lovers, sisters, daughters, and
wives. Dracula does not limit his victims to women, nor does he merely drain
the blood of a series of individuals. His inevitable, ultimate aim must be the
eventual assimilation of an entire population into the ranks of the undead. In so
embracing the entire spectrum of Gothic villainy and supernatural
characteristics, Dracula becomes a figure of such iconic power that his cultural
resonance exhibits no sign of waning at the time of this writing, over a century
after he emerged from his coffin.

*Presumption; or The Fate of Frankenstein* – Richard Brinsley Peake, 1823

Without question, the most significant intellectual product to emerge from
the famous game of swapping horror tales at Lake Geneva in the “ghost
summer” of 1816 was Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein; or The Modern Prometheus*.
Shelley’s purpose in writing the novel, which was first published in 1818, was to
“speak to the mysterious fears of our nature, and awaken thrilling horror.”

Shelley harbored a voracious curiosity toward many of the budding facets of science that were becoming popular among the public in the early nineteenth century. Her diaries from the period in which she was writing the novel reveal that she was an avid reader of scientific journals and record her participation in discussions on such topics with Byron, Polidori, and Percy Shelley.

One particular conversation on galvanism – the potential of electricity to reanimate dead tissue – prompted a nightmare which ultimately inspired Mary Shelley’s novel. The plot follows the brilliant but misguided Victor Frankenstein, who, obsessed with discovering a means of defeating physical death, constructs a gigantic, grotesque body from components of various corpses he has exhumed. Frankenstein manages to give life to this creature before he has fully contemplated the implications of his technology, and, horrified at the result, rejects his own creation. The monster repeatedly fails in his attempts to assimilate into society over the ensuing years, and ultimately seeks revenge on the man who gave him life. The creature becomes responsible for a number of deaths, murdering Frankenstein’s wife and brother with his own hands.

Frankenstein and his behemoth begin a game of cat-and-mouse that spans years.

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and continents, until Frankenstein’s death prompts the creature to ignite his own funeral pyre on the Arctic wastelands to which his creator pursued him. Shelley does not divulge in her novel the details by which Frankenstein animates his composite corpse, but is instead more concerned with the philosophical ramifications of creating life. Though the novel was generally well received by the public, the critical response was largely negative, owing as much to “the blasphemous nature of Frankenstein as ‘Creator’” as its affiliation with Shelley’s husband, the controversial Percy Shelley.43

Despite negative press, the popular sensation engendered by Shelley’s novel guaranteed stage adaptations, and the first was produced in 1823. *Presumption; or The Fate of Frankenstein* was penned by Richard Brinsley Peake. Peake (1792–1847) was the writer of over forty dramatic works of a variety of forms, produced at several major houses in London. *Presumption* was not the only play of Peake’s that could be called Gothic, although it was the first; *The Haunted Inn* (1828), *The Bottle Imp* (1828), and *The Devil of Marseilles* (1846) all belonged to his melodramatic repertoire.44 *Presumption* opened on July 28th, 1823, at the English Opera House and enjoyed an initial run of thirty-seven performances. It was frequently revived over the next twenty-five years, and

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43 Partin 115.

inspired several imitations.\textsuperscript{45} Some of the liberties Peake exercised in adapting Shelley’s novel have profoundly informed the overall Frankenstein mythology that has developed over the past two centuries. These include the notable invention of Frankenstein’s assistant, Fritz, who would become a fixture in film adaptations, and the reconceptualization of the monster as an infantile mute, capable of communication only through a pathetic, pantomimic lexicon.

The play opens in a Gothic chamber in the house of the brilliant Frankenstein, where Fritz, a loyal servant, wastes no time in establishing the chilling atmosphere. Fritz is at the mercy of his nerves, starting at even the merest sound, and growing increasingly alarmed at his master’s obsessive behavior. Despite Frankenstein’s kind disposition, Fritz surmises that he “holds converse with somebody below with a long tail, horns and hoofs, who shall be nameless.”\textsuperscript{46} As base as his superstitions may seem, there is a distinct ambiguity to the nature of Frankenstein’s work that is detected by those closest to him. Clerval, Frankenstein’s friend and fiancé to his sister, arrives and inquires after the master of the house. Fritz voices his suspicions of his master’s fanatical endeavors: “my shrewd guess, Sir, is that, like Doctor Faustus, my master is raising the Devil.”\textsuperscript{47} Clerval attempts to dispel this suspicion, for he is convinced

\textsuperscript{45} Cox, \textit{Seven Gothic Dramas} 385.


\textsuperscript{47} Peake 389.
his friend is a simple alchemist. He is surprised to learn, however, that Fritz has no knowledge of Frankenstein’s alchemical pursuits. When Frankenstein enters to greet Clerval, he refuses to disclose the nature of his work, but his gaunt visage betrays the ravages of his obsession. Clerval is stunned by Frankenstein’s appearance and begs him to be more mindful of his health. Frankenstein is undeterred:

I am engaged heart and soul in the pursuit of a discovery – a grand, unheard of wonder! None but those who have experienced can conceive the enticement of science; he who looks into the book of nature, finds an inexhaustible source of novelty, of wonder, and delight. What hidden treasures are contained in her mighty volume . . .

Frankenstein agrees to the immediate wedding between his sister, Elizabeth, and Clerval, though he regrets the disruption it will mean for his work. Alone, he hints at the purpose of his mysterious enterprise: “Like Prometheus of old, have I daringly attempted the formation – the animation of a Being!” Desperately concerned for his friend, Clerval secretly bribes Fritz to spy on Frankenstein and report back his findings.

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48 Peake 390.

49 Peake 392.
Frankenstein reveals more to the audience as the climax of his labors approaches: “The object of my experiments lies there (Pointing up to the laboratory.) – a huge automaton in human form. Should I succeed in animating it, Life and Death would appear to me as ideal bounds, which I shall break through and pour a torrent of light into our dark world.”

The mad philosopher retreats into his laboratory, and Fritz begins his reconnaissance, relaying to the audience what he sees as he peers through the window into Frankenstein’s study. From within, we hear Frankenstein’s exclamations of triumph: “It lives! It lives!” A petrified Fritz stutters through his description of the newborn being: “There’s a hob – a hob-goblin, and twenty feet high!” Frankenstein flees his laboratory in horror, expressing the kind of remorse typically reserved for a Gothic villain facing his downfall:

\[\text{\ldots a flash breaks in upon my darkened soul, and tells me my attempt was impious, and that its fruition will be fatal to my peace for ever. }\ldots \text{ The dreadful spectre of a human form – no mortal could withstand the horror of that countenance – miserable and impious being that I am! – lost – lost!}\]

Frankenstein is only jarred from his despairing reverie by the entrance of his creation. The Demon, as it is described, bursts from the sealed laboratory door.

\[\text{\footnotesize 50 Peake 397.}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize 51 Peake 398.}\]
with superhuman strength and bounds upon the stage. Face-to-face with its creator, the Demon “approaches him with gestures of conciliation.” Repulsed, Frankenstein attacks his creation with a sword, which the Demon effortlessly snaps in two. The creature tosses Frankenstein to the floor, hurdles through a large window, and vanishes into the stormy night, closing the first act.

As the curtain rises on the second act, Frankenstein has physically recovered from his encounter with his monster, but is distressed at the realization that his creation – “powerful in form, of supernatural and gigantic strength, but with the mind of an infant” – remains at large. He is somewhat comforted to learn that his old flame, Agatha De Lacey, has returned from abroad, and resides in a nearby wood with her brother and father. Agatha’s brother, Felix De Lacey, was in love with Safie, the daughter of a Muslim, “the treacherous Mahometan,” who was a state prisoner in Paris. Felix helped Mahometan to escape French custody in exchange for his daughter’s hand in marriage. When freed of his bonds, however, Mahometan did not uphold his promise and fled Paris with his daughter. Felix was charged with aiding a criminal, and the De Lacey family’s fortune was confiscated, its honor forfeit.

Little do the De Lacey’s realize that their meager cottage resides in the forest that has become home to Frankenstein’s monster. The local gypsies speak

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52 Peake 399.
53 Peake 400.
54 Peake 404.
in hushed whispers of the fiend that allegedly haunts their woods, and though
the general sentiment is that the creature seems to be passive, none have braved
its presence long enough to find out. The Demon begins to visit the De Lacey’s
habitually, and stealthily, learning what it can from observing their behavior. It
begins to aid the family where possible, gathering flowers and firewood, and is
on hand to witness the joyous reunion of Felix and Safie, who escaped her
father’s custody and returned to be with her lover. En route to his reunion with
his own lover, Frankenstein encounters a peasant who has seen the monster,
which he describes as “ten foot six long, with a head of black lanky locks down
to his very elbows.” At the De Lacey cottage, the Demon finally makes itself
known to Agatha, who swoons at the sight of it, and plunges into a nearby
brook. Though the fiend saves her, Frankenstein and Felix arrive only in time to
misinterpret the scene, and Felix fires his gun at the creature. In retribution, the
Demon seizes a burning brand and ignites the cottage’s rafters “with a malignant
joy,” closing the second act.

The mood is cheerful at the house of Frankenstein, where all make ready
for Clerval and Elizabeth’s wedding, blissfully unaware of the recent conflicts
and conflagration. That is, until the Demon arrives and kidnaps William,
Frankenstein’s young brother, right from under Fritz’s nose, and proceeds to

55 Peake 411-412.

56 Peake 413.
murder him. The wedding preparations are suspended while the entire company begins an exhaustive search for William. The Demon takes advantage of the hysteria to slay Agatha only a short distance from where Frankenstein stands. The twice-bereaved scientist arms himself and pursues his creation over the course of the final two scenes of the play, thirsty for vengeance. He at last chases the Demon up a neighboring mountain, where, against the better judgment of those familiar with the dynamics of triggering avalanches, Frankenstein discharges his musket. “The avalanche falls and annihilates the Demon and Frankenstein. – A heavy fall of snow succeeds. – Loud thunder heard, and all the characters form a picture as the curtain falls.”

Despite the presence of picketers whose objections to Presumption echoed moral concerns originally registered against Frankenstein, Peake’s play was very well received by critics and audiences alike, including Mary Shelley, whose reaction to the play was positive. There is little doubt that the most celebrated aspect of the production was the performance of Thomas Potter Cooke, who portrayed the monster, and who had also originated the role of Lord Ruthven in The Vampire three years earlier. Cooke’s imposing stage presence and singular gift for pantomime was widely praised in his interpretation of the creature’s corporeality, and is intimated in the striking illustration below. William

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57 Peake 425.

58 Partin 131.
Oxberry, a comic actor and theatre chronicler at the time, deftly articulates the general sentiment regarding Peake’s acting style and paints a vivid portrait of what audiences observed:

The thing is a creation of his own brain . . . it contains no trait of the theatre – no shade of anything that has been done before – he comes to our view, a mass of moving matter, without stimulus or intellect – he seems to have eyesight without vision – he moves as if unconscious that he is moving . . . . What can be more harassing than the respiration which supplies the place of speech – a feature in this performance as novel as it was natural . . . . The creature, raised from the particles of human remains gathered from the charnel-house, is brought before you in the green, ghastly hue of putrescent flesh. It is indeed the realization of the walking corpse.  

The role of the Demon is substantial but involves no spoken dialogue whatsoever, and Cooke was tasked with evoking through physicality alone the discovery of the complexities of sensation and thought. Though the star of the production was James William Wallack, who played Frankenstein, Cooke’s performance consistently stole the show, and the actor toured the role throughout the provinces, eventually taking it all the way to Paris.  

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4.1. T. P. Cooke in *Presumption; or The Fate of Frankenstein* (1823):

“Mr. T. P. Cooke of the Theatre Royal Covent Garden in the Character of the Monster in the Dramatic Romance of Frankenstein.”

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60 Gordon Hitchins, “‘A Breathless Eagerness in the Audience’: Historical Notes on Dr. Frankenstein and His Monster,” *Film Comment* 6 (1970): 51.

61 Harvard Theatre Collection.
Frankenstein’s creature shares much in common with Cooke’s other signature role, Lord Ruthven. Like the vampire, the Demon is an abomination: an unnatural hybrid of living and dead material. His very corporeality is a patchwork of disparate pieces, inherently disagreeable to a public that valued purity and abhorred mixtures. The Demon also represents a grotesque combination of social classes, from the elite, to the rising middle class, to the teeming masses of the London poor, a notion that would have made him all the more ghastly to his audiences. Like the vampire, the monster is also a murderer, thief, and something of a stalker, and therefore evocative of London’s considerable crime.

Despite their similarities, Frankenstein’s monster is othered to a greater degree than the vampire. While Lord Ruthven can masquerade as a human, Frankenstein’s disfigured creature must remain hidden from human view, artfully interacting with people in secret. As Markman Ellis writes, the “deployment of fear around the creature constructs him as both racially different and as a vision of the modern, alienated laboring poor …”\textsuperscript{62} In point of fact, the image of the monster quickly became an iconic signifier of marginalized groups

in British society, reflecting racist and xenophobic inclinations. A political
cartoon from 1843, for example, conflates the monster with an Irish bandit in a
caricature that expresses the prevalent immigration anxieties of the time.

The monster’s affiliation with the early nineteenth century’s emerging
fields of science and rapidly advancing technological developments further
distinguishes him from the more mystical vampire. It is important to note,
however, that in the original novel, Victor Frankenstein is almost as much an
alchemist and conjurer as he is a scientist. As Ellis indicates, science at the turn
of the nineteenth century was about making knowledge publicly available so
that it could be verified, while secret discoveries were considered alchemical. 63
Science was about a process while alchemy was concerned with results. While
Mary Shelley does not reveal the nature of Frankenstein’s discovery of the key to
life, or the particularities of the procedure he conducts to execute his knowledge,
she does divulge that he had studied alchemy and the medieval Cabbalists,
which would suggest that his creation is as much a ghost or a golem as it is a
product of science. It is significant that Richard Brinsley Peake refers to the
monster for the first time as an “automaton” in Presumption, which indicates that
he is a construct – a robot – and frames him in scientific terms.

63 Ellis 150.

“The Irish Frankenstein.” 64

64 Library of Congress.
Science, which was more commonly referred to as “natural philosophy” at
the time, encompassed a wide range of burgeoning disciplines, including
mechanics, electricity, natural history, chemistry, physics, and mathematics,
among others.\(^65\) As mentioned above, Mary Shelley had “an active interest in,
and a sophisticated understanding of, some important scientific debates of her
time concerning electricity and the origin of life.”\(^66\) She was not alone. Public
demonstrations of scientific phenomena and lectures on a wide range of topics
were becoming extremely popular entertainments in the early nineteenth
century, and celebrated humankind’s capacity for overcoming any obstacle
through reason and enlightenment. However, the theatricality of scientific
inquiry was often exploited for a paying public that was simultaneously
fascinated and repulsed by the grotesque. As Marjean Purinton writes:

Commercialized shows featured giants, midgets, bearded ladies,
hermaphrodites, and mad women. While these productions relied
on theatrical methods for the presentation of specimens, they also
made those spectacles seem authentic in their use of commentary
that appropriated scientific discourses.\(^67\)

\(^{65}\) Ellis 121.

\(^{66}\) Ellis 141.

\(^{67}\) Marjean Purinton, “Theatricalized Bodies and Spirits: Techno Gothic as Performance in
The public’s enthralment with this brand of pseudo-science can be accounted for in part by Freud’s concept of the *unheimlich*, a phenomenon whose triggers include automatons and robots, the sight of dismembered limbs, and the notion of being buried alive. Each of these could conceivably be elicited by Cooke’s representation of Frankenstein’s monster. This attraction/repulsion, curiosity/fear dichotomy characterizes anxieties the public harbored toward new fields of scientific inquiry. A keen fascination with the possibilities of scientific discovery was counterbalanced with a wariness of technology gone awry.

It was the *othered* poor that were most familiar with the uses and dangers of unnatural devices – machines – in early nineteenth-century Britain. Industrial workers at this time, most of whom were women and children, were accustomed to working twelve hours a day or more at spinning machines in textile mills, trading the individuality of their bodies for membership in a collective body, a vast, human-machine hybrid. Routine communion with automations blurred the distinction between the body and the artificial construct it served.

This chapter has discussed abominations – monsters that emerged upon the waning Gothic stage – whose inhuman nature alone could disrupt the order of the domestic sphere and its theatrical analogue, the domestic melodrama. James Robinson Planché’s *The Vampire; or The Bride of the Isles* (1820) was the first major vampire play in English, while Richard Brinsley Peake’s *Presumption; or The Fate of Frankenstein* (1823) was the first stage adaptation of Mary Shelley’s
novel. Both characters were enlivened by the substantial corporeality of actor Thomas Potter Cooke, and both informed respective mythologies that have persisted to the present. Both figures are others seeking integration within societies that cannot abide their true natures. Both characters’ corporealities are unnatural fusions of living and dead tissue that allow for the possibility of a disordered cosmos in a culture that bore a fearful disdain of mixtures. Both figures evoke London’s rampant crime at the turn of the nineteenth century. Both threaten to assimilate their victims into themselves, suggesting to audiences the unsettling notion that anyone has the potential capacity for monstrous behavior. This triggers an experience of Freud’s unheimlich, the uncanny phenomenon of encountering something that is at once familiar and entirely alien. The Vampire’s Lord Ruthven was designed to resemble a medieval lord, whose regular human sacrifices and ability to charm his victims align him with earlier Gothic dramatic villains. His otherness derives from the fact that his blood is mingled with that of foreigners and disparate social classes, which exacerbated xenophobic sensibilities among audiences, calling to mind invasion fears and the threat of violence from revolution-minded members of the working classes. His blended plasma makes him an inherently impure carrier of disease, and as a sexual deviant, the vampire, like the prostitute, corrupts morals and tempts victims to submit to baser passions. Frankenstein’s monster, also a grotesque combination of social classes, became a symbol for marginalized factions of
British society, including foreigners and the poor. He probes tensions between humans and their technology on both practical and theoretical levels, at once warning of the dangers of science gone awry and reinforcing a status quo that allowed workers to defer the individuality of their bodies in concerted acts of communion with machines.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

On December 30, 1808, John Philip Kemble, the manager-proprietor of Covent Garden, hosted an elaborate Masonic ritual at the site of his recently immolated theatre. In pragmatic terms, this ceremony represented a meticulously orchestrated public relations campaign designed to keep the image and the memory of Covent Garden alive and well in the public consciousness despite its recent “demise.” As such, this event was a piece of theatre, which, upon examination, proves to have been unusually Gothic. It was, after all, a magical ritual that served not only as a funeral for the “body” of the destroyed theatre, but a kind of incantation for its resurrection. As this dissertation has demonstrated, notions of facilitating something that has become disembodied, manipulating memory, and reconfiguring an old body for a new purpose take on particular significance in the context of the predominant form of theatre at the time, Gothic drama.

The ceremonial placement of the cornerstone for a new Covent Garden was attended by the Prince of Wales and a retinue of nobility, members of the theatre company, including the celebrated Sarah Siddons, and a carefully
monitored representation of the general public. *The London Times* described this singular event as follows:

> On Saturday, the first stone of the new edifice was laid by his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales. Preparatory to the ceremony, an extensive range of temporary accommodations, consisting of a covered gallery with seats, was prepared within the area of the building for the reception of a very numerous assemblage of spectators of both sexes, who were admitted only by tickets . . . .¹

Detachments of the Foot Guards secured the area, three regiments of grenadier companies assembled “with their colors and music,” and two troops of Life guards patrolled adjacent streets. With the new Covent Garden’s cornerstone suspended above its intended resting place, all was in readiness, and a procession ushered in the ceremony:

> The Grand Lodge was opened at Freemason’s Hall … at 12 o’clock, and was attended by a Deputation from all the minor lodges of the Metropolis, the whole in their proper paraphernalia. At half past 12, they set out in procession, and passed down Long-acre, Bow-street, and entered by the door next to Broad-court, and proceeded to the place appointed for their reception…²

¹ “Covent Garden Theatre.” *London Times* 2 January 1809: 3E.

² “Covent Garden Theatre.” *London Times* 2 January 1809: 3E.
As the Life Guards prepared to receive the Prince of Wales, the bands began playing “Come Let Us Prepare,” a Masonic hymn. The stage was set:

…the illustrious Grand Master made his entrance; he was received at the door by a Deputation from the Grand Lodge, with the Chief Proprietors. The bands struck up "God Save the King," and some pieces of artillery within the area fired a royal salute of 21 guns. His Royal Highness was attended by the Dukes of Sussex and Gloucester, the Earl of Moira, Colonels Bloomfield and Hulse, and several other Masons of distinction; and being arrived at his tent, shortly afterwards proceeded to the ceremonial: a plan of the building was presented to his Royal Highness by Mr. Smirke, the architect, and a gilt silver trowel by Mr. Copeland, the builder of the edifice. The cement was then laid by the workmen, and adjusted by the Grand Master; the stone was lowered to its bed.\textsuperscript{3}

Once the Deputy Grand Master determined the stone’s position to be correct, “his Royal Highness laid it by giving it three strokes with a mallet,” and placed into a cavity within the stone a sort of time capsule, containing an inscribed bronze medal and a collection of coins.\textsuperscript{4} Finally:

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\textsuperscript{3} “Covent Garden Theatre.” \textit{London Times} 2 January 1809: 3E.
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\textsuperscript{4} “Covent Garden Theatre.” \textit{London Times} 2 January 1809: 3E.
\end{flushright}
His Royal Highness then poured upon the stone the offerings of corn, wine, and oils . . . . During this ceremony all the bands played “God Save the King,” and a second royal salute was fired by the artillery. His Royal Highness then returned the plan to the architect, graciously expressing his wishes for the prosperity of the undertaking, and retired in the procession, amidst the plaudits of the multitude.5

Kemble staged his theatre of public relations within the culture of ghosts that London cultivated in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as described in chapter two. It was a period described by scholar Terry Castle as having “a growing dissociation from corporeal reality, and a new and unprecedented antipathy toward death in all its aspects.”6 Death and life were segregated, which mystified death and ultimately demonstrated that the dead have a way of resurfacing. A rising belief in the autonomy of the spirit accompanied what Castle has dubbed the “spectralization” of memory, the process by which memory is endowed with the ability to haunt the mind.7 This moment witnessed the proliferation of Gothic literature, both novels and plays. Ghosts on the Gothic stage emerged from a culture of ghosts – a Petri dish – an

5 “Covent Garden Theatre.” London Times 2 January 1809: 3E.


experimental atmosphere that resulted from these changing perceptions beginning in the 1790’s. First, the theatre enabled ghosts to represent bodies of literature. The circumstances of James Boaden’s phantom in Fontainville Forest recalled Hamlet’s ghost, and by extension Shakespeare’s canon, with which the playwright attempted to align himself to legitimize his own career. Matthew Gregory Lewis used his bleeding Castle Spectre to invoke his own sensational and controversial literary works – in particular his Gothic novel The Monk – as well as his reputation as a purveyor of dangerous and morally ambiguous material. Gothic ghosts also signified political bodies. As a victim of usurpation, the murdered aristocrat in Fontainville Forest can be read as post-Revolutionary France warning Britain against its own flirtation with revolution. The ghost in Matthew Gregory Lewis’ Castle Spectre, the most famous Gothic play, invokes Revolutionary tensions by representing a body in exile, reminiscent of the displaced French aristocrats the playwright encountered on the Continent. The ghost is bleeding from one breast, and is fashioned after the iconography of the emerging French republic, which included a woman with a single exposed breast. Lewis' eroticized, idealized spectre is a target of male aggression, something to be possessed, a concept treated in a similar manner by playwright Joanna Baillie some thirty years later. As a spectralized other, Emma Graham, the ghost in Baillie’s play The Phantom represents a female subject of a patriarchal system: her individuality is dismissed in favor of an idealized mental construct.
She is taught to have little confidence in her individual voice. Her body becomes an object of male social advancement, an inescapable prison that is expected to conform to societal representations of femininity.

In hosting the Masonic ritual at Covent Garden, John Philip Kemble attempted to “spectralize” the memory of his devastated theatre, endowing it with the ability to stick in the minds of the public, effectively manufacturing a ghost that would haunt his customers for the duration of its disembodied state. This ghost, like the spectres of the Gothic stage, evoked the body of the canon of British dramatic literature. Given the fact that Covent Garden was one of the two theatres sanctioned by the monarchy, its spirit also recalled political bodies, a fact that was reinforced at the Masonic ceremony by the presence of the Prince of Wales and his entourage, as well as various factions of the military. While the presence of Sarah Siddons alone would likely not have been widely perceived as a challenge to traditional notions of female societal roles, her performances were often described as having a kind of “wildness,” a fierce intellectual energy that “associated her with a select group of mortals whose sensibilities seemed to contemporaries to escape the usual limitations associated with sex and gender.”

Siddons, among the greatest actors of her generation, was a frequent player of

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Gothic heroines, and her participation in the Masonic ceremony became etched in the public consciousness; Kemble’s Covent Garden ghost therefore included a strong female element.

Having thus given the memory of Covent Garden its own agency, John Philip Kemble manipulated this memory in the minds of the public. As discussed in chapter three, the skilful maneuvering of memory was a form of magical conjuring for the supervillain, the Gothic villain possessed of supernatural powers. Where ghosts are memory, those able to control memory effectively control history, and therefore wield the most power. Matthew Gregory Lewis’ Hardyknute, the Faustian sorcerer in *The Wood Daemon*, uses his preternatural gifts to reshape his deformed body into one more befitting of monarchical authority, and maintains his usurped station through regular human sacrifices. These behaviors identify Hardyknute with the tyranny of the French Revolution as it was perceived in Britain. As an analogue for Napoleon, Hardyknute achieves extraordinary heights of power, enjoys unearthly control over others, and carries a magic wand, a phallic representation with which he summons spirits – manipulates history – even as Napoleon imposed a monolithic male will upon history. Like ghosts, supervillains and their nonhuman companions addressed the changing role of women in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Europe. The Wood Daemon herself, Sangrida, is a descendent of mythological motifs and rejects traditional female roles. She is
independent, mobile, and not subject to patriarchal authority. These characteristics are pursued to no avail by the women of Joanna Baillie’s *Witchcraft*, however. The play occupies a world not unlike that of Britain at the turn of the nineteenth century, insofar as there was a pervasive danger of what Mary Wollstonecraft described at the time as being “Bastilled in marriage.” A woman’s own body becomes her personal Gothic dungeon in this schema, even as her individuality becomes lost or idealized as the subject of the male gaze. In *Witchcraft*, Joanna Baillie wrote a world that would rather see women burn as witches than allow them the agency they lack; agency for which they would willingly trade their eternal souls.

Although it is doubtful that John Philip Kemble promised his soul to demonic forces in exchange for earthly power, he almost certainly bit off more than he could chew in conjuring the spirit of the fallen Covent Garden. For when the theatre’s new “body” was completed in September of 1809, it was received by the public as something of an abomination, as we will see. As described in chapter four, abominations were monsters that traversed the stage as the popularity of Gothic drama gave way to the domestic melodrama in the first decades of the nineteenth century. James Robinson Planché’s *The Vampire; or The Bride of the Isles* was the first significant vampire play in English, while Richard Brinsley Peake’s *Presumption; or The Fate of Frankenstein* was the first stage

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adaptation of Mary Shelley’s novel. Both stage fiends share a common origin, the gathering of Lord Byron’s expatriates in Switzerland in 1816, “the year without a summer.” These othered characters were both portrayed by T. P. Cooke, and both seek assimilation within their respective communities. They are infernal mixtures, living and dead, representing disorder to a culture for which everything and everyone had a proper place. The Vampire’s Lord Ruthven emerged from the classic tradition of Gothic stage villains, exhibiting immortality and the power to control others at the cost of regular blood sacrifices. He is the danger of invasion, which was pervasive on a national level, and the fear of disease on an individual level. He penetrates his victims against their will, mingles their blood with his own, which is the blood of all of his victims, and worst of all, threatens to make abominations out of his prey: Ruthven’s charms corrupt one’s morals even as his bite defaces the skin. Frankenstein’s creation, a stitched-together automaton, is fabricated from charnel house scraps, boasting parts from every constituent of society. His hideous corporeal constitution lent itself well as a tool for racial and class discrimination in the early nineteenth century. As an artificial construct, he afforded audiences an unheimlich encounter with the realities of rapidly advancing technologies and the pursuit of science. He cautions against probing forbidden arts and is an expression of anxieties about increasingly common interaction with machines. Both the vampire and Frankenstein’s monster allow for the possibility of assimilating others into
themselves, suggesting to audiences the unsettling notion that anyone has the
capacity for monstrous behavior. Thus a progression becomes visible in the
wake of Gothic drama. We have moved from an obsession with ghosts, to
manipulating and consorting with them as magicians, to the abominable
possibility of being ghoulish ourselves.

This overarching progression of the supernatural in Gothic drama, from
memory-as-ghost, to the manipulation thereof, to the realities of the monstrous
within the self, was, I would argue, the key to the tremendous power that Gothic
drama had in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Britain. While the
Gothic drama is no longer the most important form of theatre in Britain, or
anywhere else, for that matter, its influence remains. Many Gothic scholars point
to the contemporary horror film genre as the natural successor of Gothic drama,
an idea with which I concur. However, by categorizing Gothic drama as simply
the antecedent of a more recent phenomenon, we risk overlooking its inherent
significance. As theatre historians, we would do well not to overlook spandrels
for their arches. I submit that any piece of theatre that engages a memory’s
ability to haunt, the manipulation of memory to define or characterize the past,
or vexations and anxieties of the body potentially carries with it the vestiges of
the Gothic supernatural.

Covent Garden emerged from the earth nine months after it fell, in
September of 1809. Its new form was a monstrosity, a grotesque, and proved to
be an *unheimlich* encounter for the public; extensively redesigned and expanded, it was a simultaneously recognizable and unrecognizable approximation of what had stood in its place before. A whole tier of gallery seating had been replaced by private boxes and retiring rooms, significantly reducing the available space for spectators at the top of the theatre.\textsuperscript{10} Kemble had hired an Italian opera singer, Angelica Catalani, who aggravated xenophobic sensibilities, and whose exorbitant fees were reflected in substantially higher admission prices.\textsuperscript{11} The cavernous space made it nearly impossible to hear performers, and *The London Times* recorded the difficulty audiences had in even seeing the dramatic action: “...the Theatre is certainly too large. How the top boxes and one-shilling gallery can see the stage, we have not an idea; and a very imperfect view of countenance is to be gained from any average situation in the house.”\textsuperscript{12} Without a doubt, the greatest objection to the new Covent Garden was the substantially elevated ticket prices, which Kemble had raised to compensate for the considerable expense of constructing his Frankenstein. The public outcry was immediate: not a word of Kemble and company’s production of *Macbeth* was audible on opening night over the persistent and cacophonous protests of the audience.

\textsuperscript{12} “Covent Garden Theatre.” *London Times* 19 September 1809: 3A.
The ensuing Old Price Riots carried on for two months and became “the longest-running and most colorful dispute between audience and management in British theatre history.”13 Mostly nonviolent, the riots were characterized by a distinctly performative quality on the part of the public and included songs, dances, and processions each night. One of the more carnivalesque, not to mention Gothic, incidents occurred when members of the public promenaded with a coffin, complete with an epitaph for the new ticket prices. This particular act suggests the perception that the new Covent Garden and its ticket prices were, like the Gothic monsters examined here, abominations: alive only through unnatural means and belonging to the grave. In the end, a desperate Kemble was forced to make a public apology for his price hike and agreed to most of the rioters’ terms. Even this strikes me as a Gothic act: for when his scheme is foiled, and his ghosts dispersed like so much mist, the Gothic villain inevitably expresses remorse for his transgressions.

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