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The supernatural in popular gothic romance

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER II. THE BEGINNING OF GOTHIC ROMANCE	8
CHAPTER III. SUPERNATURAL SHAPE-CHANGERS	24
CHAPTER IV. GHOSTS AND OTHER PHENOMENA	37
CHAPTER V. THE RESURGENCE OF GOTHIC ROMANCE	45
CHAPTER VI. CONCLUSION	57
BIBLIOGRAPHY	61

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Over the last two centuries, the gothic romance has proven to be one of the most enduring of fictional formulas because it combines specific cultural perceptions with the more universal story of romance, thus allowing for large numbers of books to be produced which repeat the same basic elements. The gothic romance, as a fictional formula, also provides a means for making inferences about the cultural perceptions of a large group of people and for identifying differences in these perceptions from one cultural period to another.¹ In discussing the changes or variations in one of the formula's elements--the supernatural--this study indicates that there has occurred a movement inward away from external supernatural terrors toward those terrors which originate in the mind.

This examination of supernature in specific gothic romances begins with Walpole's Castle of Otranto (1764) and progresses chronologically to several 1977 publications. Although individual elements of the supernatural may be repeated in the discussion, the arrangement of the material illustrates the shifts in the supernatural elements from one cultural period to another. Because of the numerous works in eighteenth-century gothicism, the discussion, to avoid unnecessary repetition, is limited to those novelists who best represent the period's trends in supernatural phenomena. References are made, however, to additional primary and secondary sources to provide further support for the conclusions drawn.

The discussion of nineteenth-century supernatural fiction is limited by text availability. Even though publishers such as Dover and Arno Press have begun to reprint nineteenth-century supernatural fiction, many of the texts which are available are outside of the gothic romance formula. Little published research exists on nineteenth-century supernatural fiction; in fact, the reprint of Dorothy Scarborough's The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction (1917) is the only readily available work aside from Howard P. Lovecraft's Supernatural Horrors in Literature (1945).

In recent years, the gothic romance novel has increased in popularity, becoming "one of the few boom areas in a generally depressed publishing industry."² Although gothic novels are primarily designed to appeal to women, "men, too, read the more adventurous books of this type."³ Nevertheless, the gothic romance, because of its "woman's fiction" classification, has been studied primarily as a reflection of attitudes toward women in a sexist society.⁴ The supernatural as discussed in most studies of modern gothic romance is considered to be outside of the modern gothic formula.⁵ As this study shows by tracing the supernatural element of the popular gothic romance over the two centuries of its existence, the supernatural is as essential to the modern gothic romance as it was to earlier formula works.

"Popular," in regard to the arts, refers to those productions which express the taste and understanding of large groups of people and which are free from minority standards of control in content and execution.⁶ Since the popular arts appeal to and are expressive of the

values and attitudes of particular groups of people, their success as popular art is measured by their ability to sell widely over a specific time period. In formula fiction, however, "popular" refers to the formula's rather than the individual novel's wide dispersion and acceptability, even though formula works may be best sellers. As a result, the study of a given formula is concerned with why a number of books of the same formula were popular over a particular period of time instead of why a specific work sold widely.⁷

Although the gothic romance is highly conventionalized, many popular novels published as gothic romances fail to adhere to the elements of the basic formula. Generally, a formula gothic romance is a work which is set in the recent past and which centers on a castle or castle-like structure with secret passageways and unused rooms. A secret, or past crime, which haunts the villain, contributes to the mystery surrounding the main character who must discover the past's secret in order to achieve his or her goal. When the secret is revealed by a clue concealed in an old manuscript, letter or art object, order is restored as good triumphs over evil and boy-gets-girl.⁸ Also essential to the formula are the supernatural occurrences, either direct or indirect, which terrorize the characters.

Originally, the gothic romance formula used the supernatural in two ways: indirectly, with rational explanations as in Mrs. Radcliffe's novels and directly, without explanation as in the works of Lewis and Walpole. A third use of the supernatural, that of combining the indirect and direct methods, has recently gained popularity among gothic

writers.

Regardless of their origin, the supernatural phenomena of gothic romances appear to belong to the realm of supernature, a world which consists of three elements: protospirits, spirits, and mana. Mana, as "a substance or essence which gives one the ability to perform tasks or achieve ends otherwise impossible," confers supernatural powers on the individual after the individual performs appropriate acts.⁹ In itself, mana is an objectified essence which, like other inanimate substances, has no intentions except those given it by either man or spirits. Therefore, an object such as the mirror in Lewis' The Monk (1796) is only a mirror to all except Matilda, who, having performed the appropriate acts, can infuse the mirror's mana with her own intents.

Unlike mana, spirits (as personified supernatural forces) "have purposes and intentions of their own as well as the power to achieve their objectives."¹⁰ Because of their freedom of intent, spirits are the most powerful of supernatural forces, but like humans, spirits can vary in form and power. A spirit may possess the powers and forms of a Dracula, or it may be as gentle and unchanging as the ghost of Guir House.¹¹ If, however, spirits do not possess their own objectives even though they retain the ability to take on the form of a living creature, they are classed as protospirits, since like mana, they remain "dormant until men activate them in the interest of human desires."¹²

With the increase in scientific rationalizations for preternatural events, the domain of pure supernatural elements has diminished. Nevertheless, a residuum of cultural associations clings to the once

mysterious and uncanny phenomena of spirits, mana and protospirits. Often a scientific label like ESP merely replaces an older label such as witch or fortune teller, giving the illusion of naturalness to a preternatural event without altering the uncanniness originally associated with the phenomenon. As one commentator suggests, once a so-called occult system, i.e., "a network of beliefs in anomalous process," gains in social acceptability it attempts to remove itself from occult associations by taking on a scientific or religious label, thus achieving a more legitimate social status.¹³ Hence, a phenomenon such as ESP remains culturally anomalous, and in a sense supernatural, despite the scientific sound of its label. In a novel like Portrait of a Witch,¹⁴ a woman's power to foresee the future can be explained in terms of ESP rather than witchcraft and still produce a feeling of having contact with the anomalous world of the supernatural.

Since the gothic romance, as a fictional formula, furnishes a means for drawing inferences concerning specific cultural perceptions, changes in the supernatural element of the gothic formula should then indicate changes in the culture's perceptions of the supernatural. In the earlier works, supernature is objectified; that is, the phenomenon, although it may be misperceived, is witnessed by several people. During the nineteenth century, the supernatural loses its objectified quality and becomes a figment of an agitated imagination. And as the genre moves into the twentieth century, gothic romances combine the two forms to present objectified phenomena created by agitated imaginations. This study, therefore, attempts to show that the changes in the supernatural element of the popular gothic romance from 1764 to 1977 indicate that man's terrors have become self-induced.

¹¹The ghost in Charles Willing Beale's The Ghost of Guir House (Cincinnati: Editor Publishing, 1897) exists in the same form for over two hundred years.

¹²Swanson, p. 238.

¹³Marcello Truzzi, "Definition and Dimensions of the Occult: Towards a Sociological Perspective," Journal of Popular Culture, 5, No. 3 (1971), 635/7-646/18.

¹⁴Dorothy Daniels, Portrait of a Witch (New York: Pocket Books, 1976).

CHAPTER II. THE BEGINNING OF GOTHIC ROMANCE

England in the mid-eighteenth century was moving away from the Augustan ideals of common sense and reason towards the more emotional attitudes of the Romantic period. In architecture, a revival of the gothic-styled building, modified slightly by eighteenth-century tastes, replaced the more classical designs of the Augustan Age. In art, the growing taste for landscape paintings rich in ruins and melancholic shadows reflected the culture's increased fascination with the past. In literature, the medieval chivalric romances enjoyed renewed popularity as did the ballad and the Elizabethan drama. And in poetry, the works of the Graveyard Poets concentrated on the gloom, decay and melancholy of death.¹

But, while the eighteenth century was fascinated by its vision of the past, it was often frightened by the changes in the present. The political unrest which culminated in the American and French revolutions brought the stability of traditional governments into question. The rise of the middle class, both socially and economically, forced a rethinking of values on all sides. And the continual upheaval in religious circles only added another source of controversy. Yet out of the turbulent eighteenth century came one of the most durable of fictional formulas--the gothic romance.²

As the popularity of the gothic romance increased during the late eighteenth century so did the number of gothic novelists. Few of these writers were more widely read, however, than Horace Walpole, Mrs.

Radcliffe, and Matthew Lewis, all of whom influenced Charles Brockden Brown, the founder of the American gothic tradition. Not only were Walpole, Radcliffe and Lewis' novels popular, but they were also widely imitated because of the culture's growing tastes for supernatural terrors. In the novels, the supernatural elements move from the benign supernature of Walpole through the rationally explained phenomena of Mrs. Radcliffe to the malign, objectified supernatural of Matthew Lewis. Although other gothic works reflect the same movement in supernatural terrors, this chapter discusses in detail only specific works of Walpole, Radcliffe, Lewis and Brown because they are most representative of the trends in gothic romance fiction of the eighteenth century.

From the moment of its conception, Walpole's gothic novel seemed "destined to exert an almost unparalleled influence on the literature of the weird."³ When The Castle of Otranto appeared in December of 1764, few people expected the novel to be an immediate success, and no one envisioned the tradition it began. Yet scarcely four months later a second edition was published, and within ten years, gothic romances were flooding the reading market.

Although earlier works had anticipated Walpole's tale,⁴ The Castle of Otranto was the first novel to incorporate all the elements of the formula gothic romance. The novel's action, which occurs during the Crusades, centers on the castle of Otranto with its trap doors and underground passageways. The castle's lord, Manfred, plagued by his grandfather's murder of Alfonso, fears divine retribution as the reason

for his only son's mysterious death. Suddenly left without a male heir, Manfred decides to divorce his wife and marry his son's bride-to-be, Isabella, who rejects the offer and flees to the safety of the neighboring monastery. Amid the confusion of Isabella's escape, a mysterious knight, Isabella's father, arrives with full medieval pageantry and eventually exposes Manfred as a usurper, thus returning Otranto to Theodore, Alfonso's legal heir.

Amid severe storms and moonlit nights, sinister and supernatural occurrences terrify the castle's occupants. A portrait that walks from its frame and a statue that bleeds three drops of blood paralyze Manfred while a hermit's ghostly skeleton terrifies Isabella's father into action. The fragments of Alfonso's armor which appear throughout the castle frighten the servants into speechlessness, and the dilated ghost of Alfonso sends even Manfred scurrying to the nearby monastery.

Despite Walpole's attempt to justify his use of the supernatural by appealing to the past's belief in such phenomena, the novel itself presents each supernatural terror as an objectified phenomenon without rational explanation. The absence of rationalization does not mean that all of Walpole's readers believed in the supernatural, although his use of the supernatural does suggest that his audience was culturally more willing to accept the phenomena as legitimate than later readers who found his supernature comical instead of terrible.⁵

Walpole's supernature, composed mainly of spirits, is benign. Each supernatural occurrence brings Manfred closer to justice and Theodore nearer his title. While the hermit's ghostly visitation reminds

Isabella's father of his vow against Manfred, other supernatural events prevent Manfred's escape. As a result of the supernatural interferences, a previously unknown crime is revealed by the dead so that a fitting punishment can be rendered to the living.

The concept of benign supernature reflects the culture's prevailing concern with benevolent sensibility, for "[t]o the eighteenth century, it [sensibility] was a significant, an almost sacred word, . . . [because] it enshrined the idea of the progress of the human race."⁶ As a result of their high regard for benevolence, many people in the eighteenth century visualized God as a kind and benevolent being since the world's evilness resulted from man's deeds, not God's designs. After all, only a God of feeling could create men who valued sensibilities. Since God was a benevolent creator, then the supernatural, which originated in the world of God's domain, must also be benevolent; that is, supernature would invade human life to help only those of sensible and right conduct, not those of corrupt and immoral designs.

Although Walpole's novel set the gothic romance form, it was Mrs. Radcliffe who made the fiction of terror a fashion. Of her five novels, The Mysteries of Udolpho, published in 1794, is undoubtedly the best known. The novel, rich in the famous Radcliffean nature descriptions, chronicles the life of Emily, a young Frenchwoman who moves to Italy with her aunt, Madame Cheron, because of the latter's marriage to Montoni, the Italian lord of Udolpho. Once at Udolpho, Emily wanders through underground vaults, secret passageways, and unused rooms in

search of a means of escape. Instead of escape, Emily finds a black-veiled terror, hears mysterious sounds, and learns of frightful legends. After her aunt's death, Emily escapes only to be shipwrecked as she returns home. At the Chateau Villori, ghosts in unused wings of the house, mysterious nightly music, and frightful legends of past inhabitants terrorize the occupants. Eventually, the secret crimes of Montoni, Laurentini and the Marquis are revealed, and in typical Radcliffean fashion, the supernatural terrors are rationally explained as Emily's happiness is restored by her marriage to Valancourt. The black-veiled terror is only a sinner's reminder of past transgressions; the nightly ghost-walks, with their mysterious sounds, are only Montoni's wandering prisoner; and the mysterious nightly music comes from a guilt-stricken singing nun. Even the haunted chambers are only robbers' tricks to protect their booty.

Mrs. Radcliffe's explained terrors reflect her adherence to the culture's belief in the didactic function of literature. As J. S. Tompkins points out: "Conduct, the definition and application of the general moral laws that should govern the behaviour of man in society, was the prevailing intellectual interest of the age, and naturally enough this interest was reflected in the novel."⁷ In order to illustrate the value of a properly conducted life, Mrs. Radcliffe's terrors had to be actual, rationally created terrors that tested the heroine's ability to practice the morally right precepts of the eighteenth century--common sense and rational thinking.⁸ Otherwise, the heroine's reward, usually marriage in the eighteenth-century romances, would be the result of

supernatural intervention instead of rational living.

Despite their rationally explicable origins, Mrs. Radcliffe's phenomena appear to be supernatural elements that haunt the living, and like Walpole's her terrors are forced on her characters from outside: They do not imagine their terrors although they may misconstrue the cause. Only when her characters fail to think rationally do they attribute human-created terrors to supernatural agencies. However, Mrs. Radcliffe's supernature, unlike Walpole's, appears to side with evil. By having the human-created supernature appear to side with evil, Mrs. Radcliffe can test the hero and heroine's ability to practice the morally right precepts of the eighteenth century and still maintain her belief in a rational and benevolent God because the wickedness comes from man not supernature.

Other writers of the period agreed with Mrs. Radcliffe's use of supernature. As one of Mrs. Roche's characters states: "'God, of his infinite mercy . . . may perhaps give such warnings [supernatural phenomena] to the wicked . . . ; but to the good . . . , I never can believe he does.'"⁹ God, as a benignly rational being, sends the supernatural to warn the wicked to repent before death, but He never sends the supernatural to plague the innocent. Therefore, despite their apparent use of evil supernature, few writers differed from Walpole's belief in benign supernature: The supernatural invades human life to see justice done, not to frighten the innocent. Although writers such as Walpole and Radcliffe appealed to the popular beliefs in the supernatural, Walpole's works directly represented the supernatural as

benevolent and rational, while Mrs. Radcliffe's novels indirectly used the benign and rational supernatural by attributing evilness to man's world not God's.

Not all novelists, however, possessed a rational and systematic view of supernature. One writer who did not was Matthew G. Lewis. With the publication of his novel The Monk in 1796, the gothic romance took on a more sinister and, to some, a more perverse aspect. After his seduction by Matilda, Ambrosio, the Spanish monk of the title, pursues his lustful passions amid the serenity of religious life. Once stimulated, Ambrosio's lusts flame unfulfilled until he seeks aid from Matilda's demonic powers in order to satisfy his desires for Antonia. However, his crimes are discovered, and he appears before the Inquisition court accused of murder, rape and sorcery. Prompted by his punishers' arrival, Ambrosio sells his soul to the devil only to learn that the guards carried his release, not his condemnation. As Ambrosio falls to his death, he discovers the true extent of his crimes against his sister, Antonia.

Antonia links Ambrosio to the romantic subplot of Raymond and Agnes. The two lovers, separated by Agnes' relatives, plan to elope. At midnight Agnes, in the guise of the bleeding nun who haunts the castle, is to meet Raymond at the castle's gate. But at the appointed hour, Raymond unknowingly leaves with the actual ghost of the bleeding nun. Unable to escape her hauntings, Raymond's health declines until the Wandering Jew frees him from her nightly visits. Raymond then returns for Agnes but discovers that she has been forced to enter a convent which

adjoins the monastery in which Ambrosio rapes Antonia. After numerous attempts, Agnes is freed from the convent by her brother, Antonia's love, and marries Raymond.

Lewis' supernatural spirits appear in three forms: Elvira's ghost, the bleeding nun and Satan. Each of their appearances occurs without a rational explanation. Elvira's ghost warns Antonia of her impending death and departs. The bleeding nun haunts Raymond until her bones are buried, and Satan materializes to grant human wishes. Even though Lewis' spirits appear less fantastic than Walpole's gigantic ghosts, they differ only slightly from Walpole's in their fictional use. Elvira haunts Antonia to protect rather than to frighten her. The bleeding nun, Raymond's deceased relative, plagues him because of the crime committed against her. Even Satan appears only at man's command and only to grant human requests, although he may then outsmart his commanders.

Even though Lewis is willing to acknowledge evil supernature in the form of Satan, he does not allow it to enter human life at will. Only on man's command can spirits with evil intents enter human life. Despite the thirty years between Walpole and Lewis, spirits, when they invade human existence of their own accord, still attempt to restore order.

In its depiction of the supernatural, Lewis' novel indicates a shift in terrors. Although Walpole had used the unexplained supernatural in the form of spirits, Lewis uses the unexplained phenomena in the form of mana as well as spirits. Both Matilda and the Wandering Jew perform acts which allow supernatural powers to help humanity. Matilda's

ritual acts enable her to infuse the mirror and myrtle branch with preternatural powers while the Wandering Jew, living proof of supernatural powers, exorcises the bleeding nun. Even the gypsy's prophecy has supernatural overtones as she depends on nonhuman forces for her powers. Since mana-acquired powers may be good or bad, depending on how man uses them, the Wandering Jew and the gypsy can attempt to use supernatural powers to maintain order while Matilda's powers aid Ambrosio's lustful desires.

Lewis' willingness to use both Satan and sorcery reflects a more malign view of supernature. Prior to The Monk, the supernatural, unless it is humanly created, appears only to aid the good, but Lewis' evil is aided by the supernatural. The villainous Ambrosio secures his evil ends because of the preternatural myrtle branch and secret sleeping draught conjured by Matilda. Even Satan lends support to Ambrosio's crimes. It seems that Lewis' readers found the world less rationally ordered than Mrs. Radcliffe's audiences and were, therefore, more willing to accept a malign view of supernatural dealings in human life, or to explain human perversity by blaming supernatural agencies.

Human life as defined by the rationalistic precepts of the early eighteenth century no longer fit the culture's perceptions of the world. Plagued by defeats abroad, economic disasters at home, and political uprisings against the Pitt administration, England was under pressure from all sides. Add to the domestic disorders the French Revolution which loomed as a constant reminder of the consequences of social unrest, and ample reasons appear for Lewis' readers to believe in

a less ordered world.

From the time of the publication of The Monk until the end of the century, few new writers emerged in the English gothic romance tradition, and those who did merely imitated Mrs. Radcliffe or Matthew Lewis. At the close of the eighteenth century, however, a Pennsylvania novelist--Charles Brockden Brown--was beginning the gothic romance tradition in America.

Two years after The Monk's appearance, Brown published his gothic romance Wieland, or the Transformation. Set in the remote woodlands of America's Schuylkills, the novel tells of Wieland, a Pennsylvania German who, like his father, is engulfed in a wave of religious fanaticism. Unsure of his salvation, Wieland, who hears voices, slays his wife and children as sacrifices for his sins. Wieland's sister, Clara, narrowly escapes a similar fate at his hands.

Believing that Clara's death is necessary for his salvation, Wieland escapes from prison in order to murder her. But before Wieland can kill her, he is condemned by the voices which are really the tricks of Carwin, the evil ventriloquist. Realizing that his crimes were not divinely condoned, Wieland stabs himself. As the novel ends, Clara, having survived Wieland's illness, marries Henry, who had earlier doubted her virtue because of Carwin's attempts to seduce her.

Although the supernatural elements are rationally explained, each occurrence appears as if it were of supernatural origin. When Wieland's father ignites, it seems as if he were struck by a lightning bolt from God; however, the rational explanation rests on the theory of

spontaneous combustion of humans.¹⁰ Similarly, Wieland, Henry and Clara hear voices which seem to be of supernatural origin but are only ventriloquist's tricks.

While Mrs. Radcliffe carefully explains that her characters' sensory perceptions are accurate, even though they may attribute their perceptions to false origins, Brown does not. Whether by commission or omission, Brown fails to explain the voices which Wieland swears told him to kill Clara. Another less questionable example occurs when Clara explains the voices to Wieland who, discounting Clara's story, still believes in their divine origin. Not until Carwin uses his ventriloquism to produce the voices which condemn his acts does Wieland feel guilt for his crimes. Thus, Wieland manipulates his reality to justify his crimes, despite the previous rational explanations for the voices, and only when a part of his fabricated reality condemns him is he willing to see his acts as crimes.

Writing in the popular rationalistic tradition of Mrs. Radcliffe, Brown foreshadows, in his use of supernatural, the changing attitudes in the nineteenth century. Like most earlier practitioners, Brown's evil supernature comes from man and is forced upon the characters from outside. Although his terrors are humanly created, Brown does focus on the fabricated terrors which result once an unbalanced mind has been terrified. Thus, Wieland creates terrors which lead to his death because he refuses to deny their human origins. It is this concern with the unbalanced mind that foreshadows the nineteenth century's growing obsession with human-created terrors.

But Brown was forced to alter certain elements of the British formula in adapting the gothic romance to an American audience. After all, "what could one do with the [gothic] form in a country which . . . had . . . neither a proper past or history."¹¹ The central element for change was the haunted castle; obviously, in a country as newly settled as America, a European gothic structure would hardly be convincing. The dark, mysterious and untamed forest, however, served the castle's function by providing unknown terrors behind every tree and by confusing the characters because of the numerous avenues of possible escape.

In another and less obvious way, the supernatural element of the British formula had to undergo changes in its American counterpart. In the earlier gothic romances, the supernatural was linked to two of the most established institutions in England--the Church and the aristocracy. Previously, ghosts belonged to the aristocratic class: Alfonso was the lord of Otranto; Elvira was the wife of a nobleman, and the bleeding nun was of aristocratic birth. Even Mrs. Radcliffe's explained ghosts were of noble descent: The chambers at the chateau were supposedly haunted by the Marquess, and the Countess Laurentini's ghost was the source of the haunting music of the forest. Occasionally, the specters had religious associations (cf. Walpole's hermit), but church-related supernature usually appeared in conjunction with sorcery, demonology or witchcraft.

Witchcraft and other mana-acquired powers were most often linked with members or ex-members of the Catholic faith. Not only was the Church with its secretive convents and monasteries a world where crimes could

be concealed, but it was also tainted because of its affiliation with the rebellious Jacobites and the monstrous Inquisition. But for American audiences such traditional elements of the formula had to be changed: Where was one to find the aristocracy, let alone the history, to create convincing ghosts, and how was a newly established Protestant country going to produce old Catholic convents and monasteries of the Inquisition?

Although Brown's supernature maintained the religious and aristocratic associations, the phenomenon's form changed. Instead of nobly descended ghosts, Brown used divinely descended voices which eliminated the difficulties of producing an aristocratic specter in a democratic country. At the same time, the supposedly divine origins of the voices linked the supernatural with religion; however, it was not the Catholic Church which appeared to consort with evil, but the fanatical elements of the Protestant sects. In this way, Brown was able to alter the form but not the spirit of the eighteenth-century gothic romance.

From its humble beginnings in December, 1764, the gothic romance had, by the time of Brown's publications, become one of the best selling fictional formulas of its time. Drawing when necessary from the blood and revenge tragedies of the Elizabethan dramatists, the old folk ballads, and the school of graveyard poetry, the writers of gothic romance produced a fictional form which incorporated the terror of the supernatural with the prevailing cultural attitudes of sensibility, didacticism and rationalism.¹²

As the eighteenth century drew to a close, neither Walpole's benign

ghosts nor Mrs. Radcliffe's rationalized phenomena satisfied the public's growing belief in a more irrational world. Even though gothic romances continued to use the rationalized phenomena, few novels enjoyed the success of the earlier works. Instead, works such as Lewis' The Monk had captured the reading public's taste. In their use of malevolent, unexplained supernature, the later gothic romances foreshadowed the nineteenth-century's taste for supernatural terrors. And while both periods shared the evil-motivated supernature, the characters of the late eighteenth century lacked the motive for consorting with evil so cherished by the nineteenth century: questing for the secrets of heaven and earth.

FOOTNOTES

¹For a more detailed discussion of the changes in cultural taste in the last half of the eighteenth century, see Devendra P. Varma's The Gothic Flame: Its Origins, Efflorescence, Disintegration, and Residuary Influences (New York: Russell & Russell, 1957, 1966), or J. S. Tompkins, The Popular Novel in England: 1770-1800 (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1932, 1962). Other works which discuss the influences of and upon the gothic romance are: Edith Birkhead, The Tale of Terror: A Study of the Gothic Romance (New York: Russell & Russell, 1921, 1963); Eino Railo, The Haunted Castle: A Study of the Elements of English Romanticism (New York: Humanities, 1927, 1964); Eleanor Sickels, The Gloomy Egoist: Moods and Themes of Melancholy from Gray to Keats (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1932), and Montague Summers, The Gothic Quest: A History of the Gothic Novel (New York: Russell & Russell, 1938, 1964).

²Kay Johnson Mussell, "The World of Modern Gothic Fiction: American Women and Their Social Myths," Unpublished dissertation (Iowa City, Iowa: Univ. of Iowa, 1973), p. 99.

³Howard Phillips Lovecraft, Supernatural Horror in Literature, intro. E. F. Bleiler (New York: Dover Press, 1973), p. 24.

⁴Tobias Smollett's The Adventures of Ferdinand Count Fathom (1753) and Daniel Defoe's A True Relation of the Apparition of One Mrs. Veal (1706) employ certain elements of the gothic romance formula.

⁵Both Howard P. Lovecraft and Martin Kallich (Horace Walpole. New York: Twayne, 1971) express this idea in their discussions of Walpole's novel.

⁶J. S. Tompkins, The Popular Novel in England: 1770-1800 (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1932, 1962), p. 92.

⁷Tompkins, pp. 70-71.

⁸Eugene B. Murray, Ann Radcliffe, Twayne's English Author Series (New York: Twayne, 1972), p. 14.

⁹Regina Maria Roche, Clermont, 1798; rpt. (London: Folio Press, 1968).

¹⁰Bergen Evans, The Natural History of Nonsense (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), pp. 116-141.

¹¹Leslie A. Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, rev. ed. (New York: Stein and Day, 1966), p. 144.

¹²J. S. Tompkins, pp. 70-116.

CHAPTER III. SUPERNATURAL SHAPE-CHANGERS

Despite the continued popularity of gothic romances during the early nineteenth century, few of the novels differed significantly from the eighteenth-century prototypes.¹ For the most part, gothic novels published in the popular "bluebooks" and "shilling shockers" were poor imitations, if not plagiarisms, of the earlier, more successful publications.² But in 1820 Charles Robert Maturin, an Irish novelist, published what has been called "the last and greatest expression of its kind"--Melmoth, the Wanderer.³

Maturin's novel is a collection of tales covering the one hundred and fifty years of Melmoth's life, the length of time granted him in his pact with the devil. In exchange for prolonged life, youth and knowledge, Melmoth gives his soul; however, if he can find one person who will freely accept the devil's bargain, then he can escape damnation. Despite numerous attempts, Melmoth fails to find a willing person because few can hear the secret of Melmoth's powers without a loss of reason or life. As a result, each individual that Melmoth tempts suffers: Stanton is confined to a London madhouse; Guzman helplessly watches his children starve; and Immalee, Melmoth's wife, dies in the dungeons of the Inquisition. Without a willing replacement Melmoth returns to Ireland where, amid frightful sounds and strange weather, he disappears. Only a scarf caught on a crag overlooking the sea testifies to the Wanderer's fate.

Much of Maturin's novel reflects the earlier eighteenth-century

gothic romances. The novel takes place in southern Europe during the Inquisition. Melmoth's visits occur at night amid stormy weather, and the tormented characters resemble those of Lewis and Radcliffe.⁴ Yet Melmoth, as the novel's main preternatural element, indicates the nineteenth century's concern with terrors of the mind.

In order to gain knowledge through an extended life, Melmoth sells his soul to the devil, but Melmoth's quest for knowledge fails to bring him happiness. Instead, his knowledge creates unspeakable terrors which cause him to plague humanity in search of release. In spite of his knowledge, Melmoth fails to find a willing replacement; even his magic telescopes, futuristic visions and reanimated corpses are powerless to save him. In the end Melmoth's knowledge haunts him because, having the knowledge of a god, he knows what hell awaits him.

While earlier villains were willing to suffer the fires of hell for the simple earthly pleasures of lust, land and wealth, nineteenth-century men endure hell only for the secrets of heaven and earth. Unlike the eighteenth century when men did not aspire to be more than men, the nineteenth-century villains aspire to be gods, to have power over life and death.

Underlying such knowledge-seeking villains as Melmoth is the nineteenth century's preoccupation with increasing scientific discoveries, discoveries which forced a rethinking of traditional cultural beliefs. As newly discovered facts came into conflict with traditional beliefs, many people sensed the cultural changes caused by science. As a result of the public's apprehensions over scientific discoveries, novels often

focussed on the terrors created by man's desire for more knowledge. Melmoth, as a Faustian figure, represents one of the most common characters used to depict the dangers of desiring too much knowledge, but another figure--the mad scientist--also emerged in early nineteenth-century fiction to illustrate the evils too much knowledge could produce.

Published in 1818, Mary Shelley's Frankenstein is undoubtedly the most famous work to use the mad scientist figure. Because of his desire to know "the secrets of heaven and earth," Frankenstein creates "a mummy again endued with animation."⁵ However, the monster's unnatural appearance repulses all who look upon it, and Victor Frankenstein finds himself the creator of a "filthy demon" that vows revenge on its maker. From the forested wilds of southern Europe to the icy wilderness of the north, the monster haunts Frankenstein until death separates them.

Although more properly considered a precursor of modern science fiction, Shelley's novel depends on a number of gothic romance conventions in weaving its tale of human-created terrors. The nature descriptions, like those of Mrs. Radcliffe, contribute to the dark, foreboding atmosphere of doom. And, as in Brown's novels, nature replaces the traditional castle, providing the obscurity and isolation necessary for Frankenstein's struggles with his monster. Even the monster can be viewed as an extension of the explained supernature; for in Shelley's novel, the real supernatural phenomenon is explicable in terms of human-created terrors.

Despite scientific explanations, the monster takes on supernatural associations because of the culturally anomalous phenomenon of

reanimated life. In effect Shelley mixes eighteenth-century supernature and nineteenth-century scientific thought to create a new realm of supernatural potentials, a realm where "scientific man is a kind of God, [and] his scientific method . . . a new supernaturalism."⁶

Despite the mixing of supernature and scientific thought, the early nineteenth-century writers adhered to many of the eighteenth century's supernatural beliefs. Evil supernature, as in the earlier works, enters human existence only at man's command. Thus Melmoth and Frankenstein, because of their desires to know all, open the way for evil supernature to enter human life. Other writers in the first half of the nineteenth century such as Hawthorne, Bulwer-Lytton, and G. W. M. Reynolds also depict supernatural evil in human life as a function of man's desire for knowledge. In fact, few successful writers of the period use the supernatural except as a source of evil conjured by knowledge-seeking men.

Although nineteenth-century writers follow the earlier beliefs about supernature, they do not copy the forms which the evil took; instead, they replace the old forms with new scientifically advanced phenomena; magic mirrors become magic telescopes and gypsy fortune tellers become futuristic visions created by time- and space-displacements. But not all the phenomena are merely updates of older forms; a new phenomenon--reanimated life--enters the supernatural realm of nineteenth-century gothic fiction.

In Maturin's work, the reanimated corpses function as mana, since they appear only to carry out Melmoth's commands. In Shelley's novel,

the reanimated corpse becomes a protospirit, having its own desires but depending on man for activation. Protospirits, despite their early appearance, are rarely used by gothic writers; rather, the presence of reanimated life that exceeds man's control seems limited to science fiction, not gothic romance.⁷

Gothic fiction during the early nineteenth century is concerned, however, with science, or more precisely, with scientists. Whether American or British, gothic writers depict the man who quests for knowledge as the agent through which evil enters the world. Because man is no longer content with earthly imperfection, he strives to create perfection; but, like Aylmer in Hawthorne's "The Birthmark," man destroys rather than perfects life.

Although man's mind creates the idea from which the terror materializes, the terrors themselves are not imaginary. Like Frankenstein's monster, they exist. The use of man's mind as the creative agent out of which physical, nonillusory terrors emerge foreshadows later developments in the use of the mind's ability to create illusory supernature.

In the years following the publication of Frankenstein and Melmoth, few gothic romances were published in England, although Hawthorne and Poe were producing gothic works in America.⁸ However, most gothic fiction from 1820 to 1875 was not in the gothic romance formula, although a few writers of gothic romance enjoyed brief periods of popularity. Of these novelists, three--Charlotte Brontë, G. W. M. Reynolds and J. S. LeFanu--are especially noteworthy because their works indicate a growing concern with the psyche.

Writing during the mid-nineteenth century, the Brontë sisters produced literary works which greatly influenced the gothic romance formula. Among their novels, Emily's Wuthering Heights and Charlotte's Jane Eyre are the most gothic in tone and plot. Both works focus on the lives of a few characters in a strangely foreboding setting; yet, their novels create romantic scenes of domestic life while they maintain the mysterious mood of the gothic romance. This interweaving of romance and mystery becomes so central to later gothic fiction that the romance cannot be completed until the mystery is solved.⁹

Although Emily Brontë creates an atmosphere of haunting frustration in Wuthering Heights, Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre is more central to the developments of gothic romance. Besides establishing the motif of the governess story in gothic fiction, Charlotte Brontë introduces the demented character as a rationally explicable source for seemingly supernatural events.¹⁰ Prior to the nineteenth century, the unbalanced mind was more likely to see than be a supernatural phenomenon, but in Jane Eyre, Rochester's deranged wife haunts the house with her murmurs, movements and laughter, giving the illusion of another "being" in the house.¹¹ By creating a demented character as an explicable supernatural phenomenon, Charlotte Brontë indicates the terrifying potentials of an unbalanced mind. But she employs the deranged individual only as a haunting supernatural element; later writers depict the disturbed mind as turning in on itself, thus becoming the haunter as well as the haunted.

The growing awareness of the mind's rational-irrational functionings

presents new terrifying potentials for the later nineteenth-century writers. Although earlier works presented man's conflicting natures in the form of monsters versus humans or female domesticity versus male bestiality, the early Victorians' conflicts unite in a self that changes form.

In 1846, G. W. M. Reynolds began serialized publication of his lycanthropic novel, Wagner, The Wehr-Wolf. As the novel begins, Wagner, who is old and alone, is visited by a young stranger who offers him youth, power and knowledge. In exchange, Wagner, on the evening of the full moon, must assume the form of a wolf and seek revenge on mankind. Accepting the bargain, Wagner moves with the stranger to southern Europe, where he falls in love with Nisida, the apparently mute daughter of Count Riverola. Nisida, who only pretends to be deaf and dumb in order to spy on her father and protect her brother Francisco, is abducted by a band of robbers who plague Florence. Eventually, Wagner finds Nisida on a deserted island, where the two lovers live in isolation. Nisida, tempted by Satan, desires to return to Florence, which she eventually does, leaving Wagner on the island. In Florence, Nisida schemes to prevent her brother's marriage while Wagner, with the help of the Rosicrucians, learns how to save his soul. At the novel's climax, Nisida reveals her secret concerning her feigned handicaps; her brother marries and discovers his father's cruel deeds and Wagner, having completed the Rosicrucians' commands, dies free of the werewolf curse.

While adhering closely to the eighteenth-century gothic formula, Reynolds presents two supernatural elements which reflect the

mid-century's dominant concerns: dualism and knowledge. Although Reynolds' use of the Rosicrucians probably comes from William Godwin's writings, other works such as Bulwer-Lytton's Zanoni detail the popular beliefs surrounding the secret society of the Rosy Cross. Rosicrucians, unlike the previous knowledge-seekers, are visited by "holy angels who reveal . . . in visions the will of the Most High."¹² They do not pact with the devil for their knowledge nor do they reveal their knowledge to outsiders unless to help them gain salvation. But as with all things beyond man's comprehension, the trials which must be endured to reach the desired end test the individual's moral fiber. If the candidate should fail the tests, his knowledge serves only as a haunting reminder of what he desired, a reminder which plagues him forever.

Even though their reasons for characters' consorting with evil differ from those of the previous century, nineteenth-century writers also insist that evil supernature enters human existence at man's commands. Because of their desires for knowledge, the unfit cause innocent people to endure the suffering brought about by evil's entrance into human life. Similarly, Wagner, by his bargain, provides the means for evil to enter human life. As a result, the innocent as well as the wicked suffer if they cross the werewolf's path.

Although the werewolf motif appears in earlier English letters, the legend emerges in early Victorian literature as a dominant means of describing the light-dark quality of human nature.¹³ The werewolf, when human, is the epitome of human dignity, an individual of refined tastes and social graces; yet, beneath the polished surface lies an animal that

must satisfy its bestial desires. This continual contrasting of man as human and nonhuman becomes more internalized as the century progresses until the human and nonhuman natures unite, as in Dracula, to form a being that is neither human nor nonhuman, neither alive nor dead.¹⁴

In their use of shape-changing supernatural phenomena, popular writers focussed on the early Victorians' fears and anxieties. From every part of the system new ideas were converging on the established cultural order. Not only was the social order threatened by the rising middle class, but the traditional political system was also under attack by reform movements which led to a shift in power away from the aristocracy to the propertied middle class. Similarly, the industrial revolution created changes in the economic order of England.

In creating a haunting atmosphere of fear, few novelists surpass J. S. LeFanu in his use of the subtle terrors which prey on the mind. In his most gothic novel, Uncle Silas, LeFanu adheres to the formula conventions of setting, atmosphere and character; but in his use of the supernatural, LeFanu reflects the growing awareness of the mind's terrors. At first, LeFanu's supernature seems insignificant compared to the mystery's development. Yet, the supernatural pervades the novel in the form of Uncle Silas whose sinister existence seems to direct the lives of those connected with him.

From the opening chapter, Uncle Silas, "an apparition . . . in black and white, venerable, bloodless, fiery-eyed," floats through the novel like a phantom whose existence is acknowledged but never discussed. And after meeting Uncle Silas, many characters would agree with his

cousin, Lady Knollys, that "perhaps other souls than human are born into the world, and clothed in flesh."¹⁵ In addition to Uncle Silas, LeFanu uses Swedenborgian beliefs, grotesquely mysterious characters (such as Madame, Dudley and Pegtop), and ghostly legends to create an atmosphere of supernatural foreboding. But the supernatural in LeFanu's novels depends not on fact, but on suggestion.

In earlier gothic works, the supernatural, even if it was eventually rationally explained, was not imagined: The phenomena existed. However, LeFanu begins to use the imagined supernatural. In Uncle Silas, what makes Uncle Silas seem supernatural is not so much what he does as how the other characters interpret his actions. By attributing his actions to unnatural forces, the characters surround Uncle Silas with a supernatural atmosphere.

LeFanu's use of mind-created terrors commences an internalizing of the supernatural. Prior to LeFanu, most writers depicted mind-created terrors in physical terms: Frankenstein's monster, Rochester's wife and Wagner's werewolf. But LeFanu's terrors exist only in the mind of the person who says they exist. In "Green Tea," Reverend Jennings believes that a supernatural monkey is haunting him. Yet no one sees the phenomenon which eventually drives him to commit suicide. Furthermore, Jennings' supernatural monkey appears without being triggered by a physical phenomenon and without apparent reason. Unlike Charles Brockden Brown in the eighteenth century, LeFanu does not connect Jennings' supernature with a physical occurrence, and unlike the eighteenth-century writers, he draws no correlation between supernatural visitations and

the wicked.

In their use of the supernatural, the writers of gothic fiction, up to and including LeFanu, reflect the changing cultural perceptions about the mind's ability to create its own terrors. Unlike earlier works, nineteenth-century gothic fiction has the mind as unreliable. In Jane Eyre the mind may become unbalanced, allowing the individual to become a supernatural element to those who are unaware of the deranged mind. Or in Uncle Silas, the mind may create its own phenomena by seeing more in human actions than actually exists. And the mind, by desiring to know the secrets of heaven and earth, can produce actual supernatural phenomena, e.g., in Wagner, The Wehr-Wolf or Melmoth, the Wanderer.

At the same time, the supernatural elements in gothic romances also indicate the nineteenth century's anxieties about the divided self.¹⁶ Through Shelley's Frankenstein, Reynolds' Wagner and LeFanu's Uncle Silas runs the common theme of man's dualistic nature. While in Frankenstein man's dualism is represented as two separate entities, in Uncle Silas the dualism unites into an individual who appears to be human and nonhuman, to be almost two separate personalities in one body.

Although the nineteenth century's concern with dualism and knowledge continues into later examples of the gothic romance, it is the focus on the mind's ability to create, for no apparent reason, illusory supernatural terrors without physical stimuli that foreshadows developments in the fiction written between 1875 and 1925. Unlike LeFanu's tales of the 1860s, most supernatural fiction written during the next fifty years presents its terrors in the ghost formula, not the gothic romance.

FOOTNOTES

¹Devendra P. Varma, The Gothic Flame: Its Origins, Efflorescence, Disintegration and Residuary Influences (New York: Russell & Russell, 1957, 1966), p. 173.

²Masao Miyoshi, The Divided Self: A Perspective on the Literature of the Victorians (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1969), p. 36.

³William F. Axton, ed., Melmoth, the Wanderer by Charles Robert Maturin (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1961), p. xii.

⁴Immalee's characterization resembles that of Emily in The Mysteries of Udolpho and Antonia in The Monk. The priests and other religious figures reflect Lewis' characters of the Inquisition.

⁵Mary Shelley, Frankenstein, 1818; rpt. (New York: Dutton, 1951), p. 55.

⁶Miyoshi, p. 86.

⁷In examining gothic fiction written over the last two centuries, one finds that only those works which use the Frankenstein myth depict supernatural elements that exceed man's control; however, man-created phenomena such as computers, robots, and other mechanical devices often go beyond man's control in science fiction novels.

⁸Although Hawthorne and Poe are often considered gothic writers, their works which fall within the gothic formula, e.g., The Marble Faun and "Ligeia," were not well-received during their lifetimes and, therefore, they are not discussed in connection with nineteenth-century popular gothic romance.

⁹Kay Johnson Mussell, "The World of Modern Gothic Fiction: American Women and Their Social Myths," Unpublished dissertation (Iowa City, Iowa: Univ. of Iowa, 1973), p. 172.

¹⁰Mussell, pp. 103-106, 143-49, 175.

¹¹Paul F. Saagpakk, "A Survey of Psychopathology in British Literature from Shakespeare to Hardy," Literature and Psychology, 18 (1968), pp. 135-165.

¹²G. W. M. Reynolds, Wagner, The Wehr-Wolf, ed. E. F. Bleiler. n.d.; rpt. (New York: Dover, 1975), p. 120.

¹³For a discussion of the werewolf myth and its cultural correlations see Brian Ward, "Werewolves: A Culture-Bound Psychosis," World Medicine, 30 May 1973, pp. 43-55.

¹⁴Frank Norris' Vandover and the Brute written around 1895 also describes a being who is neither human nor nonhuman and who suffers from something akin to lycanthropy.

¹⁵J. S. LeFanu, Uncle Silas. 1899; rpt. (New York: Dover, 1966), p. 159.

¹⁶See Masao Miyoshi's The Divided Self for a discussion of dualism in Victorian literature.

CHAPTER IV. GHOSTS AND OTHER PHENOMENA

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the gothic romance gave way to the ghost story as the dominant formula for depicting supernatural terrors. Influenced by the increased interest in psychic phenomena, the ghost fiction reflected the culture's perceptions of supernature and indicated changes which occurred in the gothic romance formula when it reappeared in the twentieth century.

Although the human-created ghosts of Mrs. Radcliffe persisted in the late nineteenth century, most of the ghosts were presented as actual supernatural phenomena. In Mrs. Riddell's The Uninhabited House, the ghost of Mr. Elmsdale is said to haunt River Hall, even though no one actually sees the ghost. The owners, unable to rent the house, hire a clerk to live in the house to see if the ghost exists. After several rational tests, the ghost's existence is verified, the clerk marries the ghost's living daughter, and the house remains haunted and unrented.

Other writers such as Charles Willing Beale, Amelia Edwards and Wilkie Collins depict the ghost as a verifiable phenomenon, as did earlier writers like Walpole and Lewis. But nineteenth-century ghosts are not restricted to the wicked nor to those whom they knew in life, although they still enter human life to seek vengeance or to warn the living.¹ In Mrs. Riddell's works, the ghosts haunt anyone who enters the house. In Beale's The Ghost of Guir House, the ghosts haunt anyone they can lure to their ruined home. And the ghost in Collins' The Haunted Hotel plagues the innocent in hopes of revealing his murderers.

Although most fiction between 1875 and 1900 presents ghosts as verifiable, a few works did not.

In Vernon Lee's A Phantom Lover, Mrs. Alice Okehurst acts as if she is visited by Lovelock, a poet who lived in the 1620s. Alice's husband eventually believes that Lovelock exists and is having an affair with his wife. In a fit of jealousy, Mr. Okehurst attempts to kill Lovelock, but instead, he shoots the only person found in the room--his wife.

By presenting the ghost as possibly-but-not-definitely verifiable, Lee forces the reader to decide the validity of ghosts as supernatural phenomena. Did Lovelock exist? Or, was Lovelock a figment of the imagination, a shared hallucination? No answer exists in the story. Although other writers such as Henry James use this technique of possibly verifiable phenomena,² it is not until the mid-twentieth century that mind-created terrors of this sort appear consistently in the gothic romance formula.

In their use of ghosts, writers during this period drew from several new elements which were entering the culture. As Dorothy Scarborough points out in her 1917 discussion of the period:

Present day science with its wonderful development has provided countless plots for supernatural stories. Comparative study of folklore, with the activities of the numerous associations, has brought to light fascinating material. Modern Spiritualism, with its seances, its mediumistic experiments, has inspired many novels and stories. The Psychical Research Society, with branches in various parts of the world and its earnest advocates and serious investigations, has collected suggestive stuff for many ghostly stories.³

These influences helped to focus turn-of-the-century supernatural fiction on the invasion of human life by spirits.

Although most writers during the period used the ghost, writers like Bram Stoker drew upon other supernatural phenomena for their tales of terror. In Stoker's Dracula (1897), the supernatural occurrences center on the vampire myths of folklore. Although earlier writers had used the vampire motif,⁴ Stoker's novel incorporates the vampire myths into a tale which reflects the shape-changing theme of the nineteenth century.

Aside from his hypnotic powers, Dracula possesses the power to change shapes. Usually he takes on the form of a bat, although he may also appear as a wolf-like dog. Because Dracula, unlike earlier shape-changers, is not limited to one form, his powers are greater than those of a werewolf. In addition to different physical shapes, Dracula exists in a third state of being, that of the undead. No longer is man limited to shape-changing in two states of being--alive and dead; he may now change his shape while in the third state of the undead.

While continuing the nineteenth century's theme of shape-changing, Stoker's novel heralds a return of the earlier form of the supernatural tale. During the nineteenth century, especially the latter half, the preference was decidedly for the short story, while the one-act play came into vogue around the turn of the century. But in the first decades of the twentieth century, the supernatural novel began its return to favor.⁵ Admittedly, most of the supernatural novels written during the first part of the twentieth century did not employ the gothic romance formula, but certain of its elements began to appear in the works of writers like Mary Roberts Rinehart.

Although Rinehart is considered to be a writer of detective fiction, many of her novels share elements with the modern gothic romance.⁶ In The Circular Staircase (1908), the narrator, Miss Rachel, rents a country house, Sunnyside. Within the first days of her arrival, Miss Rachel finds the murdered body of Arnold Armstrong, the owner's son, in the card room. Among the suspects are Miss Rachel's niece Gertrude, her nephew Halsey, and John Bailey, Gertrude's fiancée. After a sufficient amount of amateur as well as professional detective work, the murderer is revealed and the mystery solved.

Even though the novel's focus is on detection, elements of the gothic formula appear throughout the work. The novel's action centers on a house with unused and secret rooms where mysterious, nightly occurrences frighten the inhabitants. Also, artistic objects such as uniquely designed cufflinks and incomplete letters reveal the secrets underlying the crimes which plague the characters. Two elements which Rinehart uses appear, slightly altered, in the modern gothic romances of the 1960s: the interweaving of the mystery and romance and the participant narrator.

The Circular Staircase is told by Miss Rachel as she recalls what happened while at Sunnyside. Although the nineteenth-century supernatural fiction used the first-person narrator, the earlier gothic romances were usually told in the third person. In the late 1950s when the gothic romance reappears, the first person point-of-view is most commonly used. Moreover, Rinehart's mixing of romance and mystery closely parallels that which appears in the modern gothic romances. Although Mrs.

Radcliffe's Mysteries of Udolpho closely links the romance of Emily and Valancourt with the mysteries of Montoni, the novel's mysteries could be solved without the romance being completed. In The Circular Staircase, however, Gertrude could not marry John nor could Halsey wed Louisa unless the murder and the mysteries surrounding it were solved.

Although the supernatural is mentioned in the novel, it is not presented as a serious explanation for the mysterious, nightly sounds. Usually, the belief in supernatural phenomena such as ghosts seems to be the mark of foolishly superstitious servants like Tom and Liddy.⁷ No rational, intelligent person such as a detective would believe in such things. Nevertheless, in some of her later fiction Rinehart presents serious supernatural occurrences, although under scientific labels.⁸

At the beginning of the twentieth century, many of the previous century's disagreements concerning industrialism, commerce and imperialism, although not settled, were crystallizing. And even though individuals continued to advocate changes, a larger segment of the populace focussed on the behaviors which had previously brought success.⁹ Rinehart, like other writers of the early twentieth century, reflected the public's desire for success stories in her use of amateur and professional detectives who, through rational thought, successfully solved crimes.

The presence of the supernatural in popular fiction increased, however, as the century moved through World War I and into the Depression.¹⁰ By the century's fourth decade, the world's fluctuating tensions began to surface in the popular fiction as irrational stirrings of

the mind. Even though the gothic romance was not a continuously popular genre, a few novels appeared in the late 1930s. Among these, Daphne du Maurier's Rebecca is undoubtedly the best known.

The novel, published in 1938, centers on Manderley, the de Winter's estate. Located on the British coast, the manor house seems haunted by the memory of Rebecca, de Winter's first wife. When Max de Winter arrives with his second wife, doubts begin to haunt the inhabitants of Manderley. The rooms which were Rebecca's remain intact and unused while the house itself retains the personality of its decorator--Rebecca. The new Mrs. de Winter, inexperienced in social etiquette, finds herself continually plagued by the memory of the way Rebecca did things. Yet, no one discusses Rebecca's death, and to Mrs. de Winter, Rebecca often seems more alive than dead. Eventually, the mystery surrounding Rebecca is revealed: The housekeeper, who was devoted to Rebecca, tried to frighten the second Mrs. de Winter by acting as if Rebecca were an entity remaining in the house, and Max, who had killed Rebecca, was haunted by his actions and frightened by Mrs. de Winter's possible reaction to the truth. At the novel's end, Rebecca's murder is justified, Manderley burns down and the de Winters live happily ever after.

The first person point-of-view restricts the reader's information to that provided by the narrator, which in modern gothic romance is typically a young girl. As a result, when a supernatural phenomenon is presented, the reader views it as the narrator viewed it, thereby making the events more immediate. In Rebecca, this method allows du Maurier to create a supernatural atmosphere without producing a

supernatural phenomenon because Mrs. de Winter feels, given the insinuations of the housekeeper, that Manderley is haunted.

Here is the extension of the nineteenth century's internalizing of supernatural terrors. In Mrs. de Winter we see a character who, because of inexplicable events, attempts to explain causes but ends up creating explanations which haunt her. Even though du Maurier's characters, like Mrs. Radcliffe's, must be motivated by external forces before they create supernature, they only need the suggestion, not the physical fact, to create the supernatural out of daily events.

Although the supernatural surfaced in the fiction written between 1875 and 1940 the formulaic gothic romance rarely appeared. For most of the period the dominant fictional form was the short ghost story, a reflection of the culture's interest in new types of psychical phenomena. Yet the use of the supernatural elements indicated the continuing fascination with internalized terrors.

Even though much of the nineteenth-century fiction presented supernature as verifiable phenomena, a few writers viewed the supernatural phenomenon of ghosts as a possible, but not provable, occurrence. But as the world moved further into the twentieth century, the supernatural was used to illustrate how foolish the fears of the superstitious were.

FOOTNOTES

¹For a discussion of the ghost in modern supernatural fiction to 1917 see Dorothy Scarborough's The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction. 1917; rpt. (New York: Octagon Books, 1967).

²Henry James employs the possibly verifiable phenomenon in "Turn of the Screw" (1898).

³Scarborough, p. 73.

⁴Other writers who used the vampire myths were: J. S. LeFanu in his short story "Carmilla" and J. M. Rymers in his novel Varney the Vampire (1845).

⁵Scarborough, p. 284.

⁶Kay Johnson Mussell, "The World of Modern Gothic Fiction: American Women and Their Social Myths," Unpublished dissertation (Iowa City, Iowa: Univ. of Iowa, 1973), pp. 100-129.

⁷Henry James also relies on the foolishly superstitious servants in "Turn of the Screw."

⁸In "Sight Unseen" (1921), a medium reveals a murder which occurs while a seance is in progress. The members of the seance try to prove the medium's vision correct by revealing the murderer. Eventually, the medium is proven correct. Although the phenomenon is presented as a scientifically explicable experience, the belief in seances and mediumship still carries supernatural connotations because of the occult associations.

⁹James D. Hart, The Popular Book: A History of America's Literary Taste (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1950), pp. 199-205.

¹⁰For a discussion of popular fiction during and after World War I, see Dorothy Scarborough's The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction and James D. Hart's The Popular Book.

CHAPTER V. THE RESURGENCE OF GOTHIC ROMANCE

Like the rest of the world, the writing community was preoccupied with rebuilding after World War II. Postwar popular fiction had, for the most part, changed only slightly from the prewar period, and for the gothic romance which had been redeveloping in the late thirties, this meant beginning again.¹ Even though writers such as Mary Stewart and Dorothy Eden published gothic formula novels during the 1940s and early 1950s, most of their works were only moderately successful. When the gothic romance did begin to sell in the late fifties, the culture was confronting the bomb, Cold War tensions, the United States' involvement abroad and growing political and social unrest at home. Given these stresses, it is not surprising that the gothic romance re-emerged.

"For the genre, [however], the breakthrough book was Victoria Holt's Mistress of Mellyn which [appeared in 1960 and] sold a million copies."² Holt's novel, set in Cornwall around the turn of the century, is told in the first person by the governess, Miss Martha Leigh. When Marty Leigh arrives at Mount Mellyn, a castle made of granite, to take charge of the motherless Alvean, she finds herself surrounded by mysteries. The castle with its lepers' squints, peepholes and secret priest chambers seems a fitting backdrop for the TreMellyn household, which lives in the shadow of Alice, the deceased wife of the master, Connan TreMellyn. In attempting to help Alvean, Miss Leigh learns that the child is not Connan's daughter but the child of Alice and her lover, Geof.

Marty also discovers Alice's diary, an event which ultimately leads to the discovery that Alice was murdered by Celestine, a neighbor who wants to marry Connan. Eventually, Marty and Connan fall in love and marry, but only after Connan rescues Marty from the secret priest chamber where Celestine leaves her to die.

Essentially, Mistress of Mellyn reflects the formula of the modern gothic romance. A young girl, usually from an ordinary background, finds herself in an unfamiliar setting, full of danger and mystery.³ After arriving in the new setting, the heroine, who becomes involved in the lives of the other characters, learns of a past or secret crime which plagues her new acquaintances. In the process of discovering the secret crime and removing everyone from danger, the young girl begins a successful love affair which ends in marriage or improved marital relations. The central differences between the modern gothic romance and earlier examples of the genre are the interweaving of the mystery and romance and, as noted earlier, the first person narration; otherwise, the formula elements remain the same.

In their use of the supernatural, the modern gothic writers focus on legends, possession, reincarnation, psychical phenomena and occultism. Although the phenomena may be presented directly, a few of the more recent works use a third method which combines a direct with an indirect theory of the supernatural, i.e., a recognized theory of psychic disorder and an occult theory of demonic possession. Of the numerous modern gothic writers, Victoria Holt, Phyllis Whitney and Barbara Michaels not only represent the more popular formula writers but also illustrate the

uses of the supernatural in formula fiction.

Producing gothic romances under the pseudonym of Victoria Holt, Eleanor Burford Hibbert is one of the most prolific of formula writers. Like her Mistress of Mellyn, most of Holt/Hibbert's fiction adheres closely to the original gothic romances, using the governess or young bride caught in a castle and surrounded by danger as the basic plot. Similarly, Holt's use of the supernatural resembles that employed by earlier writers.

Although Holt rarely uses Mrs. Radcliffe's hoax ghosts, she is fond of curses, legends and prophecies as explicable supernatural phenomena. In Mistress of Mellyn, Alice's ghost is said to haunt given rooms of the house, although no one actually sees anything resembling a ghost. In Bride of Pendorruc (1963), a legend mixes with a curse to create a feeling of supernatural events: Because several of the Pendorruc wives die young, a belief develops that a new Pendorruc bride will die young because her predecessor, who haunts the house, will kill the new bride so that the old bride, having found a replacement, can rest in peace. The Curse of the Kings (1973) focuses on an Egyptian nobleman's curse which threatens death to anyone who disturbs his tomb. And, in The House of a Thousand Lanterns (1975), as in most of her works, Holt uses prophecies to indicate the course of events. Aside from the prophecies which are often used as a foreshadowing technique, each supernatural element is exploited by the villain who covers his devious plans by the supernatural.

As in Mrs. Radcliffe's novels, human-created supernature tests

the heroine's abilities to act according to established cultural precepts.⁴ When confronted by a situation which seems to validate the legend, curse or prophecy, the typical Holt heroine reacts rationally, scoffing at the supernatural and searching for the human source. As a result of her rational conduct, the heroine is rewarded by a successful love affair with the hero. In other words, Holt's use of human-created supernature which tests the heroine's ability to adhere to culturally recognized behavior seems to illustrate the value of appropriate conduct for twentieth-century heroines, i.e., getting or keeping a man. Otherwise, the only way heroines could achieve their reward--a man--would be by supernatural intervention.

Like Mrs. Radcliffe's, Holt's supernature sides with evil in order to test the characters; however, the tests are humanly rather than superhumanly devised since the supernatural phenomena originate in man's evilness. Despite their human-created origins, Holt's supernatural legends and curses are presented as valid supernatural events. It is not until the mystery is solved that the supernatural occurrences are completely explained.

Holt's supernature, unlike that of the earlier writers, is not witnessed by several people. When Jane, in The House of a Thousand Lanterns, thinks she sees the spirit of death, no one else witnesses the appearance. Only after the discovery of the costume is Jane's vision verified. This use of the nonverifiable supernatural indicates a continuation of the nineteenth century's internalized terrors. Holt's novels, as did those of her nineteenth-century precursors, suggest that individuals

cannot trust their senses. Where the early gothic heroines believed in the senses' ability to relay accurate information, the twentieth-century females question the validity of their sensory signals.

When Favel, in Bride of Pendorrlic, hears violin music coming from a supposedly haunted room, she tries to find the human source, but she cannot. As a result Favel begins to wonder if she did hear the music.

Another writer who relies on the rationally explicable supernature is Phyllis Whitney, who publishes both her gothic romances and children's fiction under the same name. In her novels, Whitney does not adhere as closely to the formula of early gothic romance as does Victoria Holt, although she shares several of Holt's supernatural elements. Because most of Whitney's novels are set in America, her legends and curses lack the verisimilitude of Holt's works, which occur in more remote regions. But Whitney's use of dreams and reincarnation helps create an atmosphere in which extraordinary happenings can occur.

In The Turquoise Mask (1973), Amanda has a recurring dream in which "a very old tree, with black twisted branches . . . seemed to reach toward [her]--as if the leafy ends were hands that would grasp and injure [her]. Always there was horror in [the] vision of the tree."⁵ Although Amanda cannot recall such a tree, she believes that her dream originates from something which occurred when she was five years old and living in New Mexico. So after her father's death, Amanda leaves New York to return to her deceased mother's family in Sante Fe, hoping to exorcise her dream. However, she succeeds only in exposing the

terrifying secrets surrounding the Cordova family: illegitimate births and murder.

In the light of modern psychological theory Amanda's dream can be rationally explained, but certain occult associations still cling to the phenomenon of recurrent dreams. Whitney appeals to these associations by referring to Amanda's dream as a vision, a word which connotes something supernaturally revealed or perceived. By presenting phenomena which retain occult associations, Whitney provides supernatural elements while maintaining a rationalistic point of view. This technique is especially apparent in her use of reincarnation.

In Snowfire (1972), Whitney has Margot McCabe's spirit return to the family in the form of a cat, or at least that is what Shannon and Adria believe. Margot, the invalid wife of Julian McCabe, was a bitter and cruel woman, feared by most people. When she was killed, Shannon, her sister-in-law, said that she had returned as the cat, who hissed and clawed at everyone. Adria, who felt responsible for her mother's death, accepted Shannon's tale of reincarnation. Although the rest of the characters discount the belief, no attempt is made in the book to rationally disprove reincarnation. By relying on the reader's identification with the nonbelieving characters, Whitney can present supernatural elements without losing her rationalistic point of view.

Rationalism, for Whitney, is highly valued. Like Victoria Holt, she relies on the supernatural for tests to prove her heroines'

rationality, a trait which is rewarded by getting or keeping a man. However, Whitney's increasing use of occult-associated phenomena, especially since 1972, seems to indicate a willingness to recognize the irrational side of human existence, that side which is beyond the individual's control.

The recurring dream in The Turquoise Mask is beyond Amanda's control. She cannot determine when the dream will appear nor can she discover why the vision of a tree should horrify her. Her uncontrollable dream places her in danger because her mind's terror, when exorcised, reveals another's terrifying crime. As a result, a rational order does not seem to play as large a part in determining Amanda's life as the uncontrollable and irrational.

Although Whitney's terrors continue to mirror the internalized supernature used by Holt, a subtle shift recalls the shared hallucinations of late nineteenth-century fiction. Like Lee's A Phantom Lover, Whitney's Snowfire has one character, Shannon, convince another person, Adria, of a supernatural phenomenon. In The Turquoise Mask, Whitney expands the mind-created terrors to include a mind-created terror's triggering terrors in the minds of others. Amanda's mind creates, in the form of a dream, an unknown terror which in turn creates other terrors in the minds of those guilty of the unconfessed crimes revealed by the dream.

Although most gothic romances follow the formula employed by Holt and Whitney, a few writers have begun to use the direct method of presenting supernatural phenomena. Of these writers, Barbara Michaels is

one of the most popular. Even though most of Michaels' works present alternative theories of supernatural occurrences, they usually conclude with a statement favoring the supernatural.

Her novel The Dark on the Other Side (1970), which is told in the third person, focuses on the strange events surrounding Gordon and Linda Randolph. Gordon, a famous athlete, writer, politician and teacher, and Linda, his exotically beautiful wife, live in a secluded mansion with only a witch for a neighbor. A writer, Michael Collins, arrives to do a piece on the famous Mr. Randolph; but, when he arrives, he discovers that one of the Randolphs is possessed. Eventually, Gordon is identified as the one so afflicted. As Michael, Linda and the psychologist Galen arrive at the mansion, they discover Gordon and Jack, his secretary, engaged in an unusual rite in the tower room. In the midst of the confrontation shots are fired and Gordon is killed by a silver bullet. As Galen, Michael and Linda drive away from the mansion at the novel's end, they exchange the following remarks:

'What did you see, Galen?'

'At the end? . . . The original delusion of lycanthropy was Randolph's, as I suspected. He reverted completely.'

'I saw him change . . . I saw the dog. How do you define a hallucination, Galen? If three people out of four see a thing, and the fourth sees something else--which of them is halucinating [sic]?' (222-223)

Like the nineteenth-century writers, Michaels' supernature indicates a concern with the conflicting natures of man. It seems that man is still unsure of which of his natures he really is and of how to live with the apparent conflicts in his natures. But Michaels, unlike

earlier writers such as G. W. M. Reynolds, allows Gordon to die while still in conflict with his natures, implying perhaps that the resolution of conflicting natures lies in the death, either actual or metaphorical, of the individual.

In one of her latest works, The Sea-King's Daughter (1975), Michaels deals with the belief in reincarnation. Unlike Whitney's use of the phenomenon, Michaels creates a heroine, Sandy, who is the reincarnation of Ariadne, Minos' daughter. Set on the Greek Island of Thera, the novel chronicles Sandy's adventures while she is diving for treasure buried during World War II. While in Greece Sandy experiences dejà vu, a phenomenon which transports her back in a series of brief flashes to the Minoan civilization of 1500 B.C. She also meets Jim, whom she eventually marries. At the close of the novel, Sandy poses the following questions:

Who are we, really? Combinations of common chemicals that perform mechanical actions for a few years before crumbling back into the original components? . . . Or the same soul, immortal and eternal, refurbished and reused through endless lives. . . ? (224)

Again Michaels asks who we are, but this time she implies that the answer may lie in the past. And given the current fads, e.g., the return to the '50s, she would seem to be reflecting one of the culture's solutions.

Unlike the earlier gothic romances the twentieth-century novels indicate no clear social order, although they are concerned with the individual and society. The primary reason for the heroine's actions

is not to better society but to satisfy the individual need for a man. It would appear that the continual internalizing of the supernatural to the degree that individual terrors can be projected onto others reflects the culture's growing perception of the chaotic state of American culture and indicates the individual's continued search for order.⁶

In their use of the supernatural, writers of modern gothic romances reflect the twentieth century's concern with the individual's relationship to society. Because each individual must establish a relationship to the larger society, many of the anxieties which result from the search are reflected in modern gothic romances which attempt, through mind-created supernature, to establish a correspondence between the self and the unknown. In the fiction of Victoria Holt, the individual's terrors serve as tests for the characters in order to illustrate that if individuals adhere to the established cultural values of appropriate behavior, then they will not be confounded by what appear to be unknown or supernatural forces. Instead, they will be rewarded by a marriage which in gothic romance has clearly defined social roles and order. In recent years, however, the presentation of supernatural terrors reflects the continued frustration of Americans in their attempts to establish a relationship between themselves and the larger world. As Barbara Michaels' novels indicate, the individuals' attempts to relate themselves to the larger society have produced other, and in some ways, more frightening terrors since the heroines carry the memory, if not the terror itself, with them into marriage. Now that man has gone as far

inside himself as he dares, he is returning to society; only this time he is bringing his individually mind-created terrors along, forcing others to share in his nightmares.

FOOTNOTES

¹According to James Hart's The Popular Book: A History of America's Literary Taste (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1950), fiction during the Depression, the hostilities and the unsettled peace focused on self-analysis, war, including real and fictionalized tales, and history, both fictional and nonfictional accounts. Some of the postwar books included in Hart's study are: Thomas B. Costain, The Black Rose (1945), Taylor Caldwell, This Side of Innocence (1946), Ralph Ingersoll (Top Secret (1946), Alfred Charles Kinsey, Sexual Behavior in the Human Male (1948) and Norman Mailer, The Naked and the Dead (1948).

²Martha Duffy, "Books: On the Road to Manderley," Time, 12 April 1971, p. 95.

³Henry James employs these same basic elements in "Turn of the Screw".

⁴Kay Johnson Mussell's dissertation discusses in length the cultural values put forth in modern gothic romances.

⁵Phyllis Whitney, The Turquoise Mask (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett, 1973), p. 16.

⁶This search for order is especially apparent in the recent popularity of the Zodiac Gothic Romances which incorporate the gothic romance formula with a given sign of the zodiac. In these novels, the characters act according to the prescribed astrological characteristics of their given signs. In this way, if people want to learn how to act, they can turn to the appropriate zodiac gothic romance for guidance.

CHAPTER VI. CONCLUSION

Although this study of the supernatural in popular gothic romance is meant to be suggestive rather than exhaustive, the novels discussed are representative of the formula, and as such, reflect the prevailing trends in the genre over the last two centuries. Furthermore, gothic romance, as a fictional formula, provides a means for comparing changes in the formula's supernatural element with changes in the cultural perceptions of supernature over a given period of time. In tracing the supernatural element of gothic romance over the last two hundred years, this study indicates a movement inward away from external supernatural terrors to those terrors which originate in the mind.

Writing in the eighteenth century, Walpole and Radcliffe blended supernatural terrors with the prevailing cultural attitudes of common sense and reason to produce successful gothic romances. But at the close of the century, the malevolent, unexplained supernature of Matthew Lewis caught the public's taste as the belief in a less ordered world grew. Confronted by defeats abroad, economic disasters at home and the French Revolution, England was under pressure from several sides, a fact which helped to strengthen the culture's growing belief in a less rational world.

Much of the gothic romance fiction of the early nineteenth-century merely imitated earlier formula works. Yet specific novels indicated the century's growing concern with dualism and knowledge. Scientific discoveries forced a rethinking of traditional cultural beliefs, which in turn

produced anxieties within the culture regarding the ultimate results of such quests. And writers often focussed on the culture's fears by creating novels like Frankenstein and Melmoth, the Wanderer which illustrated the terrors of too much knowledge.

At the same time, the nineteenth century's gothic fiction indicated a movement inward toward those terrors which originated in the mind. In works like Uncle Silas, the mind created its own phenomena, while in Wagner, The Wehr-Wolf, the mind produced actual supernatural phenomena. Moreover, the popular writers, through their use of shape-changing supernature, reflected the Victorians' concerns with the rising middle class, emerging reform movements, the industrial revolution and scientific discoveries.

The ghost story surfaced as the dominant fictional form for depicting supernatural terrors during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Influenced by renewed interest in folklore, Modern Spiritualism and psychical research, writers of ghost stories reflected the culture's interest in psychic phenomena. In their use of ghosts, popular writers commonly presented supernature as a verifiable phenomenon, although a few writers saw the ghost as a possible, but not provable, occurrence.

Most of the supernatural novels written during the first part of the twentieth century did not employ the gothic romance formula although certain elements began to appear in works by Mary Roberts Rinehart. In her novels, the supernatural is mentioned, but only to illustrate how foolish and superstitious the individuals are who believe in such phenomena. Like other writers of the period, Rinehart reflected the

public's desire for past behaviors of success in her use of detectives who repeatedly solved crimes by relying on rational thinking, not supernature.

Supernature, however, began to appear in popular fiction as the century moved into the 1920s. And by the third decade, economic collapse and rumors of war were creating tensions which surfaced in popular fiction like Daphne du Maurier's Rebecca. Du Maurier extended the nineteenth-century's internalizing of supernatural terrors, by creating a character who, because of inexplicable events, attempted to discover causes but created haunting explanations instead. Although du Maurier's characters were motivated by external forces before they created supernature, they only needed the suggestion to see the supernatural in daily events.

In the postwar years, the gothic romance was reestablishing itself. Even though writers of gothic romances published works during the 1940s and 1950s, not until the publication of Holt's Mistress of Mellyn (1960) did the genre begin to reemerge as a popular fictional formula. During the fifties and sixties, Americans, confronted by the bomb, United States' involvement abroad and growing political and social unrest, were concerned with the seemingly unknown forces which were apparently directing the course of events.

In the last ten years, the supernatural in gothic romances has become more individualized in its presentation. Writers continue to use the direct and indirect methods of presenting the supernatural as well as the combination of the two, but their presentations focus on the

individual's ability to relate experiences to a larger order. Thus, in the fiction of Victoria Holt, the individual's terrors illustrate how individuals who adhere to the established cultural values cannot be confused by what appear to be unknown or supernatural forces. And more recently, writers such as Barbara Michaels indicate that the individual's attempts to provide himself with answers have been ineffectual and now he is seeking answers from the larger social order. But in his search, man is forcing others to share in his individualized mind-created terrors of the unknown.

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