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Gothic Sublimity

David B. Morris

The unconscious is that chapter of my history that is marked by a blank or occupied by a falsehood: it is the censored chapter.¹

Jacques Lacan

A SURPRISING and consistent feature of recent studies of the sublime is their choice of period. Romanticism has now thoroughly displaced the eighteenth century as the focus of modern scholarship on the sublime.² Among such scholarly studies, the most powerful and challenging is undoubtedly Thomas Weiskel's *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (1976). Summary misrepresents the skill and detail of Weiskel's argument, but it is accurate to say that he defines the Romantic sublime through its relation to meaning. For Weiskel, the Romantic sublime is born at the moment when the normal relations between signifier and signified suddenly break down.³ The Romantic sublime is thus invariably—although not exclusively—hermeneutic. That is, it involves an experience in which words and images grow radically unstable, where meaning is continually in question, approaching or receding or fixed on a distant horizon, promising new dimensions of insight or (in its abrupt absences) unexpectedly blocking the mind. By contrast, the eighteenth-century sublime occurs in a world of received, relatively stable meanings, where interpretation is not openly at issue. Its pictorial descriptions seek to inspire powerful emotions, but not to unveil mysteries. The style is bold, but not prophetic; the scenes exotic or wild, but not visionary. Even in its highest flights of religious feeling, the eighteenth-century sublime confirms rather than challenges the convictions of orthodox faith. Like true wit for Pope, it cannot tell us more than we already know.⁴

Provisionally I want to accept this simplified sketch with its contrast between periods and modes: an eighteenth-century sublime, fundamentally affective and pictorial, and a Romantic sublime, fundamentally hermeneutic and visionary. What this static sketch conceals, of course, is not only the diversity within periods and modes but also the perplexing question of literary change. By reopening discussion of two important mid-century texts—Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical*

Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (1757) and Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764)—I want to examine ways in which the Gothic novel participates in a significant revision of the eighteenth-century sublime. I will argue that Gothic sublimity as developed in Walpole's novel cannot be adequately explained on the basis of Burke's theories, which is how all previous studies of the sublime have explained it.⁵ Further, at the point where Burke and Walpole diverge, I want to consider Freud's essay "The 'Uncanny'" (1919). Freud, I believe, offers us a much improved theory of terror, a theory which helps to explain why sublimity is a vital, integral part of the Gothic novel, not merely an incidental, ornamental, scenic prop.

We should begin by accepting an uncomfortable fact: the sublime, like the Gothic novel, embraces such a variety of historical practices and of theoretical accounts that the quest for a single, unchanging feature or essence is futile.⁶ There is no essence of the sublime. Instead, what we encounter is (in Wittgenstein's phrase) shared "family resemblances" which link the countless, related discussions of sublimity beginning with Longinus, who first described the irresistible power of great writing to seize control of the reader, to take us outside of ourselves with the sudden, startling intensity of a thunderbolt (*Peri Hupsous* §1). As we know, these discussions abruptly multiplied and intensified in the early decades of the eighteenth century, following Boileau's French translation of Longinus in 1674. Among these early writers on the sublime, undoubtedly the most rigorous, subtle, and thorough analyst (until he was displaced by Kant) is Edmund Burke. It was Burke's accomplishment, in entering the confused and contradictory dialogue on the sublime, to consolidate the vastly diverse materials of previous accounts within a single, uneasily unified system. Splitting the sublime from the beautiful in an irreconcilable division, he then explained all aspects of sublimity as governed by one comprehensive power. As he summarized his theory unconditionally: "Terror is in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently the ruling principle of the sublime."⁷

Burke's account of the sublime is clearly relevant to the almost simultaneous Gothic explorations of terror. Walpole, for example, in his preface to *The Castle of Otranto*, describes terror as his "principal engine," and writers committed to explorations of terror found obvious uses for the sublime.⁸ Thus scholars of the Gothic novel—no doubt following the steps of many Gothic novelists—regularly consult Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry* as if it were a storehouse of approved and guaranteed terrors. His illustrations of the sublime have provided something like a readers' guide to the Gothic novel: vast cata-

racts, raging storms, lofty towers, dark nights, ghosts and goblins, serpents, madmen; mountains, precipices, dazzling light; low, tremulous, intermittent sounds, such as moans, sighs, or whispers; immense, gloomy buildings; tyranny, incarceration, torture.⁹ Certainly it is true that some unusually artless Gothic novels seem patched together as a sampler of Burkean terrors. Yet there are serious drawbacks to the standard critical reading which interprets Gothic sublimity as merely instrumental, something to be used, a repertoire of terrifying devices. A critical approach which reduces Gothic sublimity to the familiar inventory of ghosts and dark passageways cannot help us understand what was both profoundly innovative and yet also deeply inadequate in Burke's account.

Burke's strengths lie in the far-reaching implications which his theory held for an unprecedented "poeticizing" of the British novel. Gothic writers, in pursuing Burke's alliance between terror and sublimity, contribute to a new mixing of the previously separate conventions associated with verse and with prose, and this mixing of conventions opens fruitful possibilities for the development of plot, character, setting, and language.¹⁰ Gothic sublimity in *The Castle of Otranto* thus belongs to Walpole's conscious protest against the Richardsonian model in fiction, with its realist techniques of narrative and its bourgeois attitudes toward marriage and social relations. (He described *Clarissa* [1748] and *Sir Charles Grandison* [1754] as "pictures of high life as conceived by a bookseller."¹¹) In its marvels and terrors, *The Castle of Otranto* actively subverts the prosaic vision of the world implicit in novelistic conventions of probability and verisimilitude. The sublime in effect recaptures for the Gothic novel the same emotional intensities and narrative freedoms which belonged to poetry and to the poetic province of romance. Yet the vastly important implications of a "poeticizing" of the novel—which we cannot trace to Burke alone—must not prevent us from understanding a major defect of the *Philosophical Enquiry*, a defect especially pertinent to the Gothic novel. This is its account of terror.

Burke proves deficient for an understanding of the Gothic novel because he rests his theory of terror on a narrow, mechanical account of bodily processes. For Burke, terror derives simply and directly from whatever evokes in us "an apprehension of pain or death" (p. 131). He means that we fear whatever threatens to injure or to kill us. This explanation may be correct, as far as it goes, but it greatly oversimplifies the complex nature of pain and fear. In fact, his claim that "pain and fear consist in an unnatural tension of the nerves" (p. 132) deliberately ignores the tangled psychological and cultural dimensions of terror. The reasons behind Burke's flight from psy-

chology need not concern us here.¹² The strains and refusals of his argument, however, identify his limits as a theorist of terror. It is entirely characteristic and consistent of Burke to trace our fears of darkness to painful contractions of “the radial fibres of the iris” (p. 146). We might describe it as the contribution of Gothic novelists to explore a darkness which does not owe its terrors to the eye alone. The Gothic novel stands as an implicit critique of Burke—a testament to how much he and his age were unable to explain about the sublime.

The Gothic revision of the sublime begins with *The Castle of Otranto*, and Walpole’s contribution requires a closer look than his critics believe it deserves.¹³ Such analysis is necessary, however, if we hope to move beyond the arid catalogues of sublime props to an understanding of how Walpole’s gigantic knights and bleeding statues participate in an encompassing narrative of terror. As in the extravagant architecture of Strawberry Hill, Walpole’s subversion of neoclassical proprieties depends upon finding unanticipated resources in material which an earlier generation would have dismissed as grotesque, excessive, and merely ornamental. In effect, his revision of the sublime employs figures of speech long associated with the sublime style. With an imaginative power which rivals his achievements at Strawberry Hill, Walpole transforms these figurative elements of the sublime style into principles of narrative structure.

Exaggeration and repetition are the two dominant figures of speech which shape Walpole’s narrative in *The Castle of Otranto*, and I should like to examine each in turn. Exaggeration or hyperbole had long served as a favorite device of poets who pursued the sublime through sheer excess of style, as Pope recognized when in his Longinian mock-treatise entitled *Peri Bathous* (1727) he identified as a major trope of the false sublime “The Hyperbole, or *Impossible*.”¹⁴ Clearly, in its language *The Castle of Otranto* provides almost a compendium of exaggerated speech—from Theodore’s high-minded aphorisms to Manfred’s nonstop monologue and theatrical tears. What some philosophers call ordinary language seems the only form of discourse purposely excluded from *The Castle of Otranto*. Yet exaggeration extends from speech to every aspect of the novel. Manfred as prototype of the Gothic hero might accurately be described as character hyperbolized. His actions are pure excess reified in plot. Crime escalates into villainy; innocence is never merely virtuous but immaculate and virginal; devils and demigods, imagined or unimagined, mix with giants, ghosts, and groaning portraits. In fact, the impossible (Pope’s synonym for hyperbole) controls *The Castle of Otranto* from its opening scene, when young Conrad expires beneath “an enormous helmet, an hundred times more large than any casque

ever made for human being" (p. 17). As in such perverse unities of the exaggerated and the impossible, hyperbole passes from language to action, where it provides a mysterious logic underlying almost every instance of Gothic plot. When a figure of speech now falls from the sky with a weight which crushes one of the characters, it is small wonder that André Breton claimed Walpole for the surrealists.

Exaggerated emotion proves more important than hyperbolic language, vast size, or impossible events for an understanding of Gothic sublimity. From the love-struck Theodore to the preternaturally loyal and devout Hippolita, excessive feeling is the law for Gothic character. The Gothic hero's capacity for rage is legendary, but lesser beings also express unusual powers of feeling, such as the servant who enters Manfred's chapel with "his eyes staring, and foaming at the mouth" (p. 16). Another servant experienced such intense emotion that his hair—in what becomes standard Gothic tonsure—"stood on end" (p. 33). While emotional excess is here almost comic, Walpole's preference for mixing terror with grim comedy also permits more subtle, more troubling expressions of magnified feeling. Affection and disaffection are usually instantaneous as well as rigid and extreme. Manfred's feelings for his puny son, Conrad, for example, far exceed parental concern. Manfred, we are told, "doted" (p. 21) on Conrad, just as Matilda "doted" (p. 17) on Hippolita, who returned Matilda's feelings with equal strength.¹⁵ Upon Conrad's violent death, however, Manfred expresses no grief whatsoever, while toward his daughter, Matilda, he maintains a studied and unbending coldness. "His heart," she explains, "was ever a stranger to me" (p. 38).¹⁶ The Gothic revision of the sublime is not concerned simply with hyperbolic emotion, but with the strange patterns of desire revealed in this family drama.

Like exaggeration, repetition lends a strangeness to terror. Although *The Castle of Otranto* finds consistent employment for figures of speech which embody repetition, such as anaphora, amplification, and periphrasis, these tropes associated with the sublime style also pass from language to action. As a narrative principle, repetition creates the eerie rule that anything which can happen once in Walpole's novel is likely to happen again. Situations and events seem fated to generate exact or nearly exact facsimiles, which necessarily raise questions both about their own status and about the world in which such unlikely duplications occur.¹⁷ Manfred, for example, three times imprisons the mysterious stranger Theodore, and three times Theodore escapes to return and defy him. Less comic and less evident repetitions abound. Twice Theodore comes to the aid of Isabella as she twice flees from Manfred. There are two separate and equally

improbable recognition scenes reuniting grown children with long-lost parents. There are two formal processions into the castle with Duke Frederic as central figure. Matilda is the central figure in three separate deathbed interviews, and Manfred is twice forgiven—once by Theodore and once by Matilda—in almost identical words.¹⁸ These examples might be greatly multiplied. Nor can they be dismissed simply as imitations of romance. Indeed, their prevalence does far more than simply reinforce the specifically Gothic vision of history in which the past interpenetrates the present time, as if events were never entirely the unique and unrepeated product of human choices but rather the replication of an unknown or buried pattern, for which the curse upon Otranto is a gaudy symbol.

It is in defining character and the relations among characters that repetition proves basic to Gothic terror. Unfortunately, the odd fluidity of Gothic character is usually noted only as an occasion for ridicule. Thus Robert Kiely observes perceptively but disapprovingly of Walpole's novel: "Where any human contact requiring time, intensity, and reciprocity is called for, whether it be violent or loving, one of the two characters involved is almost certain to evaporate or become someone else."¹⁹ While absurd by the standards of realist fiction, such instabilities also serve to call into question received ideas of character and of social relations. In *The Castle of Otranto*, the romance conventions of mistaken identity, disguise, sudden disappearance, and coincidental encounter reflect a narrative principle of repetition which challenges the concept of a world where everything and everyone is unique, marked by intrinsic differences, possessing a singleness which makes them exactly and only what they appear. Theodore's exact resemblance to the portrait of his murdered grandfather not only confuses Matilda and complicates the plot, but, more importantly, it complicates our understanding of who he is—of who anyone is. Duke Frederic so quickly and openly burns with lust for Matilda that he seems a mirror reflecting hidden aspects of the equally hasty and inflamed Manfred. Such contrived similarities raise legitimate doubts whether Manfred's pressing desire for Isabella is based solely on a dynastic concern for male heirs.²⁰ Nowhere, however, is the instability of Gothic character more troubling than in the resemblance of Isabella and Matilda. The dissonance of Walpole's ending, in which Isabella substitutes for the murdered Matilda in Theodore's affections, simply carries to its conclusion the uncanny logic of repetition which governs *The Castle of Otranto*.

The principle of repetition which links Matilda and Isabella also provides the latent source of terror so crucial to the Gothic revision of the sublime. The two young women are linked not only by their

structural position within the narrative as potential brides. Throughout the novel a repeated language of kinship emphasizes their role as near sisters.²¹ Isabella's status as an orphan increases her filial attachment to Manfred and Hippolita, whom she vows to respect "as *parents*" (p. 46). This relation, of course, is based upon the contract of marriage between Isabella and Conrad, but it is not merely contractual, especially after Conrad's death. If medieval law allows Manfred to assert of Isabella that "I am her parent" (p. 47), it is desire which speaks when he calls her "dear to me as my own blood" (p. 66). Isabella in effect holds the place in Manfred's affection which he has denied to Matilda. Thus, when Manfred in jealous rage stabs the figure he believes to be Isabella, it is not coincidence but the Gothic truth of repetition which substitutes his own daughter, Matilda. Matilda and Isabella—despite their opposite temperaments—are doubles or mirror images, and Manfred's pursuit of Isabella is not simply an expression of unrequited desire but the reenactment of an ancient pattern. What terrifies Isabella as she flees from Manfred through dark, subterranean passages is not the prospect of capture or even rape—however terrible—but sexual violation by the man who, in the repetitions of Walpole's narrative, is the double or dark surrogate of her own absent father. Walpole writes of this archetypal Gothic scene: "Her dread of Manfred soon outweighed every other terror" (p. 26).

Incest—which Walpole in *The Castle of Otranto* and, more explicitly, in *The Mysterious Mother* (1768) effectively reinvented as a literary subject—is the new and often unspoken terror at the heart of Gothic sublimity.²² I do not mean that all Gothic novels deal explicitly with incestuous passion or that fears of incest are completely absent from previous eighteenth-century fiction. The Gothic treatment of incest, however, differs fundamentally from the treatment in (say) Defoe and Fielding, where incest reflects the perils of coincidence or of imprudence. In *Moll Flanders* and in *Tom Jones*, fears of incest break in upon a world which otherwise excludes them by the laws of probability. Only a vast improbability—not suppressed desire—could bring Tom Jones to his mother's bed. A prudent man, Fielding implies, will not find himself accidentally betrayed by his own sexuality. Sexuality in the Gothic novel, by contrast, cannot be regulated by prudence. It is not accident but desire which in its unremitting repetitions and hidden agenda continuously threatens characters with a crime they cannot—by mere precautions—avoid.

Incest in the Gothic novel is the visible or secret or absent center of forbidden desire to which terror always, ultimately, returns. Manfred employs the laws against incest as a pretext for dissolving his marriage to Hippolita, but this technical incest ("in the fourth

degree" [p. 49]) which he officially repudiates simply repeats itself, unofficially, in his pursuit of Isabella. Even the implied, reconciling marriage between Theodore and Isabella cannot entirely free the novel from the shadow of repeated incest. (They are each the closest surviving blood relatives of Alfonso the Good.) Indeed, in addition to its sexual terrors, incest also involves a threat to the entire social order, an order (as anthropologists now insist) based on the intricate network of differentiated kinship relations that incest would dissolve.²³ The crumbling walls of Otranto are not the only structure imperiled by Manfred's design. Isabella seems to recognize the wider threat to the social order as she desperately seeks to reassert and to shore up the differences which Manfred would deny: "You, my lord! You! My father in law! the father of Conrad! the husband of the virtuous and tender Hippolita!" (p. 23). Here—in a dread beyond ordinary terror—is a version of the sublime about which Burke can tell us almost nothing. Whereas Burke had founded his theory of the sublime on an irreconcilable split between terror and love, Walpole shows us how the intensest terror is located at the very origin of desire. In the Gothic novel, love and terror prove inextricable.²⁴

In exploring the entanglements of love and terror, the Gothic novel pursues a version of the sublime utterly without transcendence. It is a vertiginous and plunging—not a soaring—sublime, which takes us deep within rather than far beyond the human sphere. The eighteenth-century sublime always implied (but managed to restrain) the threat of lost control. Gothic sublimity—by releasing into fiction images and desires long suppressed, deeply hidden, forced into silence—greatly intensifies the dangers of an uncontrollable release from restraint. Such dangers no doubt help to explain why censorship and swooning were among the most common social responses to Gothic texts. Terror was a liberating—hence dangerous—force. "A god, [or] at least a ghost, was absolutely necessary," Walpole insisted, "to frighten us out of too much sense."²⁵ In its excessive violations of excess sense, Gothic sublimity demonstrates the possibilities of terror in opening the mind to its own hidden and irrational powers. It is a version of the sublime which demands a psychology adequate to Freud's belief that the ego is not master in its own house. If we can avoid the simplistic Freudian allegories sometimes proposed by critics of Gothic fiction—in which the castle represents Manfred's mind or vaginal spaces—Freud can become a reliable guide to Gothic sublimity, especially when we focus attention on his neglected essay "The 'Uncanny.'" It is this essay which Harold Bloom accurately describes as "Freud's theory of the Sublime."²⁶

"The 'Uncanny'" is especially relevant to the Gothic novel because

it is not only a theory of the sublime but also, simultaneously, a theory of terror. The specific subclass of terror which Freud describes as the uncanny differs strikingly from the Burkean catalogue of wild, exotic, and overpowering dangers. For Freud, the uncanny derives its terror not from something external, alien, or unknown but—on the contrary—from something strangely familiar which defeats our efforts to separate ourselves from it. In an autobiographical example, Freud describes how he accidentally wandered into the bordello district of a foreign town. “Nothing but painted women were to be seen at the windows of the small houses,” he wrote, “and I hastened to leave the narrow street at the next turning.”²⁷ In a near imitation of Gothic flight, where branching corridors and circular passages transform forward movement into endless repetition, three times Freud’s increasingly frantic efforts to escape simply return him—by devious paths—to the same street, to the identical scene of forbidden sexual practice. Such terror for Freud has nothing to do with fears of physical injury. It does not require unfamiliar mountain scenery or barbaric violence. As he summarized, the uncanny “is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression.”²⁸

Repression, according to Freud, was the cornerstone of his theory of the mind, and it is equally crucial to his analysis of terror. Like the double, the uncanny achieves its strange and disquieting power by confronting us with a part of ourselves which we have denied and disowned, but which we can never entirely expunge or escape. The terror of the uncanny is released as we encounter the disguised and distorted but inalienable images of our own repressed desire. For Freud, such uncanny images inspire the same mixture of attraction and revulsion which is the fundamental law of Gothic emotion. Nor should it surprise us that the uncanny is governed by the same principle underlying Walpole’s evocation of sublime terror in *The Castle of Otranto*. Repetition is the essential structure of the uncanny. Borrowing Freud’s language, we might describe Gothic sublimity as drawing its deepest terrors from a return of the repressed.

This is not the place to distinguish and to discuss the separate implications of Freud’s theory of the uncanny for Gothic readers, for Gothic writers, and for Gothic characters, because the discussion would lead far from a study of the sublime.²⁹ My preference instead is to consider how “The ‘Uncanny’ ” offers specific insight into a thematics of Gothic sublimity. For Freud, death and supernaturalism are the two main themes to which the uncanny obsessively returns, and they are also clearly recurrent themes within the Gothic novel. Yet

their importance has not been well understood by scholars of Gothic fiction. As pervasive themes, death and supernaturalism assume within the Gothic novel a significance unparalleled in the earlier literature of the sublime.

Although death occasionally appears in earlier sublime descriptive poems such as James Thomson's *The Seasons* (1726–30), Gothic writers invest death and dying with new prominence and new terrors. Burke once again affords an instructive contrast. For Burke, death is simply the ultimate degree of personal injury, which we fear because we fear whatever will cause us physical pain or will excite the idea of physical pain. It contributes to the sublime, we might say, as a remote and unseen cause. True, Burke once writes of death as if—like whirlwinds or ghosts—it were an immediate source rather than a remote cause of sublime passion. “The ideas of pain, and above all of death, are so very affecting,” he begins, “that whilst we remain in the presence of whatever is supposed to have the power of inflicting either, it is impossible to be perfectly free of terror” (p. 65). Yet even within this sentence we can observe death dissolving from an immediate presence into a secondary cause. As he proceeds, we discover that death itself is not Burke's main concern but yields its precedence to whatever excites our fears of death. Thus, although death sometimes receives mention among Burke's illustrations of sublimity, it tends to pass by without special emphasis, simply one sublime idea among many. What Burke leaves unsaid and unemphasized is most significant in his typically flat statement that “the ideas of *pain*, *sickness*, and *death*, fill the mind with strong emotions of horror” (p. 38). He sees no need to discriminate more subtly, to probe deeper.

For Walpole, death is not a remote cause or a miscellaneous sublime idea but a central theme and enveloping presence. It surrounds and interpenetrates the narrative. Its vividness and immediacy give it almost the status of a major character, even as it dominates—subtly or overtly—the Gothic settings of castle, prison, labyrinth, tower, or wild nature. If Gothic novels often conclude with images of violent death, deaths cannot be confined to a conclusion. Thus *The Castle of Otranto* opens with the vision of young Conrad's “bleeding mangled remains” (p. 17) pinned beneath that enormous helmet, whose waving black plumes somehow intensify the mystery and terror of death. Death in the Gothic novel is not conceived in linear relation to life, as the terminus of a long or short journey. It interrupts the hero on his wedding day; it intrudes upon the timeless chapels of religion; it mixes corpses with marriage beds and scenes of rape. Life in Gothic fiction never frees itself from the presence or threat of death. The sublime is always waiting beyond the next turn of the staircase.

Death achieves not only a new prominence but also a new terror in Gothic fiction. No longer as for Pope and his age a universal fact to be accepted and mourned, death is a mystery which fascinates and repels. Its status as mystery is doubtless enhanced by the Gothic intermingling of love and terror. Death is now so thoroughly interlocked with sexuality that it becomes difficult to know them apart. In fact, they may become knowable only through their intimate relation. As de Sade insisted: "There is no better way to know death than to link it with some licentious image."³⁰ While romantic love in *The Castle of Otranto* is endlessly deferred and dissatisfied, lust leads to open and shocking encounters with death. The scene which according to Sir Walter Scott was long praised as a masterpiece of sublime horror finds Duke Frederic seeking Hippolita in her chapel. In his hot desire to possess Matilda, he interrupts Hippolita at her devotions to secure her complicity. The figure who turns to face him, however, is not Hippolita but a cowed skeleton, who rebukes him for his lust. Here lust and death are not, I think, merely gratuitous, sensational partners. Their relation is fundamental to the Gothic subversion of sentimental myths about death which were concurrently transforming European graveyards into modern cemeteries, elegiac landscape gardens of harmony and tenderness.³¹ Death in the Gothic novel is not absorbed into the beauty of sentimental fictions about natural goodness but rather invested with contradictory emotions of desire and loathing. It is sublime because it remains a terrifying mystery, not simply unknowable but linked with human desires that we wish to keep unknown.

Like death, the supernatural holds a position within the Gothic novel quite different from its place in earlier discussions of the sublime. The long tradition of *le merveilleux chrétien* had sanctioned the poetic use of angels, spirits, and devils so long as they did not violate Christian theology. Poetry, critics believed, demanded the marvelous, and Christian marvels carried the presumption of truth, as opposed to the fictive mythologies of pagan writers. Gothic sublimity changes this argument, for the artificial supernaturalism of Gothic novels carries no presumption of truth. In fact, the opposite assumption prevails. Gothic marvels are self-evidently false. As Walpole writes in the preface to *The Castle of Otranto*: "Miracles, visions, necromancy, dreams, and other preternatural events, are exploded now even from romances" (p. 4). In this sense, Gothic sublimity does not depend upon judgments concerning the truth or reality of supernatural agents and events—judgments which lead critics into bored denunciations of claptrap machinery or inappropriate enthusiasms for "the numinous."³² But an obvious and crucial question arises here. How

can we attribute the power of inspiring terror to images which, like Walpole's murderous helmet or gigantic knights, openly proclaim their own falsehood? How can we locate the sublime in what we know to be ridiculous?

Freud's theory of terror in "The 'Uncanny'" provides an explanation which helps account for the power of Walpole's fictive supernaturalism, even as it illuminates the Gothic treatment of death. Death and supernaturalism are closely linked for Freud because they both derive their ultimate terror from a return of the repressed. Despite our casual talk of death, Freud insists that "no human being really grasps it, and our unconscious has as little use now as it ever had for the idea of its own mortality."³³ The Gothic novel in its preoccupation with death shocks us with the return of something familiar and old-established in the mind but also estranged and unknowable. So, too, Gothic supernaturalism confronts us with the repetition of what we prefer to keep hidden or covered by denial. Of course, like Walpole, Freud rejects the authenticity of supernatural events, but he did not therefore dismiss their power over the mind. In fact, he discussed at length how "surmounted beliefs" may return upon us with uncanny terror, exactly in the manner of repressed desires.

The Gothic novel in its revision of the sublime perfectly illustrates Freud's view that terror does not depend on a belief in the reality of what frightens us. Unlike more subtle shades of feeling or perception, fear is an ancient biological endowment, rooted in human physiology and psychology, as responsive to false alarms or to elaborate fictions as to genuine threats of personal injury. Outworn creeds can never be safely and permanently discarded. As Freud insists, we never completely expunge from our minds the archaic beliefs and primal images which reflect our earliest experience. No amount of learning or of skepticism can erase fears which lie just beyond or below or hidden within consciousness. "We do not feel quite sure of our new beliefs," Freud explains, "and the old ones still exist within us ready to seize upon any confirmation."³⁴ What Freud argues as true for modern man certainly applies to mankind in earlier ages. In fact, an argument for the power and persistence of surmounted beliefs finds ready support in the eighteenth century. Joseph Addison in *The Spectator* described to his immense readership how "antiquated Romances"—such as Walpole revered—tended to revive "the Stories we have heard in our Child-hood" and thus to evoke "those secret Terrours and Apprehensions to which the Mind of Man is naturally subject."³⁵ Mankind's secret terrors are the realities which Gothic novelists seek to engage through their extravagant and impossible fictions. It is

not Walpole's ghosts who inspire terror, but the ghosts we carry within us.

The Gothic revision of the sublime endows old forms with new purposes and new powers, but these innovations will remain invisible if we emphasize forms alone. We will see only clanking giants and stagy ghosts but fail to see that their emptiness—their lack of reference to a world beyond fiction—is now precisely the point. They have become like familiar figures viewed in a photographic negative, where they seem eerily drained of content. Their uncanniness, as Freud would call it, suggests that we should understand the importance of Gothic sublimity as inseparable from the antimimetic repetitions and exaggerations which implicitly announce their departure from a truth understood as probability or verisimilitude or representational form. If Freud is correct, the uncanny images of Gothic sublimity—strangely familiar and yet defamiliarized—not only make contact with experience which lies outside of consciousness. They also maintain a new relation with language, whereby the descriptive and pictorial techniques of the eighteenth-century sublime no longer carry the same function or value. What lies outside of consciousness also, as Lacan would tell us, lies outside of speech—or lies cryptically, fictively, irrecoverably inscribed within a language that both is and is not our own.³⁶

The new relation to language implicit in Gothic sublimity might be considered Walpole's most significant innovation. Although he does not entirely abandon an Augustan poetics of representational language, in which words were considered the signs of pictorial images and of clear and distinct ideas, he modifies it profoundly. Here his practice comes closest to the theories of Burke, who argued in the *Philosophical Enquiry* that sublimity does not depend upon the power of words to represent visual images or distinct ideas. Certainly in *The Castle of Otranto* we can find numerous passages to illustrate Burke's anti-Augustan view that obscure ideas and indistinct images are powerful sources of passion. Yet Walpole also goes beyond Burke in composing a fiction which—however intermittently or awkwardly—employs representation as a means of expressing and of evoking what cannot be represented. No images and no words will provide direct access to the materials of the unconscious. Every uncanny figure or event is inevitably a substitute: the inexact double or surrogate of what we cannot know and cannot represent directly. Thus, in the system of the uncanny, a corpse cannot represent death (as it might in allegorical texts) but only our inability to know what death is. The hooded skeleton which turns to face Duke Frederic in the chapel is



Edvard Munch. *The Scream*. National Gallery, Oslo. Photo: SCALA/Art Resource, N.Y.

a medieval figure in an Enlightenment text, where terror exceeds the religious purposes of a brief sermon on mortality and right conduct. It is not surprising that so much of the speech in Walpole's novel seems curiously beside the point. In contrast to the eloquent silences favored by neoclassical writers on the sublime, Gothic sublimity explores a terror of the unspeakable, of the inconceivable, of the unnameable.

We might find a visual analogue for Gothic sublimity—and for its strained relation to language—in Edvard Munch’s expressionist painting *The Scream* (1893). This representation of terror is especially apt because Munch dissociates his terrified central figure from any visible source of danger. The scream is apparently the response to something unseen, something which the two strolling figures in the background cannot perceive, and the painting forbids us from determining whether the terror ever breaks through the silence of the canvas. (Even more fearful than the sound of screaming may be the image of a speechless dread which chokes off all sound.) Walpole, of course, is garrulous, skeptical, operatic. What he offers us is certainly not the stern Augustan sublimity of Ajax—whose emotion forbids him to speak his thoughts—but a sheer excess of style which paradoxically leads toward the ultimate Gothic reduction of language, the scream. A scream is the original and recurrent language of terror, which Gothic sublimity reinvents as a wordless speech incapable of naming exactly what it fears. The scream, we might say, is less important in shattering silence than in affirming it. Yet screams are merely the point of excess which reveals less evident, less sporadic tendencies within Gothic fiction. Even in moments of grotesque or comic exaggeration, when nervous laughter seems closer than terror, the Gothic novel remains an edgy, uncomfortable, disquieting text. Its conclusions always dissatisfy, since they can never be more than substitutes for other, unallowable, perhaps unthinkable endings. “Life,” wrote Walpole, “seems to me as if we were dancing on a sunny plain on the edge of a gloomy forest, where we pass in a moment from glare to gloom and darkness.”³⁷ This sentence—Walpole’s reply to a friend who wrote him that her child had died—typifies a vision which refuses to console us with fictions of a knowable world. The potential terror of what lies outside of language—not simply reserved in silence but incapable of speech—is among the most troubling and crucial contributions which Gothic novels bring to the sublime on its journey from emotion to interpretation.

KALAMAZOO, MICHIGAN

NOTES

1 Jacques Lacan, “The function and field of speech and language in psychoanalysis” (1953), in *Écrits: A Selection*, tr. Alan Sheridan (New York, 1977), p. 50.

2 Recent books include: Angela Leighton, *Shelley and the Sublime: An Interpretation of the Major Poems* (New York, 1984); James B. Twitchell, *Romantic Horizons: Aspects of the*

Sublime in English Poetry and Painting, 1770–1850 (Columbia, Mo., 1983); Andrew Wilton, *Turner and the Sublime* (London, 1980); Stuart A. Ende, *Keats and the Sublime* (New Haven, 1976); Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (Baltimore, 1976); and Albert O. Wlecke, *Wordsworth and the Sublime* (Berkeley, 1973). A selection of recent essays (listed alphabetically by author) includes: W. P. Albrecht, "Tragedy and Wordsworth's Sublime," *Wordsworth Circle*, 8 (1977), 83–94; V. A. De Luca, "Blake and the Two Sublimes," in *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, Vol. XI, ed. Harry C. Payne (Madison, Wis., 1982), pp. 93–105; Neil Hertz, "The Notion of Blockage in the Literature of the Sublime," in *Psychoanalysis and the Question of the Text*, ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman (Baltimore, 1978), pp. 62–85; John Dixon Hunt, "Wondrous Deep and Dark: Turner and the Sublime," *Georgia Review*, 30 (1976), 139–64; Raimonda Modiano, "Coleridge and the Sublime: A Response to Thomas Weiskel's *The Romantic Sublime*," *Wordsworth Circle*, 9 (1978), 110–20; W. J. B. Owen, "The Sublime and the Beautiful in *The Prelude*," *Wordsworth Circle*, 4 (1973), 67–86; and Stuart Peterfreund, "Wordsworth and the Sublime of Duration," *Publications of the Arkansas Philological Association*, 2 (1976), 41–46.

3 In her foreword to the posthumous publication of her husband's book, Portia Williams Weiskel quotes from his journal: "I see now—this will be the working definition of the sublime—it is that moment when the relation between the signifier and signified breaks down and is replaced by an indeterminate relation" (p. ix). As Weiskel recognizes, this definition is by itself too broad, because it describes a fundamental condition of much modernist and postmodern literature.

4 See Marshall Brown, "The Urbane Sublime," *ELH*, 45 (1978), 236–54. Ralph Cohen notes that "common poetic assumptions and practices" ally sublime verse with a general Augustan mode ("The Augustan Mode in English Poetry," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 1 [1967–68], 17, n. 6). The standard account remains Samuel H. Monk's *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in XVIII-Century England* (1935; rpt. Ann Arbor, Mich., 1960). Other useful book-length studies include: Walter John Hipple, Jr., *The Beautiful, the Sublime, & the Picturesque in Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetic Theory* (Carbondale, Ill., 1957); Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite* (1959; rpt. New York, 1963); Ernest Lee Tuveson, *The Imagination as a Means of Grace: Locke and the Aesthetics of Romanticism* (Berkeley, 1960); David B. Morris, *The Religious Sublime: Christian Poetry and Critical Tradition in 18th-Century England* (Lexington, Ky., 1972); W. P. Albrecht, *The Sublime Pleasures of Tragedy: A Study of Critical Theory from Dennis to Keats* (Lawrence, Kans., 1975); and Peter Bicknell, *Beauty, Horror and Immensity: Picturesque Landscape in Britain, 1750–1850* (Cambridge, 1981).

5 See Malcolm Ware, *Sublimity in the Novels of Ann Radcliffe: A Study of the Influence upon her Craft of Edmund Burke's "Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful"* (Uppsala, 1963); and Carrol Fry, "The Concept of the Sublime in Eighteenth-Century Gothic Fiction," *Mankato Studies in English*, 1 (1966), 31–44.

6 Hugh Honour is correct in calling the sublime "the most confused and confusing aesthetic notion of the time" (*Neo-classicism* [Baltimore, 1968], p. 145). In the preface to his translation of Longinus, Boileau influentially defined the sublime as "cet extraordinaire et ce merveilleux qui frappe dans le discours, et qui fait qu'un ouvrage enlève, ravit, transporte" (*Traité du Sublime* [1674], in *Oeuvres Complètes* [Paris, 1966], p. 338). Other definitions may be found in Monk's *The Sublime*. What most eighteenth-century definitions of the sublime ignore is its self-consciousness. Whether encountered in nature or art, the eighteenth-century sublime always implied a vantage for self-observation. Chevalier de Jaucourt in his article on the sublime for the *Encyclopédie* (1765) describes this self-reflectiveness aptly: "The Sublime can broadly be said to be

that which lifts us above ourselves and which at the same time makes us aware of our exalted state" (in *Music and Aesthetics in the Eighteenth and Early-Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. Peter le Huray and James Day [Cambridge, 1981], p. 107). Francis R. Hart (borrowing a distinction from James Maddox) wisely abandons the quest for an "essential" trait by speaking of a Gothic "tendency." Among the five main elements which constitute a Gothic "tendency," Hart specifies "a preference for the style or affective state called sublimity" ("Limits of the Gothic: The Scottish Example," in *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, Vol. III, ed. Harold E. Pagliaro [Cleveland, 1973], p. 138). Gothic sublimity greatly reduces the vantage for self-observation among readers, but terror is nonetheless "aestheticized" through the intermediary of the text.

7 Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), ed. James T. Boulton (New York, 1958), p. 58. Quotations from Burke's text will refer to this edition; page references will follow quotations in parenthesis. Serious strains develop in Burke's argument because he merges into a single system the previously separable traditions of admiration and of astonishment. Admiration and astonishment referred to quite different emotional states evoked by quite different objects or scenes. In declaring astonishment "the effect of the sublime in its highest degree" (p. 57), Burke eliminated all except the most trivial references to admiration. Astonishment simply swallows up the materials previously associated with admiration, which Burke's system cannot quite successfully digest.

8 Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, ed. W. S. Lewis (London, 1964), p. 4. Quotations from Walpole's text will refer to this edition; page numbers will follow quotations in parenthesis. Walpole's first edition was published anonymously on 24 December 1764—bearing the date 1765 on its title page.

9 Burke includes as sublime "the idea of bodily pain" (torture), "the power which arises from institutions in kings and commanders" (tyranny), and "the last extreme of littleness" (incarceration). See *Philosophical Enquiry*, pp. 86, 67, 72.

10 When Joseph Warton in 1756 wrote that the sublime and the pathetic were "the two chief nerves of all genuine poesy," it would not have occurred to him to extend this statement to prose (*An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope*, I [London, 1756], x). Novelists were expected to adhere to the probable, while poets had recently appropriated—in the name of fancy—the supernatural marvels and medieval superstitions long identified with the marvelous. Further, Monk notes that even before Burke fiction "had begun to borrow mood and material from the contemporary poetry of terror" (*The Sublime*, p. 90). The Gothic "poeticizing" of prose finds its clearest expression in the tales of Edgar Allan Poe.

11 To Sir Horace Mann (20 December 1764). Quotations from Walpole's letters refer to the forty-eight volume *Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, ed. W. S. Lewis (New Haven, 1937–83).

12 For Burke, the sublime is a term which refers to the relation between an effect (terror) and its causes (power, obscurity, etc.). It is not terror itself but the causes of terror that command his main attention. With philosophical rigor, he seeks to define the causes of the sublime as abstract, presumably universal properties. Associationist psychology, by contrast, threatened to relocate the causes of the sublime not in universal properties such as obscurity or power but in the unique, individual, possibly eccentric "trains of ideas" which underlie our personal response to objects and to language.

13 In a letter to Mme du Deffand (13 March 1767) Walpole wrote of *Otranto*: "J'ai laissé courir mon imagination; les visions et les passions m'échauffaient. Je l'ai fait en dépit des règles, des critiques, et des philosophes." Yet in the preface to *Otranto* he observes, paradoxically, that the novel follows almost exactly "the rules of the drama"

(p. 4) and that he confined his characters to "the rules of probability" (p. 8). Indeed, the five chapters follow rather closely the disposition of a five-act neoclassical play, despite Walpole's claim that the "great master of nature, Shakespeare, was the model I copied" (p. 8). It is time to investigate the meaning of such contradictions rather than continue to repeat the automatic critical ridicule of the novel.

14 Alexander Pope, *The Art of Sinking in Poetry* (1727), ed. Edna Leake Steeves (New York, 1952), p. 51. Pope's emphasis on tropes and figures directly imitates Longinus, who is after all a rhetorician. William Smith, in his popular eighteenth-century translation of Longinus—which went through four editions beginning in 1739—provides numerous illustrations of Longinian figures from Shakespeare and Milton, who became eighteenth-century models of the sublime style.

15 Hippolita says of Matilda at the end of the novel: "I lived but in her, and will expire with her" (p. 106). Such emotional identification goes far beyond mere parental fondness or a mutual love of religion.

16 Manfred's violent rejection of Matilda illustrates how far Gothic fiction draws its terror from sources other than ghosts and prodigies. Sent by Hippolita to console Manfred after Conrad's death, Matilda lingers fearfully outside his door. Manfred "angrily" asks who it is. "Matilda replied trembling, My dearest father, it is I, your daughter. Manfred, stepping back hastily, cried, Begone, I do not want a daughter; and, flinging back abruptly, clapped the door against the terrified Matilda" (p. 21).

17 A useful introduction to the modern critical interest in repeating structures is J. Hillis Miller's *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982). Miller distinguishes between two types of repetition: (1) Platonic repetition, in which "copies" duplicate an archetype to which they correspond, as in biblical typology, and (2) Nietzschean repetition, in which archetypes do not exist, in which "copies" always maintain intrinsic differences distinguishing them from one another, and in which such "ungrounded doublings" are what Miller calls ghostly simulacra arising from a void (pp. 5–18). The alogical mixing of these opposed types of repetition within a single work especially interests Miller in his study of Victorian and modern novels, and it should also interest readers of Gothic fiction, where both types are thoroughly mingled. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) Freud describes the compulsion to repeat as a fundamental structure of the unconscious, and such compulsive repetitions are closely related to the uncanny, as we will see.

18 Examples could be greatly extended. To setting: the labyrinthine caves outside the castle closely resemble the winding corridors beneath and within it. To structure: the novel opens with the death of Manfred's only male heir and concludes with the death of his only female heir. To diction: Isabella twice—on radically different occasions—expresses the fear she will be "miserable for ever" (pp. 27, 84). To detail: the statue bleeds not once or continuously but three drops of blood. Even when these repetitions themselves repeat elements common to romance, their effect is quite different within the new framework of the Gothic novel. On patterns of repetition in romance, see the comments throughout Northrop Frye's *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976).

19 Robert Kiely, *The Romantic Novel in England* (Cambridge, Mass., 1972), p. 39. Kiely continues: "A peasant turns out to be a prince, a prince an outlaw, a monk a parent, an orphan a daughter, and so on to a bewildering extreme. Characters are also continuously mistaking one another for ghosts." Kiely here is pursuing his argument that Gothic novels are written not only *about* confusion but also *from* confusion (p. 36).

20 It is significant that Walpole allows Father Jerome to raise and to leave unresolved the question whether Manfred's pursuit of Isabella is motivated by "lust or policy" (p. 48). Jerome explicitly rebukes Manfred for his "adulterous intention": "By me thou

art warned not to pursue the incestuous design on thy contracted daughter" (p. 48).
 21 For example, we are told that Isabella was "treated by Hippolita like a daughter" and returned Hippolita's tenderness "with equal duty and affection" (pp. 17–18). Indeed, she regards Hippolita as "my own mother" (p. 88). Matilda shares this view, calling Hippolita "the mother of both" (p. 88), and Isabella vows to regard both Manfred and Hippolita "as my parents" (p. 22). It is clear that Isabella sees more in Manfred's pursuit than the unwanted affections of the man she once calls "my father in law" (p. 23). As she says: "I loathe him, I abhor him: divine and human laws forbid" (p. 88).

22 "Freud credited the Romantic poets with the discovery of the dark processes of the unconscious, and if this is so, then certainly a good deal of credit must go to these Gothic forerunners of Romanticism, who were describing and exploring sibling rivalry, father-hatred, and Oedipal love well before the Romantic poets came on the scene" (Peter L. Thorslev, Jr., "Incest as Romantic Symbol," *Comparative Literature Studies*, 2 [1965], 44). On the very different treatment of kinship relations as a fictional subject in earlier English novels, see John A. Dussinger, "Love and Consanguinity in Richardson's Novels," *Studies in English Literature*, 24 (1984), 513–26.

23 Claude Lévi-Strauss in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, tr. James H. Bell and John R. von Sturmer, ed. Rodney Needham (Boston, 1970) argues that the prohibition against incest is the primary step through which and thanks to which the transition from nature to culture is made. On the relation of current anthropological thought to the Gothic novel, see Josué Harari, "Exogamy and Incest: De Sade's Structures of Kinship," *Modern Language Notes*, 88 (1973), 1212–37. As Harari writes: "Incest is the refusal of differences, the crime of nondifferentiation, which at first results in the intermingling of kin and ultimately abolishes all cultural distinctions" (p. 1217).

24 Hence I disagree with Leslie Fiedler when he writes: "The primary meaning of the gothic romance, then, lies in its substitution of terror for love as a central theme of fiction" (*Love and Death in the American Novel*, rev. ed. [New York, 1966], p. 134). The relation between love and terror is not one of substitution but of interpenetration, as Fiedler in other passages seems to recognize.

25 To Élie de Beaumont (18 March 1765). I have changed Walpole's final word from "senses" to "sense."

26 Harold Bloom, "Freud and the Poetic Sublime: A Catastrophe Theory of Creativity" (1978), in *Freud: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Perry Meisel (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1981), p. 218. Recently "The 'Uncanny'" has begun to emerge from long neglect. See, for example, Hélène Cixous, "Fiction and Its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud's *Das Unheimliche* (The 'uncanny')," *New Literary History*, 7 (1976), 525–48 (translated from the original essay in *Poétique* [1972]); Samuel Weber, "The Sideshow, or: Remarks on a Canny Moment," *Modern Language Notes*, 88 (1973), 1102–33; Jeffrey Mehlman, "Poe Pourri: Lacan's Purloined Letter," *Semiotext(e)*, 1 (1975), 51–68; and Neil Hertz, "Freud and the Sandman," in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, ed. Josué V. Harari (Ithaca, N.Y., 1979), pp. 296–321.

27 Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny,'" in *The Standard Edition of The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey (London, 1953–74), XVII, 237.

28 Freud, "The 'Uncanny,'" p. 241.

29 The benefits of distinguishing carefully among psychoanalytical approaches to writers, to characters, to readers, and to literary themes are argued by Meredith Anne Skura, *The Literary Use of the Psychoanalytic Process* (New Haven, 1981). Gothic fiction affords a particularly rich field for these separable approaches. On Gothic writers, see Betsy Perteit Harfst, *Horace Walpole and the Unconscious: An Experiment in Freudian Analysis* (New York, 1980). On Gothic characters and themes, see Mary Laughlin Faw-

cett, "Udolpho's Primal Mystery," *Studies in English Literature*, 23 (1983), 481–94. On Gothic readers, see Norman N. Holland and Leona F. Sherman, "Gothic Possibilities," *New Literary History*, 8 (1977), 279–94. Two important primary texts often ignored by critics of Gothic fiction are Otto Rank's *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study* (1925), tr. Harry Tucker, Jr. (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1971), and Ernest Jones's *On the Nightmare* (1931; rpt. New York, 1951). On the specific appeal of Gothic fiction to women writers and to women readers, see Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (Garden City, N.Y., 1977), pp. 137–67. Her chapter provides the title for *The Female Gothic*, ed. Juliann E. Fleenor (London, 1983).

30 Quoted by Georges Bataille, *Death and Sensuality: A Study of Eroticism and the Taboo* (New York, 1962), p. 11. For a discussion of Gothic treatments of death, see Coral Ann Howells, "The Gothic Way of Death in English Fiction 1790–1820," *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 5 (1982), 207–15.

31 On the sentimental mythologies of dying, see Richard A. Etlin, *The Architecture of Death: The Transformation of the Cemetery in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984). Elizabeth MacAndrew in *The Gothic Tradition in Fiction* (New York, 1979) recognizes the strong links between Gothic and sentimental fiction, but I believe that she incorrectly interprets Gothic novels as affirming the benevolist theory of human nature and of natural harmony implicit in sentimental fiction. In its treatment of death, the Gothic novel subverts sentimentalism, while it also subverts its own tendencies toward establishing a coherent counterphilosophy. Any affirmation in Gothic novels is subject to parody, exaggeration, erosion, and refutation. The Shaftesbury-Hutcheson tradition of the sublime, which understands sublimity in nature as evidence or experience of a divine presence, is frequently invoked by the sentimentalized heroines of Mrs. Radcliffe, but it is this tradition of the sublime which the Gothic novel (even by including it) rigorously subverts. For a good discussion of the Shaftesbury-Hutcheson tradition in English poetry, see Martin Price, "The Sublime Poem: Pictures and Powers," *Yale Review*, 58 (1968–69), 194–213.

32 Chief propagandist for "the numinous" is Devendra P. Varma, *The Gothic Flame* (London, 1957), who ignores how far Gothic supernaturalism is an artificial, aesthetic creation which can command terror without necessarily commanding belief. But Varma is not alone in ignoring the artificiality of Gothic supernaturalism. See, e.g., Joel Porte, "In the Hands of an Angry God: Religious Terror in Gothic Fiction," in *The Gothic Imagination: Essays in Dark Romanticism*, ed. Gary R. Thompson (Pullman, Wash., 1974), pp. 42–64.

33 Freud, "The 'Uncanny,'" p. 242. Freud stresses: "There is scarcely any other matter . . . upon which our thoughts and feelings have changed so little since the very earliest times, and in which discarded forms have been so completely preserved under a thin disguise, as our relation to death" (pp. 241–42).

34 Freud, "The 'Uncanny,'" p. 247. Tzvetan Todorov in *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, tr. Richard Howard (Ithaca, N.Y., 1975) seeks to distinguish among three kinds of texts dealing with the supernatural. He bases this distinction upon judgments whether the events are described as truly supernatural (*le merveilleux*), as not truly supernatural (*l'étrange*), or as involving a doubtful hesitation between the two judgments (*le fantastique*). While clear and helpful, this division overemphasizes the role of conscious decision-making by readers and by reader-surrogates inscribed within the text. Freud's emphasis upon the survival within the mind of old and surmounted beliefs suggests that reading—in theory and in practice—is a less stable, clear-cut process than Todorov assumes. Gothic fiction creates a situation in which *known* impossibilities and *self-evident* falsehoods nonetheless can inspire terror, suggesting that *conscious* decisions do not exhaust the involvement of readers. As Samuel

Johnson said of the existence of ghosts: "All argument is against it; but all belief is for it" (James Boswell, *Life of Johnson* [1791], ed. R. W. Chapman, corrected by J. D. Fleeman, 3rd ed. [London, 1953], p. 900). Robert Burns, who was closer than Johnson to the folk beliefs which continue to persist alongside enlightened attitudes, confessed that supernatural superstitions had made a lasting impression upon his mind, despite the "philosophy" which he called upon to deny them. As he put it, they "had so strong an effect on my imagination, that to this hour, in my nocturnal rambles, I sometimes keep a sharp look-out in suspicious places" (*The Letters of Robert Burns*, ed. J. De Lancey Ferguson [Oxford, 1931], I, 106).

35 Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, No. 419 (I quote from the standard edition, ed. Donald F. Bond, 5 vols. [Oxford, 1965]). On the eighteenth-century interest in a literature of terror, see Patricia Meyer Spacks, *The Insistence of Horror: Aspects of the Supernatural in Eighteenth-Century Poetry* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962).

36 Among the many discussions of Lacan, a concise and reliable account is Malcolm Bowie's "Jacques Lacan," in *Structuralism and Since: From Lévi-Strauss to Derrida*, ed. John Sturrock (New York, 1979), pp. 116–53. David Punter in *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day* (London, 1980) and Rosemary Jackson in *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London, 1981) both offer strong discussions which emphasize the role in Gothic fiction of "empty" signifiers and antirealist conventions.

37 To Lady Ossory (12 July 1778). Perhaps Walpole's use of an artificial or "empty" supernaturalism leads back ultimately to the Gothic obsession with death. Hélène Cixous seems to me correct when in her interpretation of "The 'Uncanny'" she links Freud's treatment of death with his ideas on the supernatural. She quotes Freud as describing the ineradicability of our fears of death—"The primitive fear of the dead is still so strong within us and always ready to come to the surface at any opportunity"—and then adds her own metaphorical commentary: "The direct figure of the uncanny is the Ghost. The Ghost is the fiction of our relationship to death" ("Fiction and Its Phantoms," p. 542).