

Gothic Economics: Gothic Literature and
Commercial Society in Britain, 1750–1850

by

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Abstract

Although the sensational world of Gothic literature may seem to have little to do with the “dismal science” of economics, readers and critics have long recognized connections between Romantic-era political economic discourse and Gothic novels, from the trope of the haunted castle on contested property to Adam Smith’s metaphor of the spectral “invisible hand.” This study, the first sustained investigation of economics and the Gothic, reads Romantic Gothic literature as an important voice in public debates about the economic ideas that shaped the emerging phenomenon of commercial society. Drawing on Charles Taylor’s notion of the modern social imaginary, it argues that the ways in which Gothic literature interrogated these ideas continues to inform our understanding of the economy and our place within it today. Each chapter focuses on an economic idea, including property, coverture, credit, debt, and consumption, in relation to a selection of representative Gothic texts, from Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) to Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1848). It analyzes these texts—primarily novels, but also short fiction, nonfiction, and poetry—in the context of political economic writings by Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and others. Through this analysis, this study argues that economic ideas are foundational to the Gothic, a mode of literature deeply engaged with the political, cultural, social, and economic upheavals that characterize the Romantic Age.

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To my boys, with love.

Introduction: Gothic Economics

Today, we tend to think of the economy as a natural system, one that acts according to a set of stable and predictable rules. We take it for granted that we can exchange paper money for goods, and that we can shop online for things manufactured on the other side of the world using virtual money. Many of us spend much of our lives in debt, and barely bat an eye when our governments run deficits in the billions of dollars. We exchange our time and labour for hourly wages or annual salaries. Whether we admit it or not, we have come to accept that profit is more important than human life: we buy running shoes made by children in sweatshops and cheap plastic goods that poison the air and water we all need to live.

Late capitalism has become such an important part of how we understand ourselves and the world that it is difficult to imagine things any other way, but this was not always the case. The economic and social structures that are so foundational to twenty-first century life have been developing for centuries, but began to take their recognizable forms about 250 years ago, in late-eighteenth century Britain: the Age of Revolution. As early capitalism emerged, its forms and structures were still in flux, and were therefore more visible. Out of this same historical moment emerged the literary Gothic, a mode of writing preoccupied with all things strange, inexplicable, and supernatural: things that inspire terror. The “dismal science” might seem to have little to do with the sensational world of the Gothic, but from its very beginnings in Horace Walpole’s novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), questions of ownership, property, and exchange have been foundational to the Gothic novel. Realist Romantic fiction addresses these questions too, of course, but Gothic literature engages with them by using its anti-realist aesthetic to imagine life in commercial society *in extremis*.

The link between economics and the Gothic has been widely acknowledged—though often in passing—by literary scholars and economists alike, particularly in relation to Adam Smith’s use of the metaphor of the “invisible hand” in *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776). Whereas many literary studies present economic readings of one or two Gothic texts, or discuss economics in relation to Romantic literature as a whole, this study is the first sustained investigation of Romantic Gothic literature’s engagement with the political economic ideas that shaped its historical moment. Analyzing a representative selection of British Gothic fiction from the Romantic century, from *Otranto* to Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847), this study argues that the Gothic’s interrogation of the emerging phenomenon of commercial society is part of its cultural work. Through its aesthetic of distortion and excess, these novels engage in what I am calling Gothic economics, depicting economic ideas such as property, debt, and consumption not as natural, but as supernatural. In doing so, Gothic literature pushes back against the naturalization of capitalist ideology.

Until relatively recently, criticism of Gothic literature emphasized the psychological over the historical, or tended toward a structuralist approach that viewed Gothic novels as mere collections of generic tropes (Baldick and Mighall). This type of reading replicates contemporary evaluations of the Gothic as formulaic and derivative, such as the essay “Terrorist Novel Writing” (1798) that provides a recipe for a novel “of the terrific cast”:

Take—An old castle, half of it ruinous.

A long gallery, with a great many doors, some secret ones.

Three murdered bodies, quite fresh.

As many skeletons, in chests and presses.

An old woman hanging by her neck, with her throat cut.

Assassins and desperadoes, *quant. suff.*

Noises, whispers, and groans, threescore at least.

Mix them together, in the form of three volumes, to be taken at any of the watering-places before going to bed. (225)

Reading the Gothic as collections of tropes also replicates the error of contemporary critics who dismissed such novels as escapist fantasy, dangerous perhaps in their ability to inflame the imaginations of impressionable young women, but irrelevant in the larger public sphere and discussions of political and social import. Here, I follow in the footsteps of E. J. Clery, Gary Kelly, Ellen Malenas Ledoux, and other critics who read Romantic Gothic fiction as deeply embedded in its historical context, and as an important—but largely unrecognized—voice in public debates about political, social, and economic issues of their day.

Because this study is interested in how the Gothic depicts economic phenomena and works through economic ideas, it draws upon the critical approach defined by Mark Osteen and Martha Woodmansee as New Economic Criticism. Drawing together literary approaches to economics and economic approaches to literary criticism that gained currency first in the 1970s and again in the 1990s, Osteen and Woodmansee describe New Economic Criticism as that which seeks to reunite the intellectual and discursive domains of literature and economics that diverged—as Mary Poovey argues at length—in late-eighteenth-century Britain .

My approach borrows from all four modes of economic criticism that Osteen and Woodmansee outline: a new historicist or cultural studies approach to studying the production of texts (29); a focus on the internal circulation of tropes within a specific text (30); an examination

of the circulation and consumption of texts, considering issues of reader response, canonicity, and plagiarism (31); and a metatheoretical approach, asking what it means to use economic terminology in literature and literary terminology in economic writing (32). An understanding of the literary marketplace into which the Gothic exploded in the 1790s is essential for appreciating its influence upon other Romantic literature and beyond, as is an understanding of how its characteristic tropes circulated and were transformed within and across texts (as discussed in Chapter 2). A detailed examination of how Gothic texts were consumed is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this study, but my contention (via Ledoux and Benedict Anderson) that Gothic fictions helped shape the cultural imagination is founded upon the assumption that the ideas they contain were consumed and internalized by communities of readers. Finally, my approach is metatheoretical in that it examines how economic ideas were articulated, interrogated, and circulated within Gothic fiction and the cultural imagination. In this sense, this study is more concerned with the history of economic thought than with Romantic-era political economic theory per se: it examines how authors depicted and worked through the complex notion of commercial society within the imaginative space of the Gothic.

Marxist criticism is, of course, one of the most significant critical approaches under the umbrella of New Economic Criticism, itself under the much larger umbrella of New Historicism. I have deliberately resisted taking a Marxist approach, however, in order to avoid imposing an anachronistic understanding of social life and literature under early capitalism. My goal, instead, is to read Romantic Gothic as a product of its time, a pre-Marx era when the political economic ideas Marx articulated as a coherent system were as yet in flux, and the theoretical field was still emerging, rather than received. Instead of a theoretical foundation to this study, then, Marx's thought serves as its endpoint: I conclude with a discussion of how the economic ideas

articulated in Romantic Gothic novels are taken up over the next 200 years, including in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's *The Communist Manifesto* (1848).

Much has been written about Romantic literature and economics. Poovey, for example, argues that, until the late eighteenth century, literature and economic writing were closely intertwined, but became distinct genres holding particular forms of value (*Genres*). This distinction was part of a cultural drive to separate fact from fiction, one product of which was the distinction between high and low, or “popular” literature (8), one that is paradoxically enforced and challenged by the Gothic. Michael Gamer makes a similar claim, arguing that, as part of the complex relationship between the two, high Romanticism (i.e., canonical Romantic poetry) defines itself against the Gothic, which is thus abjected (Gamer, *Romanticism*). Alexander Dick is also concerned with the distinction between high and low Romantic literature, particularly the notion of literary standards of value. Both Poovey and Dick resist viewing money and literature as merely homologous (Poovey, *Genres* 25; Dick vii; see Osteen and Woodmansee 14–19); rather, they are interested in how the two domains intersect instead of how they map onto each other, as is this study. Dick, for instance, argues that an economic event—Britain's adoption of the gold standard in 1816—had profound cultural effects. He claims that “the idea that Britain had a standard became one of the keystones of nineteenth-century economic, social, and even religious thought,” and that Romantic literature helped disseminate this idea, functioning as a “forum for normalizing that difficulty [of capitalism]” (ix). Both Poovey and Dick argue that economic developments are significant for their effect on cultural hegemony, but both focus on realist Romantic literature: Poovey on William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Dick on “standard” works such as Richard Bentley's Standard Novels series. This study steps in to

investigate how Gothic literature, which is mentioned in these two studies only in passing, engages with these types of economic developments.

Other studies of Romantic literature and economics approach the relationship in different ways. In Paul Cantor's examination of Percy Bysshe Shelley's critiques of the national debt and paper money, for example, he argues that, although many now view Shelley as a socialist, critics must not impose our anachronistic postmodern economic ideas onto our readings of Romantic texts. Cantor's analysis shows that economic ideas are central to Shelley's philosophy as well as to his political activism: "Shelley presents political reform as necessary ultimately for the sake of economic reform" ("Poet" 23). Shelley's political-economic treatise *A Philosophical View of Reform* (1820)¹ is based on philosophy rather than calculation: on ideas rather than numbers. Richard Bronk, meanwhile, argues that economists like himself must understand the metaphors that underlie their discipline. According to Bronk (and echoing Shelley), although the branding of economics as a science led to a focus on calculation and the assumption that economic subjects act in rational and predictable ways, economic behaviour needs to be understood in relation to the imagination (xiii). Bronk is concerned with the imaginative qualities of realist Romantic metaphors, however, and mentions the Gothic—once again—only in passing. This study takes up Cantor's and Bronk's questions about economic imagination and extends them to the Gothic.

A number of studies do present economic readings of Gothic texts. Poovey's "Ideology and 'The Mysteries of Udolpho'" (1979), for example, is an early work of modern Gothic criticism that argues that Ann Radcliffe's 1794 novel explores the tension between the ideology of sensibility and the challenges posed to it by the rise of capitalism (307, 309). More recently,

¹ Shelley's unfinished treatise was written in 1820 but remained unpublished during his life. The first published edition appeared in 1920 (Cantor, "Poet" 22–23).

Lauren Fitzgerald investigates the idea of the person as property in *Udolpho*. She notes that, although claiming property rights over one's body and oneself, as Emily St. Aubert does in the novel, has positive consequences, it has potential dangers too, since it introduces the possibility that those possessions could be sold or otherwise become the property of someone else. Andrea Henderson also reads *Udolpho* from an economic perspective, discussing different forms of value in relation to characterization in early Gothic novels. Unlike Poovey, Henderson discusses Radcliffe but generalizes her discussion to the Gothic as a genre, associating the superficial nature of Gothic characterization with capitalism's emphasis on exchange value (associated with "display and 'consumption' by others") rather than the more traditional appreciation for use value (associated with "inherited or innate value") (39).

Some studies use economic metaphor to analyze Gothic literature or investigate the use of economic metaphor in it. Robert Miles, for instance, employs the metaphor of a circulating bank bill in his reading of Jane Austen's *Emma*; although not concerned with the Gothic, this article provides a model for analyzing Romantic literature using economic metaphors: Miles "posit[s] the interchangeability of two systems of value: the aesthetic, and the economic," arguing that forgery links the two ("*Emma*"). As Poovey does in "Ideology," Miles points to the use of economic metaphor and its function as a literary tool for exploring cultural-economic issues, such as the problem of counterfeit currency and the abstraction of value (par. 10). Jerrold Hogle also explores the critical possibilities of metaphors related to counterfeiting in his studies of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk* (1796). Hogle performs a semiotic analysis of counterfeit currency and spectres, arguing that counterfeit is a foundational structural trope of the Gothic ("Ghost"; "Frankenstein"). Frankenstein's creature,

Hamlet's ghost, and the ghosts in *Otranto*, he argues, all lead "a pervasively counterfeit existence: the fact of signifiers referring back to signifiers" ("Frankenstein" 181).

A handful of studies examine economics and the Gothic more generally. Ruth Beinstock Anolik, for instance, takes a psychoanalytic view, arguing that the Gothic's obsession with property is symptomatic of the illusory nature of possession. Wolfram Schmidgen also looks at property and, although his study is mainly concerned with realist Romantic fiction, he includes an examination of Radcliffe's Gothic novels and travel writings. Arguing that insufficient attention has been paid to Radcliffe's "spatial politics," he offers a historicist reading of her castles as material and political spaces (155). Finally, Ledoux analyzes how Gothic literature influences social and political-economic change. Arguing that "these texts' transgressive fantasies have transformative influence," Ledoux views the Gothic as a transatlantic phenomenon that engenders social consciousness by engaging the reader in empathetic identification and propositional thinking (9–14).

The Gothic

The term "Gothic" is complex, encompassing historical, aesthetic, and discursive dimensions. Here, I define the term broadly to describe literature that evokes fear or terror through an aesthetic of distortion and hyperbole, often making use of characteristic tropes, themes, and settings. Some characteristic tropes include haunted castles, a sense of mystery, supernatural phenomena (real or imagined), villainous tyrants, and intrepid heroines. Its thematic concerns include conflicts between duty and desire, good and evil, and the past and the present. Many Gothic novels are set in distant places and times, though these settings often amount to little

more than a thin veil over the novel's present day. They also tend to feature certain narrative and formal elements, such as fragmentation and metatextuality.

Gothic literature is often viewed as distinct from literary Romanticism, its “poor and probably illegitimate relation” (Gamer, “Gothic”). As Michael Gamer points out, the categories of “Gothic” and “Romantic” literature are modern impositions upon what was the rich and heterogeneous sphere of letters in Britain around the turn of the nineteenth century (*Romanticism* 2). Numerous critics have explored the complex relationship between these two categories, including Gamer, Miles, and Clery (Gamer, *Romanticism*; Miles, “Gothic”; Miles, *Gothic*; E. J. Clery, *Rise*); here, I read the Gothic as a recognizable yet difficult to circumscribe mode of writing that is part of—and inseparable from—the literary movement we now call Romanticism. Many Gothic novels can be read as *Bildungsroman*, and are closely aligned with novels of sensibility and of manners, such as Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1818). Others are more closely aligned with social problem novels or novels of ideas; William Godwin's *Things as They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794) and *St. Leon* (1799) and Mary Wollstonecraft's *Maria: Or the Wrongs of Woman* (1792), for example, can be read as fictionalized expressions of philosophical ideas. The effusive descriptions of picturesque landscapes in Radcliffe's novels invite comparison with Romantic travelogues, and, because the aesthetic goal of the Gothic is to evoke sensation in the reader, early critics associated the Gothic with works of obscenity and pornography (see Gamer, “Genres”).

Although the Gothic is often described as a genre, it is more usefully understood as a literary mode. Kelly, for instance, has argued that the Gothic is best understood not as “a coherent and authentic genre [but] as an ensemble of themes and formal elements which could be taken over and adapted in whole or in part by other novelists and writers and by artists in other

media,” an ensemble that James Watt calls the “Gothic lexicon” (Kelly, *English* 49; Watt 4). Rather than focusing on the Gothic as a generic category, then, I follow John Frow’s example of reading texts in relation to “generic structures,” regarding genre as something that texts *make use of* rather than *belong to* (2). Similarly, although the Gothic is often associated with the novel form—and the texts this study examines are predominantly novels—Romantic Gothic literature took many forms, including poetry, drama, and short fiction, the boundaries between which were often blurred.² I have chosen to focus primarily on Gothic novels in this study because this form of writing engages most clearly with economic ideas, and in order to keep its scope manageable. There are certainly relevant examples of Gothic poetry and drama that engage with political economic ideas, including Percy Shelley’s “The Mask of Anarchy” (1819) and Lewis’s *The Captive* (1802) (see Ledoux Introduction). Although some of the texts examined here are staples of the Gothic canon, whether others should be classified as “Gothic novels” is a matter of critical debate.

The use of the term “Gothic novel” to describe this literary mode is largely anachronistic: Romantic readers would be more likely to use the terms “terror fiction,” “terrorist fiction,” or “Gothic romances” (see Miles, “Gothic”; Watt). The term “Gothic” however, carries important meanings related to the tension between the ancient and the modern. In an early work of Gothic criticism, Alfred Longueil notes that the term “Gothic” had three related meanings in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, meanings that were both shifting and simultaneously at play. From the beginning of the eighteenth century, “gothic” (with a lowercase “g”) was synonymous

² Gothic poetry remains surprisingly understudied, but some helpful resources include Gamer’s discussion of Lyrical Ballads in *Romanticism and the Gothic*, Ingrid Horrocks’s discussion of Radcliffe’s poetry, and Douglas Thomson’s study of Gothic ballads. Jeffrey Cox’s *Seven Gothic Dramas* is an invaluable source for difficult-to-find dramatic texts and insightful analysis, and Katherine Harris’s *The Forgotten Gothic: Short Stories from the British Literary Annuals, 1823–1831* is one of the few in-depth studies of short Gothic fiction.

with “barbaric,” referring to the perceived barbarousness of the medieval age (Longueil 453). As beliefs about the middle ages shifted toward the end of the century, spurred by Richard Hurd’s *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762), for instance, “gothic” became a more neutral descriptor; it still referred to the middle ages, but with a less pejorative connotation and with an increasing appreciation of the literary qualities of the age (456). Longueil points out that it is this neutral, historical sense of the word that Walpole engages with when he calls *Otranto* a “Gothic story” on the title page of the second edition. He argues, however, that the word became associated with the supernatural features of Walpole’s novel and others, such as Clara Reeve’s *The Old English Baron* (1778), rather than their medieval settings. By 1800, many novels that employed supernatural events were categorized as “Gothic,” even if they did not have a medieval setting (457). Through this process of “transmogrification,” the term “Gothic” had become “a literary term, a mere synonym for that grotesque, ghastly, and violently superhuman in fiction which had become the outstanding feature in ‘Gothic’ novel writing” (459).

Although *Otranto* was certainly not the first work of literature to draw upon the supernatural or the rhetorical power of terror, it was the first to self-consciously claim to be a new type of novel, as Walpole explains in an oft-quoted passage from the Preface to the second edition:

It was an attempt to blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern. In the former all was imagination and improbability: in the latter, nature is always intended to be, and sometimes has been, copied with success. (*Castle* 9)

The “blend” of the romance and the novel, ancient and modern, is central to the Gothic mode; but equally important is the idea of verisimilitude, particularly when attempting to define what,

precisely, a Gothic novel is. A useful way to define the Gothic within the field of Romantic fiction is against the realist novel. In modern literature, Walpole claims, “[t]he great resources of fancy have been dammed up, by a strict adherence to common life” (9). Gothic literature’s adherence to what is common or probable is much less strict; instead, it draws on the power of the imagination to depict that which is psychologically or experientially true rather than aiming for verisimilitude. Notably, Walpole uses the language of commerce to describe his literary innovation, presenting his new “species of romance” (13) as a tool for accessing an intellectual “resource”—a commodity—that has yet to be fully exploited.

Like other fictions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Gothic novels tend to depict individuals negotiating the social, political, and economic structures that shape their world. The world that realist Romantic novels depict is typically a romanticized but generally familiar version of the world of the reader. Gothic fiction, in contrast, inhabits a very different imaginative space, a darker and distorted reflection of the reader’s world. Kate Ferguson Ellis, for instance, argues that, in the Gothic, the domestic spaces at the heart of realist fictions are distorted into spaces of imprisonment. For Frederick Frank, the Gothic world engendered in *Otranto* is characterized by darkness, dread, and “an unremitting ontological malaise” (201). The idea of the Gothic world is something of a critical commonplace, yet it remains underexamined, particularly in relation to its realist counterpart.

Although fear is the affect most commonly associated with the Gothic, whether terror or horror, dread is also an important affect, particularly in the characteristically Gothic sensation of “dreadful pleasure.” Anna Laetitia Aikin (Barbauld) and John Aikin point to this paradoxical sensation in their essay on this new mode of writing, noting the eagerness with which readers consume it: “The greediness with which the tales of ghosts and goblins, of murders, earthquakes,

fires, shipwrecks, and all the most terrible disasters attending human life, are devoured by every ear, must have been generally remarked” (121). The fear that the Gothic evokes is often understood as anxiety, particularly when examined through a psychoanalytic lens. But whereas anxiety is a free-floating fear that something bad *might* happen, dread is the fear of something that *will* happen, something inevitable, although the precise nature of this “something” is often unknown.³ Ann Tracy describes the sense of dread that pervades the “fallen world” of the Gothic, for example, as “a chronic sense of apprehension and the premonition of impending but unidentified disaster” (3). The feeling is “chronic” in the sense that it is pervasive and persistent, often spreading to and corrupting other affective states, leading to a general sense of unease. Samantha Ellen Morse’s definition of dread echoes Tracy’s: “a state of fear felt in contemplation of a concrete (prophesied) or abstract (ambiguously contemplated) future. [...] this future, regardless of how concrete or abstract it is, must be perceived as an inevitable one by the affected subject in order to elicit dread.” She points out that the “future orientation” of dread is often overlooked because of the Gothic’s preoccupation with the past (Morse), but the idea of dread as a “premonition” is important because the inevitability of the terrible future is what distinguishes dread from a more generalized anxiety, as does its suggestion of the uncanny. Citing the example of *Otranto* (as discussed in depth in Chapter 1), Morse notes that Manfred’s dread arises because his dispossession is the subject of a prophecy, and is therefore something that he knows must come to pass, although he does not know how or when. In Walpole’s novel, for instance, Manfred is “[d]reading he knew not what” (Walpole, *Castle* 18): he knows he will be dispossessed, but does not know how. Thus, the helmet overwhelms him with dread of what is about to happen, but his attempts to prevent or at least postpone his dispossession only make

³ Paul Megna offers a useful discussion of Enlightenment-era existential anxiety, a term he uses synonymously with “dread” in the context of medieval asceticism.

things worse. As discussed in Chapter 1, *Otranto* is important in the history of Gothic fiction because it sets the stage for the literary traditions that follow. “Evoking dread” is thus identified as a primary—perhaps *the* primary—function of the Gothic.

Tracy’s characterization of the object of dread as “impending but unidentified disaster” draws upon Edmund Burke’s notion of the sublime:

To make anything very terrible, obscurity seems in general to be necessary. When we know the full extent of any danger, when we can accustom our eyes to it, a great deal of the apprehension vanishes. Every one will be sensible of this, who considers how greatly night adds to our dread, in all cases of danger, and how much the notions of ghosts and goblins, of which none can form clear ideas, affect minds which give credit to the popular tales concerning such sorts of beings. (“Philosophical” 65)

Obscurity in these sense that Burke describes it is, of course, central to the Gothic aesthetic. But the fear generated by “popular tales” about “ghosts and goblins” has a different affective valence from dread; the key point about the Burkean sublime is that we experience feelings of sublime awe when we encounter the terrible from a position of safety, which makes it pleasurable; dread is similar in many ways, but it is founded on the knowledge that our encounter with the terrible thing is certain, although we may not know when or how. Death, of course, is the ultimate object of dread, since our own encounter with it is inevitable, we do not usually know when or how it will take place, and, even worse, we do not know lies beyond. The dread of death is evident in Tracy’s description of the Gothic as “fallen” and characterized by a “curious sunlessness,” an emphasis on mortality through the natural sublime (in which nature is a source of beauty and

destruction), ruins, and ephemerality (5). She also identifies “putrefaction” as a common aesthetic trope, one closely associated with mortality and the horror of what happens to the body after death (5). All of these elements are suggestive of dread—the fear of something terrible that is about to happen or already happening, and cannot be stopped.

Death is doubly obscure and therefore doubly dreadful. As part of her argument that dread is the core affect of the Gothic, for instance, Judith Wilt presents a personification of dread as a reaper figure:

Dread is the father and mother of the Gothic. Dread begets rage and fright and cruel horror, or awe and worship and a shining steadfastness—all of these have human features, but Dread has no face. As we approach Dread, its robes flutter gaudily, its figure looms with substance, its gestures teem with a significance just short of meaning, its regard upon us is a palpable thing. Then we edge around the cowl, round the blowing hair, and are upon it. No face. But not-nothing. (5)

Wilt thus personifies Dread as an uncanny, human-like figure that wears clothes, has hair, and perceives us, but has no face, and interacts with us in ways we cannot understand. This mixture of fear, awe, and uncanny “not-nothing”-ness characterize Dread using the familiar tropes of the Gothic: robes that reveal and conceal, meaning that is perceivable but incomprehensible, a thing that is there and not there, human and not human. Wilt argues that dread and imagination are inextricably linked, since imagination is what allows us to imagine things beyond our immediate experience, such as the supernatural, and thus to confront the extremities of our own knowledge (5). But Wilt’s discussion is ambivalent about what the Gothic does with dread. First, she argues

that the Gothic “resist[s] that last temptation to utter reconciliation with dread” (6), but later, after asserting that “the special flavour of the Gothic, [...] is to show not the inevitability and stamina of duality, as romance often does, but the vulnerability of it” (23), she claims that the Gothic does not do this by resisting reconciliation, but by “show[ing] the merge back together” (23). Although Wilt’s conception of Dread draws upon the Freudian uncanny, it is clear from her discussion that the dread she describes is different from Freudian anxiety: it is less about the return of the repressed and more about the encounter with the limits of the human imagination. When Hamlet ponders death, for example, it is not the end of existence that he dreads but the unbounded power of the imagination to dream. Notably, Tracy views the Gothic and the “workaday” worlds as on a continuum rather than as distinct entities (3). In the workaday world, the strange and supernatural is overshadowed by the concerns of everyday life; in the Gothic world, they invade it. The Gothic concentrates and magnifies fears and problems inherent in the “normal” world to the extent that they “demand immediate attention” (3).

Like the “Gothic world,” the critical trope of the “Gothic mirror” is widely used but rarely analyzed. David Punter provides a foundational description of the Gothic using the metaphor of a lens:

Gothic can be seen as a way of imagining the unimaginable, whether it be the distant depths of history or the even more distant soundings of the unconscious. The Gothic is a distorting lens, a magnifying lens; but the shapes which we see through it have nonetheless a reality which cannot be apprehended in any other way. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Gothic seems to have been in part a limited but genuine substitute for the sciences of history and of psychology, a way of gaining access to, and

understanding of, those barbaric areas where knowledge had not quite penetrated. The Gothic castle is a picture seen out of the corner of the eye, distorted yet real; and if it vanishes when you swing to look at it full on, this is only because of the historical limitations of perception. (*Literature* 98)

Here, Punter identifies two key qualities of the Gothic lens: it is “distorting” and “magnifying.” Although the lens is distorting, the image it shows is true; moreover, its power is unique in that it shows “a reality which cannot be apprehended in any other way.” Whereas a simple magnifying lens distorts an image as a side effect of its magnifying function, a Gothic lens distorts in order to make visible that which is otherwise difficult to see. Useful analogies can be found in a pair of widely used eighteenth-century optical tools: the Claude glass and the Claude mirror. Both tools were used to mediate reality—typically a landscape—through a (literal) aesthetic lens. A Claude glass was held up to the eye and would impart a sepia tone to the object in view, thus rendering the scene more picturesque according to the aesthetic principles laid out by William Gilpin (1–33). Claude mirrors are convex lenses of obsidian or glass with a black backing, sometimes called “black mirrors” (Thomas 11). Whereas viewers look through a Claude glass, they use a Claude mirror by standing with their back to the landscape they want to see and holding the lens in front of them (10). The landscape is thus viewed as a distorted reflection rather than through a coloured filter.⁴ This makes the Claude mirror a useful analogy for the Gothic aesthetic, which similarly mediates and distorts reality for aesthetic purposes.

⁴ Because of their powers to darken and distort, Claude mirrors were associated with black magic. To this day, for example, the Parisian Musée National des Arts et Traditions Populaires does not display the Claude glass in its collection for fear it might be used for nefarious purposes (Thomas 11; Starr 100).

Another useful optical metaphor for the Gothic lens, as Punter describes it, is an anamorphic mirror. These cylindrical or conical mirrors are used to view images that have been purposely distorted, reflecting them in such a way that they become undistorted, or true images (Orosz 177). Anamorphosis, from the Greek for “re-formation,” was particularly popular in art from the late seventeenth century, though it has been used in toys, curiosities, and other purposes since (178). Like an anamorphic mirror, the Gothic distorts what it reflects in order to reveal a true image. We can therefore understand the distortion that characterizes the Gothic literary aesthetic—the gloom, the hyperbole, the overwrought emotion, the improbable events—not as a side effect as in a magnifying glass, but as that which makes the Gothic “a way of gaining access to, and understanding of, those barbaric areas where knowledge had not quite penetrated” (Punter, *Literature* 98). Moreover, the Gothic lens, like the Claude mirror, presents “a picture seen out of the corner of the eye”: just as a viewer must turn away from the landscape in order to see it in the Claude mirror, a view of the world through the Gothic mirror is indirect, mediated through its aesthetic of distortion.

Although the view of the world that the Gothic presents is indirect, it paradoxically reveals truths that are otherwise difficult to see and comprehend. Fred Botting argues that the Gothic mediates between the feudal past and the modern present, working “as the mirror of eighteenth-century mores and values: a reconstruction of the past as the inverted, mirror image of the present, its darkness allows the reason and virtue of the present a brighter reflection” (“In Gothic” 15). Botting draws on Michel Foucault’s notion of the heterotopia to argue for the dual nature of this Gothic reflection: on the one hand, it demonizes the barbaric past and idealizes the civilized modern present, but it simultaneously idealizes the past as a more natural, unspoiled era in contrast to the artificially civilized veneer of commercial society (“In Gothic” 15–16). A

heterotopia, as Foucault describes it, is an “other space,” one that is real and yet separated from the real world, such as a ship, a theatre stage, or a cemetery. These are all physical spaces that people can enter, occupy, and exit according to the customs that mark that space as a heterotopia. Extending this idea to the imaginative space of literature, we can understand realist literature as analogous to a utopia—a mimetic reflection of the real world—and Gothic literature as a heterotopia, an uncannily distorted reflection:

In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror. But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy. From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there. Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me, from the ground of this virtual space that is on the other side of the glass, I come back toward myself; I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am. The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there. (“Of Other” 24)

The overall effect of Foucault’s self-reflexive brain-teaser is that heterotopic reflections present a vision of the reflected object (the self or, in the case of literature, the world) that is true, yet

strange, “reconstituted” by virtue of its passage through unreal space. Defamiliarization is integral to this form of clarifying distortion: looking at his reflection, Foucault sees himself anew. In the case of Gothic literature, it is the aesthetic properties of the heterotopic reflection—its hyperbolic distortion and depiction of phenomena that blur the line between real and imaginary—that produce this defamiliarizing effect in which the elements of ordinary life, depicted mimetically by realist fiction, are made strange or unfamiliar in the way described by Viktor Shklovsky (15–16). Through its powers of defamiliarization, the Gothic performs a type of literary cultural critique, along the lines of what Lisa Samuels and Jerome McGann call “deformative criticism” (28). If realist novels are utopias that reflect an idealized, romanticized version of the real world, the fallen world of the Gothic is a darkened and distorted image that reveals truths about the world—the modern commercial world—that are difficult to perceive, articulate, and understand.

Modern Commercial Society

The emergence of Gothic literature—and, indeed, all Romantic literature—coincides with that of “commercial society,” a distinctly modern social model based upon the ideas and principles of commerce. *The Wealth of Nations* was—and remains—a foundational work of economic theory that articulates a new understanding of modern political economy as a knowable and predictable system.⁵ According to Smith,

⁵ My main interest in *The Wealth of Nations* here is its articulation of ideas foundational to the emergence of commercial society; a more comprehensive discussion of Smith is beyond the scope of this study, but see Kathryn Sutherland’s Introduction.

[p]olitical economy, considered as a branch of the science of a statesman or legislator, proposes two distinct objects; first, to provide a plentiful revenue or subsistence for the people, or, more properly, to enable them to provide such a revenue or subsistence for themselves; and, secondly, to supply the state or commonwealth with a revenue sufficient for the public services. It proposes to enrich both the people and the sovereign. (*Inquiry* 275)

Smith distinguishes between two “systems of political economy”: the system of agriculture and the system of commerce. Commerce is “the modern system, and is best understood in our own country and in our own times” (275). He begins his discussion “Of the Origin and use of Money” by characterizing the social and economic conditions that make money necessary:

When the division of labour has been once thoroughly established, it is but a very small part of a man’s wants which the produce of his own labour can supply. He supplies the far greater part of them by exchanging that surplus part of the produce of his own labour, which is over and above his own consumption, for such parts of the produce of other men’s labour as he has occasion for. Every man thus lives by exchanging, or becomes, in some measure, a merchant, and the society itself grows to be what is properly a commercial society. (31)

This model of society is founded on the division of labour, in which narrow employment becomes the norm: “Each individual becomes more expert in his own peculiar branch, more work is done upon the whole, and the quantity of science is considerably increased by it” (18). In

order for this system of exchange to be practical, however, individuals must be able to make exchanges using money, tokens that represent—rather than embody—value. Smith describes numerous commodities that have historically been used as tokens of exchange, including cattle, dried cod, leather, shells, and salt, but points out that none of these are particularly convenient, threatening to make a system of exchange “clogged and embarrassed in its operations” (31): all are either perishable, heavy, or difficult to divide and recombine. For this reason, he writes, metal is widely preferred for tokens of exchange, particularly when formed into coins of standard weights and values convenient for exchanging for commodities in amounts both large and small (32).

Smith’s definition here outlines the nature of commercial society from the point of view of political economic theory, in which an individual’s possessions are not limited to those which they can produce, and individuals obtain goods and services that they need and want by exchanging freely with each other. Commercial society as it emerged in the wake of *The Wealth of Nations*, though, comprised more than this economic definition. It is a broad term encompassing moral, philosophical, social, political, historical and cultural dimensions as well as economics. The division of labour, exchange between individuals, and the use of money that Smith describe are part of a larger shift that changed not only how people participated in the economy, but also how they understood themselves, their relationship with other individuals, and their place within the economic system as a whole. Neil McKendrick has influentially argued that England underwent a “consumer revolution,” a corollary of the Industrial Revolution characterized by changing modes and scales of consumption, rather than production. This was a revolution characterized by movement and mobility: things that were once fixed were becoming more fluid. This is evident in the economic sphere in shifting conceptions of wealth, which was

based primarily on land ownership but that was increasingly founded in movable goods. Patterns of consumption were also changing. Industrialization enabled the production of greater quantities and varieties of goods and tended to raise labour wages, leading to an increase in disposable income among the middling classes, who now had the desire and means to consume goods that had previously been unaffordable and unavailable to all but the wealthiest consumers (McKendrick 10). McKendrick cites the explosive increase in the consumption of luxury goods relative to the population as evidence, noting that from 1785 to 1800, the English population increased by 14%, but the consumption of tea increased by 97.7% and that of printed fabrics by 141% (29).

As a result of these changing patterns of consumption, goods that had, at the start of the eighteenth century, been considered luxuries, came to be perceived as decencies, and eventually, as necessities for all but the very poorest classes (1, 29). The movement and fluidity of the consumer revolution was also evident in the social sphere, in which traditional notions of rank and class existed alongside—and were challenged by—the forces of social mobility. Although eighteenth-century English society was highly stratified, the relatively small disparities between the levels allowed some social mobility (21). Moreover, those hoping to move up the social ladder by emulating their betters were increasingly able to do so, by using their “new money” to buy the property that would rank them among the landed gentry and to buy their way into a fashionable lifestyle, including clothing and other markers of wealth and status that until then had been unavailable and unaffordable (11–12).

Although these economic and social changes are essential components of the consumer revolution, what distinguished this historical moment from that which came before were the changing values and beliefs that emerged with them. The changes described above were all

dependent on changing beliefs about the relationship between consumers and goods, and “the extent to which society accepted consumer attitudes” (31). That which was new, exciting, and modern was increasingly valued over that which was old, familiar, and ancient (2). Acceptance of things the way they were began to be displaced by a desire for the way things could be, manifesting, for example, in the drive toward “improvement,” whether of one’s mind, one’s image, or one’s property. This improvement could be achieved through the consumption of goods, such as books, fashionable clothing and accoutrements, and landed estates. Moreover, this desire for improvement—and the ability to consume the necessary goods—was no longer limited to the wealthy. In the seventeenth century, luxuries were regarded as the province of the rich, whereas the poor were condemned to mere subsistence. As consumable goods became more affordable and accessible and the line between necessity and luxury began to blur, consumption was increasingly regarded as a means of self improvement, and general attitudes toward luxury and self-interest shifted. The luxury and vice that Bernard Mandeville depicted in *The Fable of the Bees: or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits* were, for instance, met with public outcry in 1714, but by the end of the century were regarded as not only morally acceptable but also desirable, and even necessary (McKendrick 15).

These changing beliefs about the relationship between consumers and goods had implications for English society as well as for economic theory and moral philosophy. Indeed, as McKendrick points out, one important conceptual shift was the changing understanding of “the market” from a concrete, physical space for the exchange of goods to a more abstract, conceptual one (14). This motif carries over into our contemporary idea of “the stock market,” for example. Essential to this more abstract understanding of the market are the ideas of “expandable spending” and the “elasticity of demand,” the idea that the market for a given commodity was no

longer limited by class divisions, geographical boundaries, or traditional patterns of consumption, but could grow and change in response to marketing efforts, socio-economic shifts, and particularly by swiftly changing fashions (14). Commercial society was understood as both inevitable and as the endpoint of a teleological process of economic–social development (Sutherland xiv).

Modern commercial society is recognizable to us today as the early form of the socio-economic structure in which we found ourselves in the early twentieth century. Indeed, the philosopher Charles Taylor argues that our modern conception of ourselves and society is founded upon an understanding of the social world that developed during the Age of Revolution, from which modernity emerged. Modernity comprises

that historically unprecedented amalgam of new practices and institutional forms (science, technology, industrial production, urbanization), of new ways of living (individualism, secularization, instrumental rationality); and of new forms of malaise (alienation, meaninglessness, a sense of impending social dissolution). (1)

It also comprises a new moral order, that is, a set of foundational ideas about how people should live together in a society. Central to the modern moral order, as Taylor defines it, are Enlightenment ideals of rationality and individualism, as well as that idea of a “political society,” advanced by the Renaissance philosopher Hugo Grotius, which views people as “rational, sociable agents who are meant to collaborate in peace to their mutual benefit” (3). This idea that society exists for the mutual benefit of individuals, including their security and prosperity, began

as political theory but has expanded over the past four hundred years to become a central tenet of our twenty-first century social imaginary (4).

Taylor defines social imaginaries as broad—and usually implicit—conceptual structures that shape how members of a particular society understand that social group and their place within it:

By social imaginary, I mean something much broader and deeper than the intellectual schemes people may entertain when they think about social reality in a disengaged mode. I am thinking, rather, of the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations. (23)

Although social imaginaries share some characteristics with intellectual and theoretical structures of knowledge, such as describing relationships between people in a given society and the relationship of the individual to the group, they are distinguished by their imaginative rather than intellectual nature, which is signaled by Taylor's deliberate use of the word "imaginary" (23). Because this social understanding is based in the imagination, it is shared through imaginative productions, "carried in images, stories, and legends" (23). Crucially, though, the influence of these conceptual structures is not limited to the imaginative realm; rather, they comprise the backdrop against which a given society operates, and how the individual functions within it. A social imaginary is "that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy," including ideas about what is actually done as well as what

should be done, ideas about what constitutes a violation of social norms, and a sense of the “moral or metaphysical order” underpinning them (23–25).

Taylor describes three components of the modern social imaginary, each of which is a way in which members of a society understand themselves: the public sphere, the self-ruling public, and the economy. Although the first two are also relevant to Romantic Gothic literature, this discussion focuses particularly on Taylor’s third notion of the economic modern social imaginary: the understanding of society as an economy comprising individuals whose relationships with one another are founded upon exchange. In contrast to previous social models founded on hierarchical complementarity, in which individuals each had a place within the social strata, and each strata complemented the others, commercial society’s focus on exchange necessitates a utilitarian model of social order, in which individuals relate to one another by meeting one another’s needs and having theirs met in return (12). The social structure no longer has value in itself; instead, its value arises from its utility: the best structure is the one that maximizes the exchange of mutual benefits and best meets the needs of ordinary life. Unlike a hierarchical structure, this one is not fixed, but may change over time (12–13). By 1800, an understanding of “normal civilized society” had emerged that was distinct from feudal societies in its emphasis on manners and civility, rather than physical strength and warrior skills, and in which commerce had largely taken the place of war (37).

Although stadial models of history placed commercial society at the pinnacle of human social development, the self-consciousness that characterizes this new age and marks it as modern also engendered an ambivalent view about the present in relation to the past. As Taylor notes, this ambivalence led to the valorization of more ancient—and thus, it was thought, more natural—forms of society, as well as the preindustrial or “unspoilt” natural world (38). Taylor

also notes that this ambivalence included tension between a warrior culture ideal of masculinity based on physical strength and the emerging ideal of the man of manners (47). E. J. Clery investigates this tension extensively, reading this cultural shift as a result of the transition toward capitalism, but focusing on the significance of gender (*Feminization*). This emphasis on manners was directly related to the growth and increasing power of merchants, tradespeople, and others involved in commerce and trade, fueled in part by states' increasing awareness of economic power as the key to military and political power (Taylor 72–73). It was also related to the “disembedding” of the individual in religious life and in social life more broadly, part of a general shift toward secularization and individualism that increasingly sanctified the individual and personal relationships as well as “ordinary life,” including its economic activities (50, 74). J. G. A. Pocock, whose political historical theory Taylor is drawing upon, notes that, as political power shifted from the hands of the supposedly incorruptible landed property owners into those of the “new ruling elite (or ‘monied interest’) of stockholders and officeholders,” whose participation in the world of exchange made them susceptible to corruption, the notion of virtue came to have less to do with morals and more with manners (48–49). Commerce, *le doux commerce*, became a force that “refine[d] the passions and “polish[ed] the manners” (49), paving the way for peace, order, and security (Taylor 75). In many Romantic *Bildungsroman*, including Frances Burney’s *Evelina, or the History of Young Lady’s Entrance into the World* (1778), which exemplifies the genre, it is this world of commercial society that the naïve individual must navigate successfully.

As a popular form of discourse that harnesses the faculty of imagination and interrogates the boundary between the real and the imaginary, the Gothic had an important voice in public debates of its time, including those negotiating the shift into modernity. Kelly points out that

writing Gothic novels enabled women in particular to participate in public debates about social, cultural, and economic issues, debates from which they were otherwise excluded (“General” xxxi). Deidre Lynch argues that, although Gothic fiction was (and often still is) considered a digression in the development of the (realist) novel, this “macabre, sensational, ghost-infested” mode of fiction performed the important cultural work of instructing readers how to read realist novels, which are themselves, of course, as much constructions of the imagination as the most horrid Gothic romance (“Early” 184). Along with the emerging sense of commercial society as a distinct historical stage came a new awareness of history itself, and of historiography. Lynch argues that, as history is one of the genres with which the Gothic intersects, *Otranto* and the Gothic novels it engendered were drawing on—and participating in—contemporary discussions about the problem of historicity, modernity, and this new “historical sense” (186). Indeed, as Lynch points out, the doubled prefaces attached to Walpole’s novel—the first claiming the novel to be a translation of a medieval manuscript, and the second exposing that claim as a fictive conceit—exemplify the tendency of the Gothic to blur the line between history and fiction (187).

Because the Gothic self-consciously challenged ontological boundaries between reality and fiction, and between “real” and “aesthetic” experiences, it both exposed the illusory nature of literary realism and taught readers to perform the “mental gymnastics” necessary to successfully consume the modern novel. The Gothic novel was “a kind of training ground for new receptive competencies that were all the more useful as fiction came to saturate the field of entertainment” (185). Here, I extend Lynch’s claim of the Gothic’s cultural work beyond the realm of the aesthetic to the realm of the real. Throughout this study, I argue that, by exposing the unnatural or constructed nature of commercial society, the Gothic provides a space in which readers can think through and understand the social imaginary that was emerging around them.

The Gothic mirror's distorting properties are therefore functional as well as aesthetic, enabling Gothic literature to reveal truths about the world it reflects that are otherwise difficult to perceive, articulate, and understand. Foucault cites the Gothic as a distinctive form of discourse, and Radcliffe as one of several "founders of discursivity" ("What" 217). However, he views the discourse that Radcliffe engaged in (not originated, as he claims) as a mere collection of tropes and motifs. Her work, he writes, "contains characteristic signs, figures, relationships, and structures that could be reused by others," such as "the heroine caught in the trap of her own innocence, the hidden castle, the character of the black, cursed hero devoted to making the world expiate the evil done to him, and all the rest of it" (217–218). In spite of Foucault's dismissive wave of the hand to "all the rest of it," he does identify the Gothic as a distinct and influential form of discourse—indeed, one that profoundly influenced Freud and Marx, whom he regards as exemplary "founders of discursivity" (217). Similarly, Miles notes that the Gothic's aesthetic is "a typology of literary devices that make certain articulations possible" (*Gothic* 14; see also "Gothic").

Underpinning Taylor's theory of modern social imaginaries and this reading of the Gothic's cultural work as a heterotopic, distorting lens is Benedict Anderson's notion of imagined communities, specifically the idea that a social community is created through the collective consumption of shared media, including novels (24–33). Anderson's theories seem particularly relevant in this discussion of Romantic-era literature, when industrialization expanded the size and reach of print media, engendering a reading public, as described by William St. Clair in *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*. Although Taylor argues that modern social imaginaries are created and shared through cultural products, he mentions the role of literature only in passing as a vehicle for sanctifying sentiment and the domestic sphere (105).

E. J. Clery identifies a stronger connection between literature and social imaginaries, arguing that the transformation of ghost stories into literary commodities, such as Matthew Lewis's *Tales of Wonder* (1801), influences how the supernatural is understood to relate to the modern commercial world within the imaginative construct of the modern social imaginary (*Rise* 5). Clery views the Gothic as a product of the Enlightenment and its tendency toward secularization, which helped transform the supernatural from an object of belief to a cultural commodity (5). Like Taylor, Clery emphasizes the economic roots of this cultural shift, reading the emergence of the Gothic as inextricable from the rise of commercial society (5). Here, then, I read Gothic literature as one of the imaginative productions—the “images, stories, and legends” through which the modern social imaginary is generated and shared (Taylor 23).

According to Taylor, the modern social imaginary is founded on four key ideas: the primacy of the individual; the related notion of equality (although, as Taylor points out and to paraphrase George Orwell, some individuals are more equal than others at various points in history); the instrumental nature of social order; and crucially, for this discussion of Gothic economics, the idea that social relationships are exchanges of “mutual service” (19–21). This principle of mutual service at the core of the modern social imaginary engenders commercial society, in which the ruling metaphors are economic, and social relationships are understood in economic terms. We still imagine the world this way, and the foundational metaphor of society as an economy is so familiar that we generally regard it as a matter of common sense. In the late eighteenth century, though, before these ideas had been fully articulated, it was still possible to imagine things being another way. This is, I argue, what the literary Gothic does: it provides a space within which to articulate and work through complex economic ideas and practices that may not have yet been articulated, and to imagine something other than “things as they are.” In

particular, the Gothic employs its anti-realist, literalizing aesthetic to push the more unsavory—and thus hidden—aspects of commercial society to their hyperbolic extremes in order to make them visible, and thus more difficult to ignore in the name of social and economic progress.

Chapter 1 traces depictions of property and dispossession in a representative selection of Gothic novels, beginning with *Otranto* and ending with *Wuthering Heights*. This chapter lays out the scope of this study and interrogates one of the foundational concepts of Romantic-era economics—property—contextualizing it within the historical, social, and cultural shift into the modern commercial age. It employs an economic lens conceived by Jacqueline Labbe, the “property romance,” but using a Gothic filter, arguing that Gothic novels employ the supernatural to depict property ownership, mortmain, and dispossession as metaphysical phenomena.

Chapter 2 continues to focus on the concept of possession in a social context, looking at marriage as an institution within commercial society. Taking Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* as its focal text, and emphasizing its intertextual relationship with Radcliffe’s *Udolpho*, this chapter argues that *Northanger Abbey* presents a critical reading of the Gothic as a discourse that provides a language with which to understand and imagine married women’s life under coverture.

Chapter 3 takes the concept of credit as its focus, foregrounding its importance in the reading of literature as well as in the economic system as theorized by Adam Smith, particularly in relation to the invisible hand. It examines the ways in which Godwin’s *St. Leon* works through the problem of belief in relation to money. Linking the problem of credit with the foundational Romantic notion of the willing suspension of disbelief, this chapter argues that Gothic literature interrogated this notion some 30 years before it was articulated by Coleridge.

Chapter 4 looks at the phenomenon of debt, one of the defining features of the modern economy and of commercial society, and how the literary vampire provides a way of imagining the effects of debt on an individual and national scale. To do this, the chapter traces the origin of the literary vampire as a figure of political economic rhetoric in the 1730s, rewriting the history of the literary vampire to include the lesser-known examples in Burney's *Cecilia, or Memoirs of an Heiress* (1782) and Charlotte Smith's *Marchmont* (1796).

Chapter 5 focuses on consumption and its dehumanizing tendencies, drawing on contemporary debates about the morality of luxury. It focuses on some representative depictions of the dehumanizing potential of excessive consumption, arguing that the Gothic's use of the fantastic allows for the rhetoric surrounding luxury to be literalized in horrifying ways, such as in the abolitionist motif of "blood sugar" and the hideous body-switching creature in Mary Shelley's "Transformation" (1830).

This study concludes by examining how Gothic economics have persisted through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and to the present day. It shows that, as in *Capital*, Marx and Engels make use of Gothic metaphors in *The Communist Manifesto* and traces the economic metaphor of the "Frankenstein economy" through nineteenth-century economic writings and into the present late capitalist age.

Chapter 1: The Gothic Property Romance from *The Castle of Otranto* to *Wuthering Heights*

From the inception of the literary Gothic in Horace Walpole's 1764 novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), the haunted castle has stood as one of its most iconic and enduring symbols.⁶ As a literary prototype, *Otranto* establishes some of the foundational themes and ideas of the Gothic as well the characteristic tropes and motifs with which it interrogates them. As Frederick Frank puts it, the novel "furnishes a symbolic glossary for evoking dread, for arousing pleasure in the irrational and for establishing an iconography of an unholy and malignant cosmos governed only by absurd forces" (201). One of the most ubiquitous symbols in this glossary is the haunted castle. Indeed, Ann Tracy's index to Gothic motifs omits it because, as she notes, "Castles, [...] are so pervasive a device that no purpose can be served by the recitation of two hundred novels that have them" (195). The pervasiveness and persistence of the haunted castle in the imaginative landscape of the Gothic points to the centrality of property to the Gothic literary imagination. Indeed, property is one of the "absurd forces" that Walpole's novel establishes as part of the Gothic "cosmos": a complex of laws, ideas, and values that was foundational to eighteenth-century British economics, politics, law, culture, and social imagination and undergoing revolutionary change.

Although, as Paul Langford notes, "A world without property was almost inconceivable to eighteenth-century Englishmen," ideas about what property was and what it signified were

⁶ Some content in this chapter appeared in different forms in "'Some Fatal Secret': Mortmain in Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*."

unstable, particularly as property ownership came to be seen as a matter of civil rather than divine authority, and as commercialization introduced forms of property that challenged the hegemony of land (*Public* 1; Cope 1; Tessone 5). Imaginative literature provided a field for working through this complex idea and the individual's relationship to it (Langford, *Public* 8; Cope 2–3), but although the centrality of property in Romantic realist fiction is widely acknowledged, studies of how Romantic fiction explores the concept of property are surprisingly rare. Criticism that examines property in Jane Austen's novels—in the tradition of Alistair Duckworth's foundational study—stands out as one example, but these tend to examine the metonymic function of particular properties rather than the concept of property writ large (Duckworth). Gary Kelly's survey of Romantic fiction argues for the centrality of property, but primarily in relation to social class ("Romantic"). Wolfram Schmidgen looks at the unfixed nature of boundaries between people and things in the eighteenth century, and I draw here on his idea of literature as a discursive space or imaginative field in which to both represent various practices—things as they are—and to imagine things as they are not (3–4). In her study of Scottish and Irish novels of inheritance, Natasha Tessone builds upon Schmidgen's argument that the inheritance plot helped negotiate the shifting landscape of property from feudal to modern. The novels she examines, she argues, "privilege the romance plot of dispossession as a way to explore vital issues of historic transition and political legitimacy" (5). Tessone links these novels' obsession with inheritance—particularly their exposure of the "criminal origins of property ownership" with the Gothic (5). Indeed, she argues that the very notion of inheritance is Gothic "by the very power it holds to bind the past generations of the dead with the living" (17). Tessone refers to several Scottish and Irish novels that "invoke this gothic trope of the 'ghostly manifestation of a hereditary principle' in order to show how it is neither possible nor desirable"

(18). This trope serves a similar purpose in many English Gothic novels as well, beginning with *Otranto*, and here, I apply Tessone's argument that Scottish and Irish novels "tirelessly interrogate such seemingly generic terms as 'law,' 'justice,' and 'property,'" to a selection of English Gothic novels (22). Ruth Perry echoes Virginia Cope's argument that changing relationships between people and property are reflected in new character types that emerged alongside. Perry associates a variety of familial patterns with property relationships, such as the "selfish, pleasure-seeking, spendthrift elder son" engendered by the laws of strict settlement (415). She takes Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron* (1793) as an example of a novel driven by the trope of "usurping heirs," but does not discuss whether or how this or other tropes differ in Gothic and realist novels of the period.

Although the centrality of property to the Gothic has often been acknowledged, the question of how the Gothic interrogates that notion and to what effect has not been sufficiently examined. Studies of property in Gothic fiction tend to focus on the Gothicizing effect of women's legal non-personhood in relation to property and coverture (Pullan; Anolik; Fitzgerald), which are surveyed in more detail in Chapter 2. Ruth Beinstock Anolik takes a psychoanalytic view of the issue of property in the Gothic, arguing that property is foundational to the Gothic insofar as it is founded on the anxiety of dispossession, the obsession with which "unifies and informs the Gothic canon" (3). The Gothic's depictions of property and dispossession, then, "subvert the certainties of ownership and the ideologies that support them by asserting that property, the self and the narrative are ultimately and inherently unpossessable" (4). Lauren Fitzgerald's study of women and property in Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and the *Alien* film franchise convincingly argues the opposite, though. Drawing on C.B. Macpherson's theories of the Enlightenment notion of possessive individualism, she argues that

the issue at stake in the Gothic is the excessive reach of property, rather than its limits (par 1). These narratives both posit “that even as grounding personhood in the metaphor of property rights seems to grant women self-possession, such grounding also creates the potential to these rights to be taken away, making them simultaneously inalienable and alienable” (par 1).

Here, I follow Fitzgerald in reading property as a material and metaphysical issue and generalizing her gendered reading to argue that, in Gothic fiction, it is not the illusory nature of property that is at issue, but rather the all too real effects and implications of property as the ruling metaphor of commercial society. Because property takes the place of divine or other authority (or, more accurately, property now constitutes the divine), dispossession carries metaphysical as well as psychological, social, and economic consequences. Jacqueline Labbe’s “Metaphoricity and the Romance of Property in *The Old Manor House*” draws together many of these critical strands in order to describe a genre of Romantic fiction exemplified by Charlotte Smith’s novel that Labbe calls the “property romance,” in which “the origins, continuation, and resolution of the romance are contingent on landed property” (“Metaphoricity” 217). In this chapter, I take up this notion of the “property Romance,” but with Gothic twist, focusing on a selection of what I am calling “Gothic property romances” that span the Romantic century: *Otranto*, *The Old English Baron*, *The Old Manor House* (1793), and Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847). Each of these novels employs ghosts and other supernatural phenomena to explore the dark flipside of the conflation of property and identity, in which dispossession is a form of death or worse: a state of nightmarish nonbeing.

Property, “the Grand Enchantress of the World”

The ubiquity of issues of property in Romantic-era fiction shows its hold over the cultural imagination: property was, as the political reformer John Jebb called it disparagingly, “the grand enchantress of the world” (412).⁷ Property, and particularly landed property, was foundational to eighteenth-century thought and the economy, and therefore to the emerging modern social imaginary (Taylor). As Kaley Kramer puts it, “While real property—particularly land—remained the central ideological and imaginative paradigm in the eighteenth century, metaphors of ownership can also describe an individual’s acquisition of cultural capital and how they inhabit social, cultural, and political roles” (1146). Property’s increasing hold over the cultural imagination is an integral component of the emergence of modern, secularized commercial society, and its expanding definition made possible greater social mobility, the rise of the middle classes, and expanded political power for more people. The dangers inherent in the sacralization of property were evident, and not just to those landowners whose power was threatened by the encroaching claims of “new money.” Jebb captures this sense of mingled promise and danger, describing property as something that enables those “possessed” by it “more successfully to gratify that lust of despotic power, which so strongly characterizes the human heart” (412). It is this danger that Gothic fiction recognizes and works through.

Property was, as Langford argues, the *sine qua non* of eighteenth-century English politics, culture, society, and individual identity, but it was unstable, and increasingly so. The Revolution of 1688 that overturned the notion of the divine right of kings also overturned the

⁷ Dr. John Jebb (1736–1786) was a Dissenter, abolitionist, and radical political reformer, a friend of Joseph Priestley, and a relative of Ann Radcliffe on her mother’s side (Norton 14–15). Rictor Norton writes that Radcliffe (then Ward) may have visited Jebb while he lived in Bungay, and if so, her Gothic castles may have been inspired by visits to Bungay Castle, a popular tourist attraction and the titular setting of Elizabeth Bonhôte’s Gothic novel *Bungay Castle* (1796) (15–16).

idea of property as divinely granted, so that property ownership was increasingly regarded—particularly by radical thinkers—as a matter of convention rather than divinity (Langford, *Public* 2; Schmidgen 9). As E. J. Clery puts it,

the moment when the providential doctrine of kingship was revoked, in 1688, was the point at which aristocratic ownership of land became sacralised in its place, and the following century was to be the scene of a ceaseless struggle to maintain the legitimacy of the aristocracy’s continuing political and economic domination of a rapidly changing society on the basis of the mystique of land. (*Rise* 73)

This “sacralised” status of land was codified in law. The Bill of Rights located authority not in the divine, but in property itself: the king’s power was a result of his property in the crown, just as landowners’ property was a result of their property in land (Schmidgen 9). Overall, British law regarded property rights as natural and sacred, and the transgression of them was regarded with “horror” (Langford, *Public* 43). The aura of sanctity around property resulted in outrage when its secrets were threatened, such as when one registry bill threatened to expose any debt, mortgages, or other encumbrances on the estate that were otherwise hidden (51). This bill, “provoked an apocalyptic response,” a reaction that “suggests the sense that property transactions constituted a kind of mystery which it was inappropriate to lay bare” (51). In the Gothic property romances discussed in this chapter and in others, secrets about inheritances and usurpations are often embodied in the ghosts of murdered property owners.

In addition to the issue of sanctity and authority, the “radical doctrine” (Langford, *Public* 5) of property as the basis for political authority threatened to destabilize the political status quo,

a threat that became more pressing as the century wore on and the definition of property began to open up to include not only land, but also other, more mobile forms of capital (E. J. Clery, *Rise* 74; Langford, *Public* 2; Schmidgen 9). In addition to an expanded market of consumer goods, commercialization generated new forms of intellectual property, such as copyrights and patents, and financial property, such as stocks (Cope 1). Authority had long been understood to be granted to landowners as a kind of “natural law” (E. J. Clery, *Rise* 74), but by the early eighteenth century, this power had come under threat by the emergence of a “monied interest” (Langford 58). Although the law held personal property rights to be sacred, common property rights were more often a matter of tradition and practice and were therefore more tractable. The practice of enclosure, for example, transformed common lands into private property, a practice viewed by many—including the farmers who relied on common lands—as a violation of what Thomas Paine called their “natural inheritance” (Langford, *Public* 45; qtd in Paine, *Agrarian* 10; Rosenman). With this shift in how property ownership was understood came conflict between ancient and modern values: systems that kept power in the hands of the aristocracy were challenged by those that favoured the bourgeoisie. What this rising class lacked in noble bloodlines they made up for in ready money, with which they could buy land and the other trappings of gentility that were no longer reliable markers of landed wealth. As Langford writes,

Commercial growth and the enthusiasm of the age for ‘improvement’ suggested not the unchanging dependability of a landed polity but the chronic instability of a commercial society. Clashes of interest and the legal security granted to forms of property which assumed reliance on credit made nonsense of simple appeals to the landed proprietor against the moneyed man. (*Public* 1)

Langford's description of the tension between "the landed proprietor" and "the moneyed man" usefully summarizes the context in which Gothic literature emerged, one in which money was considered by many to be "an illegitimate, counterfeit pretender to the title and authority properly enjoyed only by land" while, at the same time, the enchantment of the "hegemony of property" was growing ever stronger (58, 28). In this context, we can understand Gothic literature as looking back to the past with ambivalence: with nostalgia for an age in which political authority was granted by divine forces, and was thus stable and immutable, but recognizing also the inevitability—and profitability—of the new economic order.

Because property was a foundational idea in all aspects of British life, the consequences of these changing dynamics of property and power reached far beyond economics and politics. Earlier social imaginaries influenced by feudal social structures gave way to one in which social relationships were imagined as transactional rather than familial. For example, relationships between landowners and tenants that were once understood as mutually supportive were becoming less communal, and absentee landlords milked their estates for ready cash rather than investing in them for future generations. As with other aspects of property, these changing social structures are widely addressed in contemporary fiction, such as Maria Edgeworth's examination of the problem of absentee landlords in *Castle Rackrent* (1800). Virginia Cope discusses how these new forms of property led to new relationships between people and property, and to changing ideas about the relationship between property and character. Personal character was increasingly defined through individualistic qualities such as education, values, and ideas, rather than through property relationships such as the ownership of land: one's character, like one's labour, became a matter of self-possession (Cope 2). In spite of the importance of the concept of

property in politics, economics, law, and culture, property was largely understood in its material sense, to mean things that could be possessed, with little attention paid to the nature or meaning of property in an abstract or symbolic sense (Langford, *Public* 8). The idea that the novel helped to establish such individualistic notions of character is a critical truism, and, as Cope argues, the figure of the “heroine of disinterest” is a figure common in narratives about contested properties:

Stories of a woman either dispossessed or threatened with dispossession, yet resistant to the lure of wealth and status, negotiate the terms of a new understanding of disinterest and ultimately of subjectivity. The novel of female inheritance, when so understood, reveals the surprising correlation among the cultural, legal, and intellectual trends that galvanized modernity: the reconceptualization of identity as internal and self-determined; the expansion in concepts of what constituted property; and the exploration of education’s potential to transform individuals and cultures. (5)

Here, Cope alludes to the novel’s ability to interrogate the vital yet rapidly changing relationships between individuals and property as central to the emergence of modernity. Also pertinent to this discussion of Gothic dispossession is Cope’s idea that the heroine of disinterest is rewarded for resisting the lure of self-interest, and for defining herself in different terms. The acquisition of property is a result of these women’s emotional and social labour of building and maintaining meaningful social and familial bonds as well as upholding values of propriety—a “linguistic fossil” that denotes proper behaviour as well as property (10–11). I want to draw particularly on Cope’s notion of the heroine’s resistance to the lure of self-interest, an idea

central to my overall argument about the ways in which the Gothic imagines resistance to the stifling force of commercialism (discussed in the Conclusion).

As a foundational Gothic motif and a sign of landed wealth, the haunted castle is rich with interpretive possibilities, as evident in the wealth of criticism deciphering it. It is often read as a relic of England's feudal past, one that persists—problematically—into the present. David Punter, for example, reads the motif of the ruined structure in the context of Scottish and Irish Gothic fictions as a “site of ruined hopes,” evidence of “a complex series of deterritorializations and reterritorializations” (“Scottish” 111), an idea echoed by Tessone. Francis Chiu traces the origin of the “Gothic castle” to late eighteenth-century political discourse, an architectural metaphor for the state and its institutions employed by conservative thinkers—notably Edmund Burke in relation to France's Ancien Régime (Burke, “Reflections” 430)—to argue they should be restored and preserved, and by radical ones to argue they should be torn down and rebuilt. Others read the haunted castle as a gendered space. Kate Ferguson Ellis's influential study reads the haunted castle as a site of resistance against the idealization and feminization of domestic space, ambivalently a haven and a prison (3). Ellis, like many others, notes that the Gothic castle may be a psychic structure haunted by secrets and memories; Clare Kahane, for instance, reads it as a Freudian symbol of the maternal body (Ellis 152; Kahane 47). Reading the haunted castle as the central figure in Gothic fiction is a critical tradition dating back to the beginnings of Gothic criticism itself. Montague Summers argued that, in early Gothic fiction, the haunted castle takes on the role of protagonist (183). Fitzgerald similarly identifies the haunted castle as “the centerpiece of the Gothic” (par 1). Like Kahane, Fitzgerald links the haunted castle with the female body, but rather than reading castles as Freudian symbols, she identifies their significance as “proprietary structures,” with material as well as symbolic significance (par 1).

The ghosts that haunt Gothic castles are often—especially in Gothic property romances—the restless souls of the dispossessed. In his study of literary ghosts from the 1840s onwards, Andrew Smith distinguishes between these literary figures and “real” ghosts, echoing Clery’s argument about the changing nature of belief in the supernatural in the late eighteenth century in *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction* (1995). Smith argues that literary ghosts “survived as a kind of disembodied knowledge,” even after ghosts were no longer a general object of belief. In their ability to embody liminal states, such as social alienation, the Victorian-era ghost story “engages with a series of grand political debates about economics, national and colonial identities, gender, and the workings of the literary imagination” (*Ghost* 2). Smith highlights the critical function of ghosts in Marx’s political economic critiques and in Derrida’s *Spectres of Marx* (1994) (*Ghost* 10–11), noting that Marx draws on the Gothic (a literary mode well established by the 1840s) because it provides a language for describing the invisible. This critical power is evident, however, in the Romantic-era ghost story, the imaginative material from which Marx’s theories draw. As discussed later in this chapter, *Otranto* establishes the motif of the property haunted by its usurped owner, as the spirit of the murdered and usurped Alfonso the Good enacts a prophecy about the return of the property to its rightful heir. Similarly, in *The Old English Baron*, the ghosts of Edmund’s parents haunt the property that his father was murdered for, and whose bones are hidden within. This tendency of ghosts to haunt their usurped properties—often in order to restore them to the rightful heir—can be explained by Schmidgen’s notion of the “porousness of persons and things and their shifting identities as they cross different geographic, social, and economic spaces” (4). The prevalence of these types of ghosts in Gothic fiction suggests a porousness between people and their property across metaphysical spaces as well, including the boundary between life and death. In this way, the Gothic property romance

literalizes the metaphysical connection imagined between people and property, making one of the most important principles of commercial society visible and therefore available for critique.

Competing Modes of Ownership in Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*

The shifting and unstable nature of property ownership in the late eighteenth century plays out in *Otranto* and many other Gothic property romances in the form of a contested property subjected to multiple claims of ownership founded on different modes of legitimacy. In this way, Walpole's novel uses the rhetorical affordances of the Gothic to begin working through the problem of legitimacy. Specifically, the novel sets three types of claims against one another: the claim of blood, the claim of possession, and the claim of law. Moreover, *Otranto* establishes the use of the supernatural to explore the connection between property and identity—specifically, between dispossession and death.

Inheritance by blood kinship is the starting point of the novel, which opens with Manfred's desperate efforts to produce a male heir that will legitimize his family's claim to Otranto castle and its estates. In this situation, as is characteristic of the Gothic, an eighteenth-century problem is projected onto a "gothic" medieval past. Manfred is desperate for a male heir because, it is apparent, the possession of Otranto passes from male heir to male heir through primogeniture, a system of inheritance by blood. Because Manfred knows his ancestor usurped the property, his only chance at preventing his dispossession is to beget an heir with the appropriate bloodline: "the line of Manfred calls for numerous supports" (Walpole, *Castle* 23). Although legitimacy in this system has the potential to be absolute—one is either a blood relative or not—in reality, and in the novel, things are not so simple. As Susan Chaplin argues, before the invention of DNA tests, a person's lineage was merely an assertion, lacking any material

evidence or external authority (182). For this reason, primogeniture is a system that purports to be based in materiality—the body—but is in fact deeply concerned with symbols, such as the symbol of the family tree: “This founding father [in a family tree], however, exists only as a fiction of origin within a chain or signification that in fact has no source outside of itself” (182). Before Theodore’s true identity is discovered, the heir is believed to be Frederic, the Marquis of Vicenza and Isabella’s father. Frederic is Alfonso’s closest known male relative by blood, which is why Manfred is so desperate to beget an heir by Isabella, either through his son Conrad or on his own. The precise relationship between Frederic’s ancestors and Alfonso is unknown, but even Manfred concedes that Frederic may be closest by blood to Alfonso (Walpole, *Castle* 60). Moreover, Frederic’s claim is initially supported by supernatural authority, the same authority that legitimizes blood-based. Frederic arrives at the castle with a spectacular retinue and bearing “an enormous sword” that seems to belong to the same giant, ghostly armour as the massive helmet that squashes Conrad (58). Frederic’s helmet is topped with a “large plume of scarlet and black feathers,” similar to the ones on the giant helmet which, upon Frederic’s arrival, wave in an unnatural wind (58). Indeed, Frederic himself seems mysterious when he first arrives, to the point that Manfred doubts whether he is “of mortal mould” (59). Frederic, like the ghost that steps out of the haunted portrait of Don Ricardo, does not answer.

Although Manfred is desperate for an heir, he does have a legitimate claim to the property of Otranto simply because he is in possession of it, according to eighteenth-century common law, at least. The principle summed up in the adage “possession is nine-tenths of the law” is thought to date to the sixteenth century, referring to “the power of physical rather than legal ownership and the assumption that possession of property is prima facie evidence of title to it” (Erickson 370). Manfred’s family has apparently defended their right to the property through possession

before: “Frederic’s ancestors had assumed the style of princes of Otranto, from the death of Alfonso the Good without issue: but Manfred, his father, and grandfather, had been too powerful for the house of Vicenza to dispossess them” (Walpole, *Castle* 56). Even though this title has been “assumed,” the family’s ability to maintain possession of the estate to some extent validates their claim. When Frederic arrives at the castle with the intention of seizing it from Manfred, he thinks he will have trouble dispossessing him, even though he appears to have supernatural authority on his side. These competing systems of possession and blood are soon put to the test. When Frederic arrives at the castle, Manfred defends his claim to the property: “Well, sirs! he held this estate; he held it by his good sword, and by the favour of saint Nicholas – so did my father; and so, sirs, will I, come what come will” (60). Indeed, Frederic seems to agree to Manfred’s intermarriage proposal in part because he does not believe he can dispossess Manfred through arms, in spite of his enormous retinue: “He forgot his enmity to Manfred, who he saw but little hope of dispossessing by force” (84).

Although the claim of blood seems to be the primary one at work in the novel, the most authoritative proves to be the claim of law. This is evident in the “fatal secret” at the heart of the novel: the secret contract between Ricardo and St. Nicholas that gives rise to the prophecy that Manfred will be dispossessed. At the heart of this contract is the principle of mortmain, which was an ongoing topic of concern because of its potential to dispossess the living at the wishes of the dead. Legislation enacted in the thirteenth, fourteenth, and sixteenth centuries sought to limit the acquisition of land by the church, and The Mortmain Act of 1736 protected potential heirs against their inheritance being willed to charity (Brand; Jones chapter 7). In a letter describing the origins of the novel, Walpole describes a dream that suggests the centrality of the image of a “dead hand” possessing the castle to the novel as a whole: “[...] I had thought myself in an

ancient castle [...] and that on the uppermost bannister of a great staircase I saw a gigantic hand in armour” (“Walpole” 88). This dream image transforms within the imaginative space of the novel into a literalization of mortmain, the culmination of the castle’s haunting by the spectral—yet solidly material—suit of armour: first the giant helmet, then an enormous foot and leg, and finally this hand symbolizing the grip the historical past holds over the present.

Most readings of *Otranto* view Ricardo’s murder of Alfonso as the event that inspires the prophecy. As I argue elsewhere, however, the ghost is merely the agent of a prophecy generated not by Ricardo’s act of usurpation, but by a secret deal he struck with St. Nicholas (Winter). Manfred confesses that his grandfather usurped the castle from Alfonso, declaring “Ricardo, my grandfather, was his [Alfonso’s] chamberlain — I would draw a veil over my ancestor’s crimes — but it is in vain: Alfonso died by poison. A fictitious will declared Ricardo his heir” (Walpole, *Castle* 99). This is the crime—the only crime—of which Frederic accuses Manfred when he first arrives. However, Manfred also reveals that, as Ricardo returned to Otranto after murdering Alfonso, he nearly died in a storm, and, afraid for his life, he struck a bargain with Saint Nicholas:

Haunted by his guilt, he vowed to saint Nicholas to found a church and two convents if he lived to reach Otranto. The sacrifice was accepted: the saint appeared to him in a dream, and promised that Ricardo’s posterity should reign in Otranto until the rightful owner should be grown too large to inhabit the castle, and as long as issue-male from Ricardo’s loins should remain to enjoy it. (99)

Ricardo's deal with St. Nicholas ensures that he will live to enjoy the property he has stolen and legitimizes his ownership during his life but condemns his progeny to dispossession. The prophecy is thus a product of the secret contract, not of the murder.

Although Manfred is the prototypical Gothic villain, he is not—like many of his literary successors—responsible for the crime for which he is punished. Rather, he inherits his guilt—his moral debt—along with the castle, and indeed understands himself as a debtor who pays for the crimes of his ancestor. When the portrait of Ricardo comes to life, just as Manfred is about to assault Isabella, Manfred reproaches it for contracting the debt he has inherited: “Do I dream? cried Manfred returning, or are the devils themselves in league against me? Speak, infernal spectre! Or, if thou art my grandsire, why dost thou too conspire against thy wretched descendent, who too dearly pays for —“ (25). Manfred similarly views the deaths of his children—including Matilda, whom he murders by mistake—as payment of this debt. He cries, “Alfonso died by poison. A fictitious will declared Ricardo his heir. His crimes pursued him — yet he lost no Conrad, no Matilda! I pay the price of usurpation for all!” (99). Although Manfred's possession of the property has stood up to challenges in the past, it cannot stand up to the force of law in this supernatural contract, supported by the claims of blood kinship.

Manfred's desperation at the prospect of the prophesied dispossession coming to pass highlights the connection between property and identity in eighteenth-century thought. It is not lust, after all, that drives Manfred to try to rape Isabella, but a consuming dread of dispossession. Manfred is initially innocent of any crimes, but this dread twists what should be a father's natural love of his wife and children into unnatural indifference. He has no qualms about divorcing his faithful wife, in spite of the shame it will bring upon her. Moreover, he seems to value his son

only as the vessel of the family's bloodline, as demonstrated by his strangely emotionless reaction to Conrad's gruesome death:

But what a sight for a father's eyes! – He beheld his child dashed to pieces, and almost buried under an enormous helmet, an hundred times more large than any casque ever made for human being, and shaded with a proportionable quantity of black feathers.

The horror of the spectacle, the ignorance of all around how this misfortune had happened, and above all, the tremendous phenomenon before him, took away the prince's speech.

Yet his silence lasted longer than even grief could occasion. He fixed his eyes on what he wished in vain to believe a vision; and seemed less attentive to his loss, than buried in meditation on the stupendous object that had occasioned it. He touched, he examined the fatal casque; nor could even the bleeding mangled remains of the young prince divert the eyes of Manfred from the portent before him. (18–19)12/31/20 12:19:00 PM

Manfred's fixation upon the helmet illustrates the extent to which his dread of dispossession has warped his natural feelings—he looks past the bleeding corpse of his son and sees only a portent that the prophecy is coming to pass. Regarding his daughter, Manfred is callously indifferent to her feelings when he offers her as a wife to Frederic so that he can marry Isabella. Mistaking her for Isabella, though, in a tryst with Theodore that threatens the integrity of the bloodline he is so desperate to establish, Manfred's dread turns to madness, “a frame of mind capable of the most fatal excesses,” and he murders his daughter by mistake (94). Manfred's horror at what he has done shocks him out of this madness, only to realize that his dread of dispossession has turned him into, as Theodore calls him, a “Savage, inhuman monster,” (95).

Manfred's dispossession as a result of this contract, enacted through a fatal prophecy, establishes the Gothic motif of the contested castle. And, although it also establishes the motif of ghosts who work to restore a property to its rightful owner, the novel's resolution is not as clearly restorative or conservative as many critics read it to be (Andriopoulos; Anolik; E. J. Clery, *Rise*; Susan Chaplin; Frank). The injustice of the novel's conclusion—in which Theodore inherits a ruined castle and estate that he never wanted, desperately mourning Matilda's death and facing a bleak future married to Isabella, whom he does not love—precludes a reading of the novel as condoning blood kinship as the only legitimate mode of ownership, or one that must be preserved and defended at any cost. Moreover, by villainizing the supernatural forces that conspire to dispossess Manfred, the novel highlights the danger of mortmain in a broader sense. As Clery points out, through its use of the supernatural, the novel critiques the process of "thingification" by which helmets, pieces of armour, and portraits are subjects with agency, while people, such as Manfred, Theodore, and especially the murdered Conrad, are objects, acted upon rather than acting (*Rise* 77–78). This conflict between the demands of the past and the present, and the issue of whether the living or the dead had precedence in the context of property rights, was a pressing political issue as well as an aesthetic one: "Far from being a problem restricted to the feudal past, or to the pages of romance," Clery writes, "this was a live issue, bearing on the conflict between aristocratic and bourgeois ideals of social being" ("Introduction" xxxi). In its critique of primogeniture, mortmain, and other tenets of property law to privilege the dead over the living, then, *The Castle of Otranto* anticipates, by some thirty years, Thomas Paine's indictment of Edmund Burke's ideal of chivalry and its privileging "the authority of the dead over the rights and freedoms of the living" in *Rights of Man* (10; Miles 132–33).

Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron*

Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron* declares itself to be a rewriting of *Otranto* in the Address to the Reader in the first edition from 1777 (then titled *The Champion of Virtue*) and the Preface to the second (1778) (2, 138). Most studies of Reeve's novel focus on its use of the supernatural, taking at face value Reeve's claim that her purpose was to tone down the supernatural as it appears in *Otranto* in order to heighten its effect. As Reeve explains,

[...] it [*Otranto*] palls upon the mind, [...] and] the machinery is so violent, that it destroys the effect it is intended to excite. Had the story been kept within the utmost verge of probability, the effect had been preserved, without losing the least circumstance that excites or detains the attention. ("Preface" 138)

Her novel employs a different proportion of the marvellous and the probable, to "[c]ompose a work upon the same plan, wherein these defects might be avoided, and the keeping as in painting might be preserved" (138). If not for Reeve's declaration, though, *The Old English Baron's* relationship with *Otranto* would not be obvious: the two novels are not terribly similar in terms of plot, character, setting, or style, so much so that Abby Coykendall notes that Reeve seems to claim kinship with Walpole only to denounce it (444). What they do have in common, though, is an interest in property. Both novels stage conflict between competing modes of ownership and, in doing so, call into question the idea that blood kinship is the only legitimate mode of property transmission. In contrast to *Otranto*, *The Old English Baron* presents bourgeois civility as a way to successfully negotiate these competing forms of property ownership, at the same time drawing

in supernatural agents to reinforce the idea that the relationship between property and its owner is sacred.

Studies of Reeve's rewriting of Walpole tend to focus on their political differences. Kelly follows James Watt, for example, in arguing that Reeve transforms the story to be in keeping with her "old Whig" beliefs rather than Walpole's "new Whig" ones. Watt and Kelly both note that Walpole's novel is rife with frivolity, decadence, and sensationalism, in contrast to Reeve's focus on old Whig values such as pride in the military history of England and an amiable social hierarchy (Kelly, "General" 121–22; Watt 47). Watt and Kelly differ, however, in the temporal direction of Reeve's novel. Watt aligns it with "the historical romance" and the tendency of that genre to look back to an idealized primitive past (Watt 44–45). Although *Otranto* presents the issue of property ownership as a matter of blood, and usurpation a matter subject to divine authority, its bleak ending and narrative framing undercut rather than reinforce this idea. Kelly, while agreeing that old Whigs such as Reeve opposed "the new Whig government of [Horace's father Robert] Walpole and his successors—sustained by the intertwined political and sexual intrigue and patriarchy of court government and oligarchy," argues that her values—and the novel's—are also bourgeois ("General" 115, 121). Coykendall agrees, emphasizing that the novel's gothic setting allows it to imagine a future where chivalric values shape bourgeois commercial society "and thereby disguise, or at least deflect, the patent incongruity between that class's posture of disinterested nobility and the materialism that sustains it" (449). *The Old English Baron* thus acknowledges the importance of bloodlines, but presents claims based on human authority—including purchase—as equally valid, thus approaching the problem of a contested property in a way that aligns with the secular values of commercial society. In doing so, Reeve joins Walpole in problematizing the idea of property as a matter of divine authority.

As in *Otranto*, the inheritance of property through bloodlines and primogeniture factors strongly in *The Old English Baron*. Edmund Twyford, an orphaned ward of the Baron Fitz-Owen, lord of the Lovel estate, is discovered to be the son of the rightful owners, who were murdered by Sir Lovel's brother, Sir Walter. Edmund's assertion of this claim to the estate pits the claim of blood against the claim of purchase. What constitutes a blood relationship in *The Old English Baron* is flexible, however: kinship relations can be forged symbolically, through adoption, with the same legitimacy as physical blood kinship. Sir Philip's journey in search of his friend, Lord Lovel, brings him to Edmund, whom Sir Philip adopts and names as his lawful heir. When telling his faithful servant John to serve Edmund too, Sir Philip declares, "[k]now, that this young man is my son. —Your son, Sir! said John!—Not my natural son, but my relation; my son by adoption, my heir!" (Reeve, *Old* 77). Sir Philip thus distinguishes between the different types of kinship but regards them as practically equivalent. Furthering this symbolic blood relationship, when Edmund's lineage is still under investigation, Sir Philip advises him to take the name Seagrave, which was his own mother's, symbolically writing Edmund into Sir Philip's family tree (77). Sir Philip's declaration emphasizes the transformative power of manners and social convention: Edmund becomes Sir Philip's son because he acts as if it were so, and because he demands that others do so as well.

Manners are indeed all Edmund has to recommend him, although his looks draw him to the notice of Sir Philip in the first place. Although Sir Philip does not at first suspect Edmund's true lineage, Edmund's resemblance to Lord Lovel in appearance and manners rouses Sir Philip's interest and protection and, later, provides evidence for his claim to the Lovel estate. Sir Philip is struck immediately by Edmund's looks, to the extent that his seemingly unflappable manners are disrupted: "As he [Edmund] drew near, Sir Philip fixed his eyes upon him, with so much

attention, that he seemed not to observe his courtesy and address” (13). Shortly after, when Sir Philip proposes taking Edmund into his care, he explains to the surprised Fitz-Owen that Edmund’s appearance has sparked his interest in his welfare: specifically, his resemblance to Sir Phillips’s old friend. He says to the Baron,

the first thing that touched my heart in his favour, is a strong resemblance he bears to a certain dear friend I once had, and his manner resembles him as much as his person; his qualities deserve that he should be placed in a higher rank; I will adopt him for my son, and introduce him into the world as my relation, if you will resign him to me. (15)

Sir Philip’s generous offer shows the importance of Edmund’s physical appearance, both his features and his manner. As is common for foundlings in Gothic novels, Edmund’s innate nobility raises him above the class into which he was born: as Fitz-Owen explains to Sir Philip, “his uncommon merit, and gentleness of manners, distinguishes him from his own class” (14). But because of his apparent origins, Edmund’s place in society and in the Fitz-Owen family depend upon his character: as he tells Joseph before learning about his true lineage, “words are all my inheritance” (21). Edmund is keenly aware that his honour and courteous manners are his greatest asset, as is clear from his discussion with Father Oswald about the machinations of Wenlock and his friends, and especially their influence with Fitz-Owen:

But, Father, if my enemies should prevail, if my Lord should believe their stories against me, and I should be put out of the house with disgrace, what will become of me? I have

nothing by my character to depend upon; if I lose that, I lose every thing; and I see they seek no less than my ruin. (30)

Although Edmund's conscience is clear of any wrongdoing, he understands that his honour is a social construction that has material value. This value is realized at the end of the novel when Fitz-Owen agrees to a marriage between him and Emma, saying "I know your heart, and that is my security" (112). Fitz-Owen's use of "security" indicates that Edmund's honour has sufficient value that Fitz-Owen is prepared to "invest" him with his beloved daughter.

Although Edmund's manners and the material evidence Edmund and Father Oswald gather help prove Edmund's claim in law, it is his strong resemblance to Lord Lovel in person and character that initiates the investigation and makes the outcome possible. Indeed, it is only Joseph, servant to the original Lord Lovel, who realizes—or at least voices the idea—that Edmund's strong resemblance to Lord Lovel is evidence that he is in fact his son. After Edmund dreams of his parents and begins to suspect that there is a secret behind his identity, Joseph tells him all he knows about Lord and Lady Lovel, and concludes by saying,

I must tell you, though I never uttered it to mortal man before; the striking resemblance this young man bears to my dear Lord, the strange dislike his reputed father took to him, his gentle manners, his generous heart, his noble qualities so uncommon in those of his birth and breeding, the sound of his voice—You may smile at the strength of my fancy, but I cannot put it out of my mind but that he is my own Master's son. (45)

Joseph's age and social station mark him as more likely to believe in superstition and old ways, which may explain why he takes Edmund's appearance as evidence of his relationship with Lord Lovel. Sir Philip seems strangely obtuse on this point and requires material proof of Edmund's lineage, to believe the claim. When Edmund seeks out Sir Philip's help in proving his claim, Sir Philip remarks that "Every time I look on you, [...] reminds me of your father; you are the same person I loved twenty-three years ago" (78). This congruence between Edmund and Lord Lovel parallels that between Theodore and Alfonso in *Otranto*, and in both cases, the inheritor's resemblance is more than merely physical. In Walpole's novel, Matilda recognizes Theodore's resemblance to a portrait of his ancestor: "Heavens! Bianca, said the princess softly, do I dream? Or is not that youth the exact resemblance of Alfonso's picture in the gallery?" (49). The resemblance is so striking that later, when Theodore appears before Manfred after his altercation with Frederic, Manfred he thinks he is seeing Alfonso's ghost:

when starting in an agony of terror and amazement, he cried, Ha! what art thou, thou dreadful spectre! Is my hour come? [...] This! my lord, said Hippolita; this is Theodore, the youth how has been so unfortunate – Theodore! said Manfred mournfully, and striking his forehead – Theodore, or a phantom, he has unhinged the soul of Manfred. (73–74)

In both cases, the ancestor is in some way reborn in them: Sir Philip says to Edmund "you are the same person I loved twenty-three years ago" (78) Echoing Manfred, Sir Walter similarly sees Lord Lovel reborn in Edmund when he first sees him. Sir Philip, who has just bested Sir Walter in a jousting duel, compels him to look at Edmund: "Look on that youth, he is the son of your

injured kinsman.—It is himself! said the Lord Lovel, and fainted away” (88). In both cases the guilty man sees the ghost of his victim embodied within the victim’s descendent.

Although *The Old English Baron* eschews the supernatural extravagance of *Otranto*, it does feature a haunted estate. Its ghosts, however, are comparatively civil, both in their behaviour and in the sense that they give Edmund the information he needs to reclaim his property in law rather than possessing supernatural authority in themselves, as in *Otranto*. The circumstances of Lord Lovel’s death are suspicious, and his wife’s, tragic. At first, Lady Lovel is told that her husband was injured in battle but was on his way home, but a second message declares that he has in fact died (28). Initially, the pregnant Lady Lovel bears the news of her husband’s death with “Christian fortitude and patience,” but after a few days, she becomes “distracted,” claiming in “passionate and frantic exclamations” that “her dear Lord was basely murdered; that his ghost had appeared to her, and revealed his fate” (28, 29). Her death follows closely after this apparent madness, another circumstance that evokes suspicion in Father Oswald, Joseph, and the other servants (29). Their suspicions seem to be confirmed by the haunting of the castle—and specifically Lady Lovel’s chamber—after Sir Walter takes possession. Sir Walter assumes ownership of the Lovel estate on the basis of being the closest to Lord Lovel in blood (29). In contrast to the spectacular destruction wrought by St. Nicholas and Alfonso in *Otranto*, the ghosts of the Lovels do not strike Sir Walter down, but instead provide Edmund with the information he needs to legally reclaim his identity and usurped property. Moreover, they and the other supernatural elements in Reeve’s novel do not enact the will of the dead upon the living, but rather enable the human agents to resolve their problems through human means. In spite of Father Osmond’s and Edmund’s repeated calls to heaven and Providence, it is ultimately human actions—particularly Sir Philip’s courtesy and negotiation

skills—that resolve the problem of the contested Lovel estate. In contrast to the malevolent supernatural forces in Walpole’s novel who seek to settle a claim from the past at the expense of Theodore’s future, the ghostly Lovels work to promote Edmund’s future happiness and the continuation of their bloodline. One potential site of mortmain-like conflict between the past and the future resides in Joseph, an ancient servant of the family. When Joseph declares that he is committed to furthering the interests of his late master, Sir Robert exclaims that, “he regards the Lord Lovel, though dead, more than Lord Fitz-Owen, living; he calls him master, and promises to keep his secrets” (70). But in this novel, the past’s influence on the present is constructive and future-oriented: Joseph’s loyalties lie ultimately with Edmund rather than to his late master. The novel even makes possible a happy future for its villains, since Sir Walter and the scheming Wenlock are given the chance to redeem themselves. The novel looks, therefore, not just to the resolution of the Lovel property but toward a happy and prosperous future, in keeping with bourgeois values.

Although the supernatural forces in Reeve’s novel are not malevolent, they are moral agents that work to punish the guilty and to ensure justice for their victims. The ghosts of the Lovels torment Sir Walter as part of their campaign to reinstate Edmund to his birthright, eventually driving him to sell the estate to Baron Fitz-Owen, the husband of Sir Walter’s sister, and to build a home in the north. As one of the tenants tells Sir Philip, Sir Walter’s decision to “leave the seat of his ancestors” in this way appears to all “very strange” (8). In contrast, Fitz-Owen, who is in possession of the usurped property but not the usurper of it, is not troubled by hauntings. Indeed, Fitz-Owen invokes his innocence as protection from any supernatural beings when the haunted apartment is about to be investigated for the first time. Similarly, when Sir Walter confesses his crime to his vanquisher Sir Philip and his party of gentlemen, Fitz-Owen

confirms his innocence by declaring he has no objection to the ensuing investigation (98).

Ultimately, Fitz-Owen's claim is upheld, even when it is discovered that the Lovel estate was not rightfully Sir Walter's to sell, presumably because he bought it in good faith.

The recognition of the legitimacy of Fitz-Owen's claim to the Lovel property complicates the novel's resolution. Sir Philip and the party of gentlemen he has assembled to resolve the situation, led by Lord Graham, are in the midst of deciding how to settle the Lovel property onto Edmund when Fitz-Owen's son Sir Robert points out that, by doing so, they would be violating his father's property rights:

I beg leave to observe to the company, who are going to dispose so generously of another man's property, that my father purchased the castle and estate of the house of Lovel; who is to repay him the money for it? (108)

Although Robert's interjection complicates the settlement of the property by asserting purchase as a mode of legitimacy equivalent to blood, the mechanism of purchase also provides a solution. Unlike in *Otranto*, in which St. Nicholas and his supernatural forces hold ultimate authority to restore property and punish crimes, in Reeve's rewriting, this authority rests in men. The commissioners use the legal authority granted to them to effect legal and moral justice, even compensating Edmund for the intangible things he lost as a consequence of Sir Walter's crimes, including the twenty-three years he was deprived of his birthright. In order to use legal and economic means to compensate Edmund for these intangible things, though, the commissioners must assign value to them in terms of material goods. Sir Philip asks Fitz-Owen to include the "furniture and stock of the farm, in consideration of the arrears" (110), suggesting that the value

of the furniture and farm stock is equivalent in value to the arrears, and indeed, that lost time has a material value. Fitz-Owen considers and reminds Sir Philip that he paid for Edmund's "education and expences," to which Sir Philip agrees, noting, "we owe you in this respect more than we can ever repay" (110). These negotiations both work out the value of intangible things and highlight the difficulty of so doing. As Sir Philip notes, the education that developed Edmund's character is priceless.

In order to unite the two houses with claims to the Lovel estate, and put an end to any future disputes, Sir Philip proposes a marriage between Edmund and Fitz-Owen's daughter, Emma. Edmund asks for the Lady Emma's hand as part of the settlement, suggesting that she has economic value as a vessel of the Fitz-Owen bloodline (and, through her mother, the Lovel's) and as an object of Edmund's love. Sir Philip asks Fitz-Owen to "give him [Edmund] your daughter," to "ingraft into your family, the name title and estate of Lovel, which will be entailed on your posterity for ever" (110). Sir Philip does not know of Edmund and Emma's love, so although for him this arrangement is merely practical, for Edmund it fulfils his wish to be an official member of his adoptive family: "Give me your lovely daughter! give me also your son, my beloved William! and let me share with them the fortune providence bestows upon me: But what is title of fortune, if I am deprived of the society of those I love?" (111). Like *Otranto's* Theodore, who asserts his claim to the property only because it will enable him to marry Matilda, Edmund's valuation of personal happiness and humanity over material wealth marks him as worthy of his wealth, although Edmund suffers a happier fate.

In addition to the legal and moral justice afforded to Edmund, the same civil and economic mechanisms hold Sir Walter accountable for his crimes. Sir Walter is not punished under the law for murdering his brother; rather, Sir Philip and the commissioners choose to punish him by

dispossessing him. In addition to settling the usurped property of Lord Lovel onto Edmund, Fitz-Owen is given the property in the north that Sir Walter built upon selling the Lovel estate, and Sir Walter is sent into exile. In this way, the moral and the economic are depicted as in some way analogous. Sir Walter is not put to death, as he would likely be if Sir Philip brought the case to the court, as he contemplates doing; rather, he is subject to a civil and economic death through dispossession, stripped of his property and social status and forced to leave the country. Through its emphasis on the minutiae of the property settlement, then, *The Old English Baron* reinforces *Otranto*'s conflation of property and life, but it relocates the source of property's authority from the realm of the divine to that of civil society and law.

Although Edmund's claim to the Lovel property is settled through legal and conventional means, his actual possession of it carries metaphysical significance. In addition to the ceremony celebrating Edmund's taking possession of the Lovel estate, his entrance into the house is attended by supernatural occurrences, the only ones in the novel aside from the ghosts of his parents:

The sound of the horn announced the arrival of the commissioners; at the same instant a sudden gust of wind arose, and the outward gates flew open. They entered the court-yard, and the great folding doors into the hall, were opened without any assistance. The moment Edmund entered the hall, every door in the house flew open; the servants all rushed into the hall, and fear was written on their countenances: Joseph only was undaunted. These doors, said he, open of their own accord to receive their master! this is he indeed!—Edmund was soon apprized of what had happened.—I accept the omen! said

he. Gentlemen, let us go forward to the apartment! let us finish the work of fate! I will lead the way. (115)

The “omen” Edmund refers to is specific to his taking possession of the estate by entering it as its new, rightful owner. He has entered those doors many times before, of course, since it was his home for many years. It is only when he enters them to take possession of the property that the omen appears. This suggests that Edmund’s physical possession of the property—his walking into it—is a performative act with metaphysical and social significance.

Although Reeve’s rewriting of *Otranto* mutes its supernatural elements, those she retains emphasize the close connection between people and property, particularly the consequences of dispossession. In *Otranto*, the restoration of property to its rightful owner is a matter of divine import. In *The Old English Baron*, it is a matter of civil and social import, initiated not by a divine authority, but by Edmund’s ghostly parents. This difference aligns with shifting views about the authoritative basis of property ownership as conventional rather than divine, views reflected in the novel’s presentation of Fitz-Owen’s purchase of the Lovel estate as being just as legitimate as inheritance through bloodlines. The novel’s emphasis on the legitimacy of Fitz-Owen’s claim to the property demonstrates its endorsement of modern modes of property ownership, particularly the purchase of property through which so many bourgeois families climbed their way into the landed gentry. Although both novels are set in the medieval past, *The Old English Baron*’s endorsement of bourgeois values aligns it clearly with the concerns of commercial society. Not only this, but the supernatural forces restore the estate to its rightful owner and bring the usurper to justice without the collateral damage inflicted by St. Nicholas and

Alfonso in *Otranto*, contrasting the “civilized” values of the modern economy with those of the medieval, “barbaric” past.

Charlotte Smith’s *The Old Manor House* (1793) and the Gothic Property Romance

How to situate Smith’s *The Old Manor House* generically is a matter of ongoing critical debate.

Labbe insists that it is not a Gothic novel, arguing instead that “Smith manipulates genre to romanticize economics in *The Old Manor House*, and she draws gothic conventions and historical references to war into the service of exposing the irrational dimension of inheritance and property law” (“Metaphoricity” 226, 217). Ellis does not discuss this novel in *The Contested Castle*, nor does Tracy in her index of Gothic motifs. On the other hand, Kelly regards it as an example of “female gothic,” and Chris Baldick and Robert Mighall classify Smith as a Gothic writer (Kelly, “General”; Baldick and Mighall 270). Although, at first glance, *The Old Manor House* does not follow its Gothic predecessors in style, *Otranto*’s influence is evident in Rayland Hall’s display of suits of armour, chivalric emblems that call to mind the spectral armour in Walpole’s novel (Labbe, “Metaphoricity” 226–27). Its influence is evident elsewhere, too, such as in Orlando’s search for Mrs. Rayland’s will in the Hall’s hidden recesses, which echoes Isabella’s flight from Manfred. Labbe notes that Smith’s novel was “both praised and blamed for its device of filtering current events through the lens of the past,” a hallmark technique of the Gothic (216). More significant, though, is the novel’s concern—shared with *Otranto*, *The Old English Baron*, and other early Gothic novels—with dispossession and the metaphysical dread it inspires. Nevertheless, Labbe writes, *The Old Manor House* “is not a gothic novel, but it does rely on gothic tropes at two key moments where loss and gain are both possible consequences of the relationship between property and romance” (226–27). She argues that these Gothic moments

“render the coupling of romance and property unreal and otherworldly [... and] the idea of property itself otherworldly, subject to irrational claims and forces” (226–227). More specifically, the novel uses this “otherworldly rendering” to highlight “the relationship between ownership and identity” (216). As Labbe discusses at length, Mrs. Rayland is a legal anomaly as an unmarried woman with property, a figure for which British property law cannot easily account. If she were to marry, it would become the property of her husband, and since she is not married and does not have children, when she dies, it will be willed away from her family line. Because family property generally went from father to son, for women, family property was, and is for Mrs. Rayland, “always there and always already lost” (Charlotte Turner Smith, *Old* 216). Whether we label *The Old Manor House* as a Gothic novel or not, it is clear that the novel draws on the rhetorical affordances of the Gothic to depict dispossession as a supernatural, haunting force.

Like Rayland Hall, Mrs. Rayland is a relic from the bygone age of chivalry. The novel emphasizes the difference between the modern and chivalric ages when Mrs. Rayland visits her similarly ancient neighbour Lord Carloraine, whose property is separated from hers only by a river:

Many years had passed since the world in which he had lived had disappeared; [...] Filled with high ideas of the consequence of ancient blood, he suffered no consideration to interfere with his respect for all who had that advantage to boast; while, for the upstart rich men of the present day, he felt the most ineffable contempt” (67)

This “ineffable contempt” for the modern age is a bond between the neighbours, as is their insistence on maintaining the old ways: “whenever Mrs. Rayland and Lord Carloraine met, which they did in cumbrous state twice or thrice a year, their whole conversation consisted of eulogisms on the days that were passed, in expressing their dislike of all that was now acting in a degenerate world, and their contempt of the actors” (67). Lord Carloraine’s contempt extends to buying neighbouring properties to prevent them being bought by “nabobs and contractors for the display of their wealth and taste” (67). When Lord Carloraine dies, however, his contempt is repaid by his heir, his nephew, “who was as completely the nobleman of the present day, as his uncle had been the representative of those who lived in the reign of George the First [...] as ready money was a greater object to him than land [...]” (68). Emphasizing the futility of his uncle’s efforts to hold onto the chivalric past, Carloraine’s nephew sells the property to exactly the type of man whom his uncle despised, a Mr. Stockton whose fortune is from contracts in the French and Indian War (68). Stockton’s licentious behaviour and drunken revels infuriate Mrs. Rayland, but she is powerless to stop them. Moreover, Stockton’s presence in the neighbourhood, as well as his extensive and thoughtless efforts at remodelling the estate (rather than improving it), affect the local economy, leading Mrs. Rayland to complain that he is driving up prices to “London prices,” even though “the vicinity of affluent luxury was thus severely felt by those to whom it was of much more real consequence than to Mrs. Rayland” (69). In an action more materially damaging to Mrs. Rayland, Stockton poaches some of her game, violating the boundaries of her property with careless disregard for courtesy, tradition, or common law (69). As much as the novel mocks Mrs. Rayland and Lord Carloraine’s futile clinging to an ancient “bygone era,” its characterization of Stockton does not idealize the modern era either.

This conflict between the past and present is, of course, characteristic of the Gothic, but dispossession also takes on an explicitly Gothic tint early in the novel. Mr. Somerive's fears about what will happen to his family after he dies and his estate falls into the hands of his profligate eldest son, Philip take the form of Gothic nightmares. Meeting Orlando coming home late after a secret rendezvous with his lover Monimia—Mrs. Rayland's ward—at the Hall, Mr. Somerive tells him,

Ah, my child! many and many nights I do not close my eyes: the sad image of Philip, bringing ruin on himself, on my wife, and on my poor girls, haunts me eternally; [...] then the apprehension of some fatal entanglement that will ruin all our hopes, comes over my heavy heart; and I see nothing for my wife, and my dear girls, but poverty and despair. (274)

Mr. Somerive describes his dread of dispossession in Gothic terms, as a waking nightmare that “haunts” him and that inspires him with dread. This expression of his father's dread sets the tone for Orlando's own, which later takes the form of nightmares in which the desperate poverty that he and Monimia will face in real life are prefigured as “unformed horrors” (275). In this way, the Gothic space of the nightmare is one in which the numinous and the material collide, and in which dispossession is imagined as a dreadful haunting spectre.

Another example of the dreadful nature of dispossession in the novel is the fate of Rayland Hall. Mrs. Rayland and the Hall are both ancient when the novel begins, but when Orlando leaves for America, they each decline with unnatural rapidity. When Orlando returns to England after about a year, he finds the hall eerily deserted and—remarkably—in ruins: “all was

still as death, and the grass had grown up among the pavement” (399). In keeping with this atmosphere of death, when Orlando breaks into the Hall to investigate, he finds it in a state of decay, as if many years had passed since it was occupied. He notes that “[t]he wainscot had fallen down, and the boards were rotted away: the study of which the door was open, had only half its books left; and the tapestry hung in fragments from the walls” (399). What’s more, the force of his shock and sorrow at encountering the eerily decayed building inspires Orlando with supernatural fear. Walking through the gallery,

Hideous spectres seemed to beckon to him from the other end of it, and to menace him from the walls; though he knew they were the portraits of his family in their black doublets, their armour, or their flowing night-gowns: [...] He opened a door of one of the bed-chambers: the old high testered green silk bed looked like a mausoleum—it seemed black, and Orlando could have fancied that the corpse of Mrs. Rayland lay on it. (401)

The rapid decay of Rayland Hall appears to be the first instance of what would become a recognizable motif in nineteenth-century Gothic fiction: unnaturally rapid aging and decay after an unnaturally long life.⁸ Orlando’s presence seems to cast a spell over the Hall and its inhabitants that keep them in suspended animation, historical relics alive in a world to which they no longer belong. When he leaves, the spell is broken, and the Hall and its inhabitant decay with supernatural rapidity.

⁸ I have not found any in-depth discussion of this motif in literature, which appears, for example, in Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar” (1845), H. Rider Haggard’s *She* (1886–1887), *Dracula* (1897), and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890).

As a relic of a bygone age, Mrs. Rayland lives in a time to which she does not belong, a kind of natural revenant. Orlando is a revenant in another sense. He arrives on the shores of the New World and is immediately almost killed by a fever, rising “as it were from the grave” (358). He is soon captured by a group of Iroquois who are returning home after being betrayed by the English army, a fate Orlando describes as a “living death” (383). Orlando arrives back in England a different man in looks and in feeling. His hair has been cut short, and his ragged clothes and incredible story arouse suspicion, marking him as a possible spy. He is also penniless, with no friends to assist him and no credit available. Compounding these difficulties is the fact that Orlando was declared officially dead: in law, he is a non-person. In addition, he has a new outlook on the war as an exercise in “purchasing glory,” and in the face of the natural horrors of death, disease, and starvation, he repeatedly wonders “*what all this was for?*” (354, 354). Orlando faces yet another natural horror upon his return to England: the loss of his family property, which he finds in the possession of strangers. His wished-for family and property are gone, too: his father is dead, his mother and sisters are gone, Monimia has vanished, and Rayland Hall is deserted and decaying, as described above. His search for information about his family finally leads him to a miller who recognizes him: seeing the exhausted, starving, unkempt man, he exclaims that “it was either Orlando Somerive, or his ghost!” (406). Indeed, Orlando is barely keeping body and soul together, and arrives at his family’s former estate “more dead than alive,” staggered by bodily and emotional suffering (409). When Orlando finally locates his mother and sisters in London, his servant Perseus has a similar reaction: having seen Orlando fall in battle, he exclaims in terror when he sees him that it is “master Orlando’s ghost” at the door (423). As a revenant, a man physically alive but dead in the eyes of law and society, dispossessed of all his property and all his loved ones, Orlando is his own Gothic nightmare come to life.

Whereas, in *Otranto* and *The Old English Baron*, the tyrannical economic forces are personified in a villain, in *The Old Manor House*, it is the legal machinery of property law that dispossesses, tyrannizes, and persecutes Orlando and Monimia. As Labbe writes, through her manipulation of genre, including the Gothic, Smith “emphasizes the fictionality—the artifice—of what her culture considers natural, such things as male primogeniture, for instance, or the notion of the *feme covert*, or love” (“Metaphoricity” 229). Moreover, here and in her later novel *Marchmont* (1796), discussed in Chapter 4, Smith exposes the danger of accepting these social and economic constructions as natural and immutable.

Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* and the Disenchantment of Property

Although it is somewhat obscured by the novel’s complex narrative structure, *Wuthering Heights* is at its core a story about contested property and, specifically, Heathcliff’s attempts to recreate himself through its acquisition. Heathcliff is often read as what Patsy Stoneman calls “a mobile atom in the class structure, seen by some as representing the working class, opposed and alienated by those who own the means of production (in this case, the land, tools, and animals of the farm), and by others as a classic case of upward social mobility” (xviii). My aim here is to resituate this reading of Heathcliff’s acquisition of property within the framework of the Gothic property romance. In the other novels discussed in this chapter, the close metaphysical association between property and identity is expressed in terms of dispossession, where dispossession equals nonbeing. Through its haunted estates, *Wuthering Heights* presents another variation on the Gothic property romance, one that paradoxically upholds the metaphysical connection between landed property and rightful owner by blood, while also undermining the very idea of property as Jebb’s “grand enchantress.”

Heathcliff is, like Theodore and Edmund, a foundling, but unlike his Gothic antecedents, the secret of his true lineage is never revealed. His identity remains stubbornly ambiguous. When Mr. Earnshaw brings Heathcliff home, he is “a dirty, ragged, black-haired child; big enough both to walk and talk—indeed, its face looked older than Catherine’s—yet, when it was set on its feet, it only stared round, and repeated over and over again some gibberish that nobody could understand” (Brontë 31). Nelly Dean’s use of the pronoun “it” emphasizes the otherness of the child, as does the fact that he speaks an unrecognizable language. The elder Mr. Linton speculates that Heathcliff is “a little Lascar, or an American or Spanish castaway” (44), and Nelly muses “Who knows, but your father was Emperor of China, and your mother an Indian queen” (50). Heathcliff’s potential as a figure of Oriental romance remains unfulfilled. Some scholars have made a point of determining his racial identity (see 324–25, n31), but while Christopher Heywood contends, for instance, that Heathcliff is “a child of Africa from the world’s largest slave port,” the critical consensus is that more important than Heathcliff’s precise origin is his otherness, whether he is understood as a member of the gypsy racial minority, an Irish refugee, or “one of the dark-skinned ‘others’ around the world who were subject to British exploitation and colonization” (Heywood 42; Newman 28–29). Heathcliff’s otherness extends beyond his ethnic origins. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick notes, for example, that in a novel in which doubled names and characters abound, Heathcliff remains stubbornly singular (*Coherence* 108). Indeed, this otherness verges on inhumanity, as Heathcliff is associated with the dogs that guard the Grange (Rena-Dozier 771), Isabella declares him to be “a lying fiend! a monster, and not a human being!” and Nelly wonders “Is he a ghoul, or a vampire?” (Brontë 134, 293).

In the context of the Gothic property romance, the crucial point is that Heathcliff’s essential otherness—his lack of money, name, and lineage, excludes him from an economy that was in

transition but still, in the novel's mid-eighteenth century setting, centred on landed property. Even though the world of *Wuthering Heights* is claustrophobically small, the lure of property and the social status it grants is strong enough to prompt Catherine Earnshaw to reject Heathcliff in favour of the attractive, well-mannered, and appropriately propertied Edgar Linton, as Catherine tells Nelly in an oft-quoted passage:

It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff, now; so he shall never know how I love him; and that, not because he's handsome, Nelly, but because he's more myself than I am.

Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same, and Linton's is as different as a moonbeam from lightning, or frost from fire. (71)

Catherine's word "degrade" signifies a reduction in rank or honour, a form of debasement that is primarily social but which also carries economic connotations. As powerful as the physical and spiritual connection between her and Heathcliff is, Catherine will not suffer this degradation. The social-economic dimension of Catherine's feelings are clear from an examination of her first experience of alienation from Heathcliff, when she returns from her stay at Thrushcross Grange. Catherine and Heathcliff had sneaked into the Grange out of curiosity about what life is like for the young Lintons. Later, at home, Heathcliff describes to Nelly what they saw through the window with uncharacteristic enthusiasm:

ah! it was beautiful—a splendid place carpeted with crimson, and crimson-covered chairs and tables, and a pure white ceiling bordered by gold, a shower of glass-drops hanging in silver chains from the centre, and shimmering with little soft tapers. (41–42)

Even the rough-hewn Heathcliff, it is clear, is vulnerable to the enchantment of wealth and luxury. As enchanted as he is with the house, however, he is contemptuous of its inhabitants, telling Nelly that young Edgar and Isabella are arguing over a puppy: “We laughed outright at the petted things,” he says, “we did despise them!” Heathcliff’s feelings are, no doubt, due to the treatment he receives at the hands of the Lintons. The frightened family set their dogs on Heathcliff and Catherine, and Catherine is bitten on the ankle. Both children are pulled into the room they were admiring from the window, and Heathcliff is subjected to a humiliating inspection under the chandelier he so admired. Old Mr. Linton remarks that “the villain scowls so plainly in his face, would it not be a kindness to the country to hang him at once, before he shows his nature in acts, as well as features?” (43). Isabella, unaware of her fate, lisps, “Frightful thing! Put him in the cellar, papa,” while Mrs. Linton, after Edgar recognizes Catherine from church, exclaims in surprise that she should be “scouring the country with a gipsy” (42–43). Heathcliff is quickly expelled from the house, echoing his general exclusion from the world of property. Catherine, in contrast, is taken in by the family and returned after five weeks not only recovered from her injury but transformed into a proper young lady. In addition to polite manners, she learns to appreciate lovely and expensive things: she returns from the Grange wearing “splendid garments”: “a grand plaid silk frock, white trousers, and burnished shoe” (47). Right away, she notices her difference from Heathcliff, who has been even more neglected than usual and still more grim and dirty. After embracing him, “[s]he gazed concernedly at the dusky fingers she held in her own, and also at her dress, which she feared had gained no embellishment from its contact with his” (47). Heathcliff responds to the unkind manners of the Lintons and his

exclusion from the “splendid place” in which they live by disavowing them and all they represent, telling Nelly,

I'd not exchange, for a thousand lives, my condition here, for Edgar Linton's at Thrushcross Grange—not if I might have the privilege of flinging Joseph off the highest gable, and painting the house-front with Hindley's blood! (42)

In spite of Heathcliff's violent imagery—which is especially shocking from the mouth of a child—the vehemence of his bitter declaration emphasizes the pain he feels as a result of his social and economic exclusion. In his study of clothes in the novel, Graeme Tytler argues that Heathcliff's self-consciousness after his expulsion from the Grange indicates his emerging class consciousness (241). His rejection, though, is also intensely personal, based on his looks and manner as much as his situation—after all, Catherine appears nearly as slovenly and unkempt as he does when the Lintons capture her. Catherine's fear when she embraces Heathcliff after returning home, that his “dusky fingers” will contaminate her new dress, is expressed years later as her declaration—overheard by Heathcliff—that marrying him would be a degradation.

Heathcliff's transformation from a foundling to a man of property is accomplished not by reclaiming property that is rightfully his, as in the case with the other Gothic property romances discussed here, but rather through a sort of legal usurpation. Three years after his abrupt departure from Wuthering Heights, Heathcliff returns as a man fit to step into the drawing room of the Grange and with the education necessary to seize it from the Lintons. The extent of his transformation is evident in Nelly's reaction. Heathcliff has quite a distinctive appearance, and Nelly has known him from childhood, but even though he has been gone only three years, she

struggles to recognize the “tall man dressed in dark clothes, with dark face and hair” who appears before her:

[...] A ray fell on his features; the cheeks were sallow, and half covered with black whiskers; the brows lowering, the eyes deep set and singular. I remembered the eyes.

‘What!’ I cried, uncertain whether to regard him as a worldly visitor, and I raised my hands in amazement. ‘What! you come back? Is it really you? Is it?’ (Brontë 82)

Similar to how Orlando’s dispossession renders him unrecognizable, a shadow of himself, Heathcliff’s appropriation of wealth seems to enlarge and alter him, to the extent that Nelly views him as something otherworldly.

Heathcliff’s transformation is not merely cosmetic: he returns with the knowledge necessary to enact his revenge. Using what Emily Rena-Dozier calls “the civilized weapon of legal intrigue,” Heathcliff manipulates property law to transform himself from a legal, social, and economic nonperson to a man of property—his enemies’ property—and power (771; Stoneman xviii). Importantly, Heathcliff does not actually usurp the properties he gains. His mode of revenge—gaining ownership of both Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, and of Isabella in marriage—is more or less within the bounds of law. That is not to say, of course, that his actions are morally defensible. Heathcliff exploits Hindley Earnshaw’s grief-driven gaming habit, forcing him to mortgage Wuthering Heights to him to pay his debts. He also exploits Isabella’s romanticized view of him and her resulting infatuation, by which means he eventually gains ownership of the Grange through the mechanism of coverture, in the process gaining the pleasure of spiting Edgar and tyrannizing Isabella. As Judith Pike argues, Heathcliff’s treatment

of Isabella clearly indicates that he is aware of the laws governing domestic abuse and is consciously refraining from breaking them, thereby ensuring that she has no legal grounds for dispossessing him of her eventual inheritance. She also shows that he constructs a narrative about Isabella's loss of self-regulation that would give him grounds for confining her to their home, as well as undermining any claim she might dare to make in a bid for legal separation (Pike 367). Heathcliff had no such knowledge of the law when he left *Wuthering Heights*; whoever taught him how to appear like a man of manners also apparently taught how to exploit the law like one too.

In other Gothic property romances, the enchanted nature of property means that the resolution of a contested property brings resolution to the novel as well, but in *Wuthering Heights*, things are not so simple. In any other novel, Heathcliff would be the villain, but we sympathize with his hatred of those who tyrannize him, as well as his response to Catherine's cruel rejection—her love is both fantastically romantic and brutally materialistic. Although we might be tempted to read his transformation as an attempt to make himself somehow worthy of Catherine, Heathcliff's view of himself and his clearly articulated motives for his actions tell us that he sees himself as a slave to his own tyrant, Catherine, and that his cruelty to others is a consequence of the economic system that, for her sake, he has inserted himself into. As he tells Isabella, "The tyrant grinds down his slaves and they don't turn against him, they crush those beneath them" (Brontë 100). Although Heathcliff's revenge hinges on his acquiring property, that acquisition does little to resolve his relationship with Catherine. On the contrary, the walls of the property are actually what is keeping them apart, as evident in the behaviour of the ghost of young Catherine who haunts Lockwood's dreams. Sleeping in a bed carved with variations of

Catherine's name, Lockwood dreams that he hears a branch scratching at the window, but the window is sealed shut:

'I must stop it, nevertheless!' I muttered, knocking my knuckles through the glass, and stretching an arm out to seize the importunate branch: instead of which, my fingers closed on the fingers of a little, ice-cold hand!

The intense horror of nightmare came over me; I tried to draw back my arm, but the hand clung to it, and a most melancholy voice sobbed,

'Let me in—let me in!'

'Who are you?' I asked, struggling, meanwhile, to disengage myself.

'Catherine Linton,' it replied, shiveringly (why did I think of *Linton*? I had read *Earnshaw* twenty times for Linton). 'I'm come home, I'd lost my way on the moor!'

As it spoke, I discerned, obscurely, a child's face looking through the window— Terror made me cruel; and finding it useless to attempt shaking the creature off, I pulled its wrist on to the broken pane, and rubbed it to and fro till the blood ran down and soaked the bed-clothes; still it wailed, 'Let me in!' and maintained its tenacious gripe, almost maddening me with fear. (20–21)

As Lockwood's gruesome nightmare suggests, the physical structure of *Wuthering Heights*, the walls, windows, and surrounding land, all now in Heathcliff's possession, are barriers that keep Catherine's wandering spirit separated from him.

Lockwood's dream is the most overtly Gothic moment in the novel, so it invites close consideration of the role that its ghosts play. The dream itself is strikingly similar to one from *Sir*

Bertrand, A Fragment (1773) by John Aikin and A.L. Aikin (later Anna Laetitia Barbauld), published to accompany their aesthetic treatise *On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror*:

He was now in total darkness, and with his arms extended, began to ascend the second stair-case. A dead cold hand met his left hand and firmly grasped it, drawing him forcibly forwards—he endeavoured to disengage himself, but could not—he made a furious blow with his sword, and instantly a loud shriek pierced his ears, and the dead hand was left powerless in his—He dropt it, and rushed forwards with a desperate valour. (132–133)

This reference to the “dead cold hand” that Sir Bertrand grasps unexpectedly mirrors the “little, ice-cold hand” that Linton thinks is a branch scratching the window, while his attempts to saw it from its wrist on the broken window glass is an even more gruesome variation on Sir Bertrand’s severing of the dead hand he encounters with his sword. Lockwood wonders why the ghost-child calls herself “Catherine Linton,” but we can read this as an expression of the longing of the adult Catherine—absorbed into the civilized world of the Lintons—to return to the Heights as the child she was when she left with Heathcliff to spy at the Grange, and to undo the alienation from him that resulted. Heathcliff’s reaction to hearing Lockwood’s screams suggest that this is not the first time Catherine’s ghost has visited. Heathcliff acts as if he expects to find a ghost in the room, entering it in terror, “his face as white as the wall behind him”:

He got on to the bed, and wrenched open the lattice, bursting, as he pulled at it, into an uncontrollable passion of tears.

‘Come In! come in! he sobbed. ‘Cathy, do come. Oh do— *once* more! Oh! my heart’s darling, hear me *this* time —Catherine, at last!’ (21–22)

Unlike Sir Bertrand or Lockwood, Heathcliff is not afraid of this ghost. Rather, he opens the window and implores her to come in. His words suggest that he has encountered Cathy’s ghost before and tried to let her in, but he could not. In the other Gothic property novels discussed here, ghosts embody the metaphysical connection between a property and its rightful owner, generally by blood, and they work to restore a property that has been usurped. Catherine’s ghost seems instead to lure Heathcliff out of the Heights. In this way, Catherine’s ghost brings about the resolution of the property issue, since it causes Heathcliff to relinquish his interest in the properties he has acquired and bring about his own death, at which time the properties pass to the younger Catherine and then to Hareton in a marriage that unites the two estates and families, just as the contesting families are united in *The Old English Baron*, *The Old Manor House* and, less successfully, in *Otranto*. Unlike his predecessors, though, who fight desperately against dispossession, Heathcliff welcomes death as a means of reuniting with Catherine, as emphasized by the mirroring of his death and Catherine’s (Davison, “Emily” 163). Moreover, Heathcliff’s death seems to re-enact Lockwood’s nightmare: Lockwood finds Heathcliff dead by the open window, and the hand that rests on the windowsill has been cut by the lattice, echoing the ghost’s wrist being cut on the broken glass. The idea that Heathcliff was able to resolve the haunting by finally letting Catherine’s ghost in—or, more precisely, letting his own out—is suggested by the horrific expression frozen on Heathcliff’s face, a “frightful, life-like gaze of exultation” (Brontë 298).

Wuthering Heights can thus be read as an example of a Gothic property romance, but one with an ambivalent take on the idea of property as “the grand enchantress.” Although the novel seems to uphold the values of earlier property romances, it simultaneously undermines them by making the resolution of Catherine and Heathcliff’s story dependent on dispossession, the disavowal of property. Heathcliff’s sudden abandonment of his property-driven revenge coincides with his encounter with Catherine’s ghost when he exhumes her body, suggesting that it is Catherine’s spirit that inspires his change of heart. Indeed, as his health begins to deteriorate so does his belief in the power of property, as he tells Nelly: “I have not written my will yet, and how to leave my property, I cannot determine! I wish I could annihilate it from the face of the earth” (296). Having failed in his attempt to win Catherine through property ownership, his property—the vehicle for his revenge against the Earnshaws and the Lintons—is now worthless. In a grisly moment reminiscent of horror Gothic, Heathcliff removes the side of Catherine’s coffin next to his own burial plot and ensures that the corresponding side of his own will be left open as well, so that their bodies will decay together in a final “degradation” that makes the boundary between them indistinguishable: “by the time Linton gets to us,” Heathcliff says, “he’ll not know which is which!” (255). For them, it is not a legal and social union at stake, as there is in the other Gothic property romances discussed in this chapter, but rather a union that is simultaneously metaphysical and grossly material. Moreover, the structures that define the social, legal, and cultural complex of property—such as the walls of *Wuthering Heights* and Catherine’s coffin—are the very barriers that keep Catherine and Heathcliff apart, and it is only by breaking down these structures—the window, the broken coffin wall—that they can be together. In this way, the enchantment ascribed in other novels to land as a metonym for property is transferred to the plot of land in which Heathcliff and Catherine are transformed into dirt.

Wuthering Heights thus complicates the notion of property as “the grand enchantress” by presenting a cynical view of the bourgeois ideals of social mobility, including the law as a legitimate vehicle for acquiring property, as is emphasized in *The Old English Baron*. None of Heathcliff’s efforts to overcome his otherness are effective, and he continues to be excluded from the benefits promised by the ideal of property: “the grand enchantress” is a curse.

Conclusion

Walpole’s account of the dream-origin of *The Castle of Otranto* emphasizes the importance of the faux gothic architecture of his home, Strawberry Hill, for creating an atmosphere that inspired the tale. He writes in a letter that the novel was inspired by a dream in which he was in “an ancient castle, [...] and that on the uppermost banner of a great staircase I saw a gigantic hand in armour” (“Walpole”). For Walpole, Michael Gamer explicates, “House and text stand, here and elsewhere, as analogous expressions of the same singular urge, serving as both excuse for, and vindication of, one another” (“Introduction” xxiv–xxv). Similarly, in his preface to *A Description of the Villa of Mr. Horace Walpole, at Strawberry Hill*, Walpole notes that “The designs of the inside and outside are strictly ancient, but the decorations are modern; would our ancestors, before the reformation of architecture, not have deposited in their gloomy castles antique statues and fine pictures, beautiful vases and ornamental china, if they had possessed them?” (4). In this way, Walpole justifies his unique aesthetic blend of the ancient and the modern in his home and, by extension, his novel, by arguing for keeping what is useful and beautiful from the past and adding the best parts of the present. As Clery points out, this aesthetic vision has political “audacity,” since it challenged some “cherished assumptions” about the relationship between the gothic past and modern present, presenting a vision of the future that

was more complex than “a simplistic formula of revolutionary romanticism versus neoclassical stagnation” (“Introduction” x). For Walpole, his property and his fiction are both expressions of the same “singular urge” of Gothic imagination in a way that echoes Duckworth’s notion of the estate as a metonym for character in relation to Romantic realist fiction.

As this chapter has argued, the haunted Gothic castle is more than a simply a motif that characterizes a genre we now know as the Gothic novel. It is, rather, a symbol at the nexus of what Anolik describes as a property/possession complex comprising: “the rule of law (real estate as property) and realism (house as locus of the domestic), and the misrule of fantasy (the building as habitation to the supernatural ghost)” (13). Situated as it is at the intersection of legal, material, and symbolic dimensions of property, the haunted castle provides a space for working through what property means as that meaning shifts and changes. Reading these four novels together as Gothic property romances emphasizes the extent to which the theme of contested property, as established by *Otranto*, remains central to the Gothic novel for the next hundred years and beyond.

Chapter 2: “The Air and Attitude of a Montoni!”: *Northanger Abbey*, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and the Marriage Market

Abodes of horror have frequently been described, and castles, filled with spectres and chimeras, conjured up by the magic spell of genius to harrow the soul, and absorb the wandering mind. But, formed of such stuff as dreams are made of, what were they to the mansion of despair, in one corner of which Maria sat, endeavouring to recall her scattered thoughts! (Wollstonecraft, “Wrongs” 69)

So begins Mary Wollstonecraft’s *The Wrongs of Woman: or, Maria*, an unfinished novel published posthumously in 1798. Maria finds herself imprisoned in an asylum by her husband as punishment for her refusal to be prostituted to his friend as payment for his gaming debts (143). The novel evokes the “abodes of horror” so characteristic of Gothic novels as a setting for this fictionalized expression of Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*’s (1792) comparison of marriage to prostitution and slavery (176, 295). In this way, this opening passage situates Maria’s tale alongside those novels while distinguishing between fictional castles and the (fictionally) real “mansion of despair” in which Maria finds herself, stripped of freedom, fortune, and family.

Maria is a victim of coverture, the doctrine of English common law by which marriage, for women, amounted to civil death, transforming her from a *feme sole* to a *feme covert* and subsuming her legal and economic identity under her husband’s. In many ways, coverture merely extended the legal and economic status of unmarried women who were subject to their father’s

will and protection, and indeed Romantic Gothic fiction abounds with accounts of young women tyrannized, imprisoned, and persecuted by their fathers, guardians, or other men who are supposed to protect them, almost always for economic reasons. The idea of marriage as fundamentally economic was, of course, not new, but it—and especially the practice of coverture—was put under pressure by the increasing forces of individualism that characterized modern commercial society.

Wollstonecraft's *Maria* is frequently invoked in discussions of coverture in the Gothic, since, as Ruth Beinstock Anolik argues, it exemplifies the use of the Gothic motif of “wifely imprisonment and husbandly murder” to represent coverture “in a literal form that proves the grave and real consequences of legal fiction” (94; E. J. Clery, *Rise*). By positioning Maria's experience in the field of real life, as opposed to romance, Wollstonecraft's novel evokes the Gothic motif of the imprisoned woman with one hand and seems to push it aside with the other. And yet, the novel's rhetorical effect depends upon its account of the Gothic horrors of the asylum and the psychological horror of imprisonment. Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1818) makes a similar move. The novel seems to ridicule the Gothic motifs that colour Catherine Morland's experience of *Northanger Abbey* and her propensity for them. Her characterization of General Tilney as “a Montoni,” a reference to the villain of Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), which Catherine is reading, is often read as her ultimate failure to separate romance from real life. Here, though, I argue that Catherine's identification of the General as “a Montoni” is doubly insightful: as a critical reading of the fundamentally economic nature of Montoni's villainy that anticipates modern critical readings of Radcliffe's novel, and as a canny application of that novel's critique of the economics of marriage to the commercial society of Bath.

The Marriage Market in Commercial Society

As one of the pillars structuring society, marriage was subject to the shifting social paradigm that Charles Taylor identifies as the modern social imaginary (23), one that put traditional views of marriage as an economic transaction, and the doctrine of coverture that transformed women into property, in tension with modern ideas of individualism. Possessive individualism, an Enlightenment idea that applies property rights to people, according to which every person has ownership of themselves and their body (Fitzgerald), extended the sphere of property (discussed in Chapter 1) to the body itself. “Political theorists,” Paul Langford notes, “asserted that every free human being, however lowly his status and destitute his circumstances, had a property in his own person” (*Public* 6). Indeed, the ability to act as “free agents,” to participate in exchanges with other individuals, is an essential characteristic of the modern commercial economy, and of the novel: both assume that individuals “possess a degree of free will and can thus exert some (though not absolute) control over their fates” (Zlotnick 279). Historically, women and their bodies had been traded in marriage as vehicles for transmitting property: as heiresses whose fortunes and land became their husband’s upon marriage, and as bearers of children who would inherit and transmit property across generations.

Changing economic conditions and understandings of property also changed the institution of marriage and how it was imagined and understood. More people than ever before were making fortunes through means other than land ownership, and at the same time, boundaries between social classes were shifting and blurring, since clothing and other markers of class that had once been available only to those with “old money”—the aristocracy and landed gentry—were now available to those with “new money” gained in trade, war, and commerce, who all participated in the high-stakes venture of the marriage market. Henry Tilney’s satirical

analogy of “matrimony and dancing” reveals an understanding of marriage as transactional, as an exchange of advantages: “in both, it is an engagement between man and woman, formed for the advantage of each” (Austen, *Northanger* 54). Moreover, in the assembly room that functions as dance floor and marriage market, “man has the advantage of choice, woman only the power of refusal” (54). It is this power of refusal, Claudia Johnson argues, that is threatened in *Northanger Abbey* (Jane). Although a father could prevent a daughter from marrying the man of her choice, he did not have the right under the law to force a daughter to marry against her will, although the pervasiveness of stories of young women compelled to marry where they do not love suggests that this was not always the case in practice. This power was especially important because a wife was so wholly under the power of her husband. This fact helps explain why some Gothic heroines are reluctant to marry the men they love, even when they need the protection that a husband would offer them from their persecutors. In Radcliffe’s *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), for instance, Adeline declines Theodore Peyrou’s offer of marriage after he helps her escape from the Marquis de Montalt’s villa of vice, even though doing so leaves her completely unprotected, and even though they have already acknowledged their love for each other (189). The idea of the marriage market is itself an indication of how marriage was imagined in commercial society. The terms “marriage market” and “marriage mart” came into usage in the early nineteenth century, often in satirical contexts. An early usage—possibly the first—occurs in *The Lady’s Monthly Museum* of July 1801, in a letter to the editor called “On the Indian Marriage Market,” decrying the practice of “sending our young unmarried women out to the *India Market*, as it is not inaptly called”:

for what can be more disgraceful and indelicate than to send our young countrywomen, whose minds should be pure and unsullied with the least breath of immodesty, to a country where it is (alas! too well known) the custom for them to be disposed of to the highest bidder (if I may be allowed the expression); I mean to that man whose fortune is largest, and who is willing to take them [...] (Amator 111).

This “disgraceful” practice was not limited to the colonies, but was standard in England too, of course. London and Bath had been established as national marriage markets by the 1740s, with facilities including assembly rooms that allowed young men and women from across the country to meet and mingle as they had never had the opportunity to do before (L. Stone 216–217).

Byron refers to the “Smithfield Show / Of vestals brought into the marriage mart” in *Don Juan* in 1823 (754), and the terms become more widely used by the 1840s.

⁹ These terms can both be understood in relation to the emerging idea of “the market,” an abstract concept foundational to the commercial age (as discussed in the Introduction).

Moreover, these terms make explicit the understanding of marriage—a foundational social relationship—as an economic transaction.

Reading Catherine Morland

It is into the marriage market of 1790s Bath that Catherine is thrust, and her ignorance of its customs and values have made her the most maligned of Austen’s heroines, in a novel often

⁹ This early usage was uncovered by using Google Books Ngram viewer to search for instances of “marriage market” between 1750 and 1850; the first usage listed in the OED is from 1842. The first usage of “marriage mart” seems to be Byron’s, as recorded in the OED.

regarded as inferior to Austen's later productions. In the wealth of criticism about *Northanger Abbey*, the predominant reading is that it is a novel of education, the story of how Catherine becomes educated in the realities of the social world and in the process rejects her Gothic imagination as foolish and wrong. Critics generally consider Catherine lovable but naïve and treat her as Henry does, with what Walter Anderson describes as “condescending but kindly tolerance” (Anderson 499; Gilbert and Gubar 140–41; Kearful; Zlotnick). Some are harsher in their judgements. Avrom Fleishman writes, for example, that “[i]t is not alone her scanty store of social facts but her flimsy equipment for grasping such facts” that distinguishes Catherine from other “heroines of romance” (649–50). Claudia Johnson, meanwhile, notes that Catherine is a prime example of what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls the “spectacle of a Girl Being Taught a Lesson” (“Introduction” xiii–xiv; “Masturbating” 833). So many readings of *Northanger Abbey* have written off Catherine as unworthy of serious attention that the matter may seem too settled to warrant discussion.

Likewise, the novel itself is often written off as a mere parody of the already ridiculous Gothic novel, whether a “smiling tribute” (Lenckos 105) or a pointed satire arguing for realism over romance (W. E. Anderson; Lau). It is a critical commonplace to argue that *Northanger Abbey*, like the Gothic ruins that it evokes, is structurally unsound: that its two parts—a *Bildungsroman* set in Bath and a Gothic parody set at Northanger Abbey—lack meaningful connection (Kearful), although some have argued that the two-part structure of the novel provides narrative unity (Rothstein). A handful of critics have noted that Austen's engagement with the rich literary landscape against which *Northanger Abbey* was written is more complex than a straightforward parody (Kearful; Rothstein; Zimmerman), revealing tensions and continuities between romance and real life in what Miriam Rheingold Fuller calls a “meta-

parody” (Fuller 92; Johnson, “Introduction” xv; Loveridge; Zlotnick 277). Johnson similarly emphasizes Austen’s complex use of “understatement (the heroine is reading *only* a novel) as a form of overstatement and aggrandizement (novels have *only* genius, wit, and taste to recommend them)” (“Introduction” viii). Although the understatement that Johnson describes is the opposite of the hyperbolic style that characterizes most horrid novels, it too has a destabilizing effect: it “relocates painfully instructive adventure from the ruined abbey to the sentence itself, where artfully deployed twists, like concealed passageways, bring us unexpectedly to new and not very comfortable places” (xix). Both Fuller and Johnson point to the problem with reading the novel as a simple story of Catherine’s social education. Doing so requires that we take the novel at face value, interpreting Catherine’s experiences as she herself does, rather than reading from the critical distance that Austen’s complexly intertextual “*meta-parody*” requires.

Reading the narrator’s tone as one of destabilizing ironic understatement thus challenges the usual reading of Catherine as a lovable blockhead. This tone is evident in the description of Catherine’s foibles—her “plain” appearance, and habits and pastimes that are decidedly “unpropitious for heroism” (Austen, *Northanger* 5)—but is also evident during her walk with Henry and Eleanor Tilney on Beechen Hill. During their walk, they stop for an impromptu “lecture on the picturesque” from Henry:

his instructions were so clear that she [Catherine] soon began to see beauty in every thing admired by him, and her attention was so earnest, that he became perfectly satisfied of her having a great deal of natural taste. He talked of fore-grounds, distances, and second distances—side-screens and perspectives—lights and shades;—and Catherine was so

hopeful a scholar, that when they gained the top of Beechen Cliff, she voluntarily rejected the whole city of Bath, as unworthy to make part of a landscape. (81)

At first glance, this passage shows the narrator poking fun at Catherine's infatuation with Henry and his willingness to be flattered by it, and it is tempting to dismiss her artistic abilities as swiftly as she dismisses Bath. But we would be making a similar error in "rejecting" her as "unworthy." The picturesque is an aesthetic framework that allows "persons accustomed to drawing," like Henry and Elinor, to "form pictures" of the world: to imagine the world mediated through an aesthetic lens (80). In his usual manner, Henry provides "instructions," telling Catherine about all the conventions of looking at a landscape with an eye to the picturesque, using terms related to drawing about which Catherine—as a failed heroine—knows nothing (6). When they reach the top of Beechen Cliff, though, Catherine does not simply mirror Henry's lesson back; instead, she puts her new knowledge into action—and "voluntarily," unprompted by Henry—imagines a landscape mediated through the aesthetic lens about which she has just learned.

Even though Catherine's misguided "rejection" of Bath is a result of her enthusiasm for pleasing Henry, rather than her "natural taste," this incident nonetheless demonstrates Catherine's ability to use aesthetic conventions to generate an imaginative lens through which she sees the world. Catherine's aptitude for applying aesthetic conventions to real-world experiences points to her powers of intuition, the ability to know by feeling rather than reason. In the age of sensibility in which Austen wrote, when the domains of aesthetics and epistemology were closely linked, intuitive abilities were highly valued (Starr 98). For example, Robert Miles argues that eighteenth-century picturesque landscape gardening was a nexus of "aesthetic

paradigms” comprising polarized epistemic notions, including “thought/feeling,” in which “aesthetic election is testified to by the viewer’s capacity, not to read, but to be emotionally and imaginatively moved” (“Gothic” 39). Even though Catherine does not get it quite right, her ability to see Bath as it is not highlights her powers of feeling, especially in contrast to Henry’s more analytic powers of thought. Rather than “read” the scene according to the principles Henry has just explained to her, she is “emotionally and imaginatively moved” by it, grasping intuitively the gist of the picturesque, if not its exact details. This same intuitive power later enables her to grasp the economic conflict in *Udolpho* and to identify the General as a particular character type.

In addition to her powers of intuition, and contrary to Fleishman’s assessment of her “flimsy equipment,” Catherine is a quick learner, and not just when inspired by Henry. Critics who, like Fleishman, deride Catherine’s “scanty store of social facts” confuse inexperience with stupidity (649). Indeed, Catherine *is* a “hopeful scholar” of social conventions as well as aesthetic ones, and she is constantly frustrated by her lack of knowledge and proper instruction. She learns through experience, for instance, that the word of a “rattle” like John Thorpe cannot be trusted (Austen, *Northanger* 46). Henry is sometimes helpful in this regard, but after Catherine witnesses Isabella Thorpe flirting with Captain Frederick Tilney while she is engaged to Catherine’s brother James, and shares her misgivings with Henry, he convinces her—wrongly—to distrust her powers of observation.

‘My dear Miss Morland,’ said Henry, ‘in this amiable solicitude for your brother’s comfort, may you not be a little mistaken? Are you not carried a little too far? Would he thank you, either on his own account or Miss Thorpe’s, for supposing that her affection, or at least her

good-behaviour, is only to be secured by her seeing nothing of Captain Tilney? Is he safe only in solitude?—or, is her heart constant to him only when unsolicited by any one else? He cannot think this—and you may be sure that he would not have you think it.’ (110)

The series of rhetorical questions that Henry asks are predicated on three “premises,” as he calls them: “My brother is a lively, and perhaps a thoughtless young man; he has had about a week’s acquaintance with your friend, and he has known her engagement almost as long as he has known her” (110). This is all true, but Catherine has reason to suspect that Isabella’s attachment to James is self-interested, based on Isabella’s “insinuations” that the living of £400 a year Mr. Morland offers James is less than he can afford (98–99). Catherine, having learned from her experience with Isabella’s brother not to take everyone’s words at face value, recognizes the true meaning of Isabella’s words and the implication for her behaviour toward James. Her suspicion of Isabella’s mercenary motives is thus confirmed, rather than instigated, by Isabella’s flirtation with Frederick. Henry’s argument is characteristically rational and analytic, informed by his knowledge of social convention and based on what Mark Loveridge approvingly calls “probable inference” (8), but Henry also knows very well—certainly better than Catherine—that self-interest is the *sine qua non* of the Bath marriage market. Catherine, who does not want her suspicions to be correct, accepts Henry’s interpretation of events, the “comfort” that “now carried her captive. Henry Tilney must know best” (111). Although Henry is trying to allay Catherine’s fears, he does her a disservice by persuading her that her conclusions—which are reasonably drawn from her observations—are incorrect.

As a “hopeful scholar” of polite society, Catherine draws upon the sources of knowledge she has available, including her experience in Bath and the books she has read. While forming

her acquaintance with the Tilneys and the Thorpes, Catherine is voraciously reading *Udolpho*, a hugely popular novel that exemplifies Radcliffean or “terror Gothic” and that sparked the Gothic boom—what Miles calls “the effulgence of Gothic”—in the 1790s (“1790s”).¹⁰ Indeed, *Northanger Abbey* is immersed in the literary world of the 1790s, as emphasized in its Advertisement:

This little work was finished in the year 1803, and intended for immediate publication. [...] The public are entreated to bear in mind that thirteen years have passed since it was finished, many more since it was begun, and that during that period, places, manners, books, and opinions have undergone considerable changes. (3)

As Johnson notes, this Advertisement—written in 1816, after Austen bought the manuscript back from its intended publisher, Richard Crosby & Sons—“is the closest thing we have to a published Preface stating her artistic programme” (3n). We can infer that this “artistic programme” included writing a snapshot of the cultural moment in which the novel was written, since Austen refers to it so pointedly. And indeed, *Northanger Abbey* demonstrates how deeply *Udolpho* and other “horrid” novels had already, by 1803, become embedded in the cultural imagination of both its characters and its readers. *Udolpho* is the most significant and most frequent intertextual reference in the novel, in its own right and as a proxy for the Radcliffean romance, but it is by no means the only work of literature with which the novel engages.

¹⁰ *Udolpho*’s significance to Romantic Gothic literature would be difficult to overstate. It was acclaimed by critics and readers alike, many of whom found it “an absorbing, even mind-altering experience, and its author an ‘enchantress’ of the highest order” (Castle xx). Michel Foucault describes Radcliffe as the founder of a new mode of discourse, noting that she “made possible the appearance of the Gothic horror novel” (“What” 217), as discussed in the Introduction. *Udolpho* also solidified Radcliffe’s reputation as a professional author, earning her the unheard-of sum of £500 (Castle xx) and inspiring countless imitators. Miles discusses her innovations and influence at length in his study of Radcliffe’s life and work (*Ann*).

Northanger Abbey is highly intertextual, interacting with a wide range of other literary works—including Gothic novels—and its effect depends to a large extent on the reader’s familiarity with this literary context. Catherine, however, is fairly new to the Gothic scene. Her reading at home does not include horrid novels; rather, she reads Pope, Gray, Thompson, and Shakespeare (7). She only begins to read *Udolpho* when she arrives in Bath, and though Isabella presents her with a list of seven other horrid novels for them to read together, they never do. Catherine is enchanted by *Udolpho*, however, and talks about it a great deal. She names it eighteen times in the first volume of the novel, but, interestingly, she never mentions finishing it once her literary adventures are replaced by her real-life excursion to the Abbey.

Although the usual reading of Catherine is that she is immersed in and obsessed with Gothic novels, this is not borne out by the evidence. Rather, the novel relies on the reader’s familiarity with the novels that Catherine has not yet read, assuming that we will understand Henry’s invented romance, for instance, as a pastiche of Radcliffean Gothic. In this way, the novel foregrounds what Joel Osteen and Martha Woodmansee call “economies of reading—the interchanges between authors and readers, or texts and readers [...]—and of reception” (31). When Catherine resists being taken to Clifton by James, John, and Isabella, for example, she speaks like a Gothic heroine, boldly declaring in the face of John’s deception, “I cannot submit to this. I must run after Miss Tilney directly and set her right. [...] Let me go, Mr. Thorpe; Isabella, do not hold me” (Austen, *Northanger* 72–73). After breaking away from John and Isabella, who were holding onto her hands, her flight is determined, but not melodramatic: “Away walked Catherine in great agitation, as fast as the crowd would permit her, fearful of being pursued, yet determined to persevere” (73). Readers familiar with Gothic conventions—including its narrative style—tend to read this as a Gothic incident (see Fuller), but the free indirect discourse used here

blurs the distinction between Catherine's own thoughts and the narrator's expression of them, leaving it unclear whether Catherine imagines herself as a heroine of romance or the narrator is evoking a particular voice to prompt us to read her that way.

Just as critics tend to overestimate Catherine's facility with the Gothic, they also exaggerate the extent to which she is carried away by her imagination. The common reading, that Catherine is deluded and conflating her reading with real life, is not borne out in the novel either. The invented Gothic tale that Henry tells her on the road to the Abbey captures her imagination, but her interjections throughout make it clear that she understands it to be only a story. When Henry asks, "Have you a stout heart?—Nerves fit for sliding panels and tapestry?" she replies in her usual manner, turning to the concrete evidence: "Oh! Yes—I do not think I should be easily frightened, because there would be so many people in the house—and besides, it has never been uninhabited and left deserted for years" (114). He continues, describing a bed "of dark green stuff or purple velvet, presenting even a funereal appearance. Will not your heart sink within you?" And she replies, once again, "Oh! But this will not happen to me, I am sure." At the suggestion that she will be terrified to discover that her room has no lock, she replies "Oh! Mr. Tilney, how frightful!—This is just like a book!—But it cannot really happen to me. I am sure your housekeeper is not really Dorothy. Well, what then?" (115) Clearly, Catherine is not confusing reality with the fiction that Henry is narrating; rather, she is consciously allowing Henry's story to "carr[y] her captive," just as his comforting reassurances about James and Isabella did (111). Here, Catherine once again demonstrates her facility with aesthetic frameworks, as well as the powers of imagination and sensibility that enable her to experience the feelings that the Gothic endeavours to evoke. In this way, she demonstrates herself to be the ideal Gothic reader, one who experiences the "dreadful pleasure" the horrid novel attempts to

evoke, without it corrupting her powers of reason. And again, this sensibility is contrasted with Henry's more analytical tendencies, evident in his ability to parse his own Gothic reading (which is, after all, more extensive than Catherine's) into its component tropes and, by recombining them, generate an abridged, chapbook version of a horrid tale, one that recirculates Gothic motifs familiar and recognizable to Gothic readers.

With her imagination primed by Henry's tale and heightened by the anticipation of being at the Abbey, Catherine gets even more carried away in her Gothic imaginings. Yet even then, her fantasies of being a Gothic heroine are always momentary, self-conscious, and quickly deflated. The extent to which Catherine is swept away in her imagination is clear, for instance, from a comparison of her reaction to Henry's tale and her encounter with the mysterious chest in her room at the Abbey:

An immense heavy chest!—What can it hold?—Why should it be placed here? [...] I will look into it—cost me what it may, I will look into it. [...] She advanced and examined it closely: [...] The lock was silver, though tarnished from age; at each end were the imperfect remains of handles also of silver, broken perhaps prematurely by some strange violence; and, on the centre of the lid, was a mysterious cypher, in the same material. (119)

This passage begins by relaying Catherine's thoughts, then carries into free indirect speech, echoing the style of Henry's tale. Its exuberant style, peppered with exclamation points, dashes, and stylized language, is very different from the rational, direct style of Catherine's earlier speech. And yet, Catherine is never deluded that she *is* a Gothic heroine. This is clear, for instance, from her encounter later that evening with the (un)locked cabinet in her room. When

she first sees it, Henry's description of a mysterious cabinet from his Radcliffean pastiche "rushe[s] across her," and she thinks "though there could be nothing really in it, there was something whimsical, it was certainly a very remarkable coincidence!" Clearly, Catherine knows it is just a cabinet but she allows herself to be carried away by the "whimsical"—the comically fantastic—idea of the cabinet as something more. Throughout this passage, her flights of fancy are checked by rational thoughts: "It was not absolutely ebony and gold; but it was Japan, [...] and as she held her candle, the yellow had very much the effect of gold" (123). The degree to which she is carried away by fancy is matched by the immediate deflation she feels upon reading the washing bills: "she felt humbled to the dust" (126). It is worth noting, too, that although there is a mysterious chest in *Udolpho*, Catherine's encounter with the chest, like Henry's tale, draws on Gothic tropes that would be more familiar to readers than to Catherine herself, evoking particularly *The Romance of the Forest*, which features a ruined abbey as well as a mouldering rolled manuscript that tells a horrid tale of murder and usurpation. Once again, the novel exploits the reader's familiarity with the Gothic—and the circulation of tropes within it—in order to draw us in to Catherine's momentary fantasy and its inevitable deflation.

The fleeting and self-conscious nature of Catherine's Gothic fantasies are quite different from that of true Gothic parodies, such as those of Cherry Wilkinson—or "Cherubina"—in Eaton Stannard Barrett's *The Heroine* (1813). Cherubina's fantasy is sustained and consciously constructed. Meeting a group of peasants, for example, she outfits them in black cloth and feathered caps, "a costume that would give them the pleasing appearance of Udolphian Condottieri" (224). When disappointed in her father's poor performance as a villainous imposter, Cherubina asks him,

Can you darken the midnight of a scowl? Have you the quivering lip and the Schedoniac counter? Can your eyes glare from under the edge of a cowl? In a word, are you a picturesque villain, full of plot, and horror, and magnificent wickedness? Ah, no, Sir, you are only a sleek, good-humoured, chuckle-headed gentleman. (224)

When Cherubina's fantasy is challenged by the inconveniently quotidian details of reality, she tries to manipulate or reframe her experiences to maintain her fantasy. Catherine, on the other hand, is pleasurably carried away rather than deluded, so encounters with reality—such as the washing bills—immediately bring her back to herself.

This distinction between being carried away and being deluded is crucial for interpreting Catherine's evaluation of the General. At first glance, Catherine's identification of the General as "a Montoni" seems very similar to Cherubina's desire to see peasants as "Udolphian Condottieri" and her "chuckle-headed" father as "Schedoniac." The difference is subtle, but significant, a matter of simile versus metaphor. Cherubina's literary adjectives indicate she wants the peasants and her father to be what they are not: Udolpho-like and Schedoni-like. Catherine, in contrast, constructs a metaphor, comparing apparently dissimilar things—the (fictionally) real General and the fictional character Montoni. Notably, and unlike Cherubina, she is not trying to see him as something he is not (as more "Montoniac"), nor does she see him as simply "Montoni," which would suggest a delusional confusion between reality and fiction. Rather, calling him "*a* Montoni" indicates that she understands him as a particular character type, exemplified by the "Udolphian" villain. Indeed, her view of the General is vindicated in the novel itself: when Henry explains that his father turned her out of the house because he discovered she is not the rich heiress he imagined her to be, Catherine realizes that, "in suspecting General Tilney of either

murdering or shutting up his wife, she had scarcely sinned against his character, or magnified his cruelty” (Austen, *Northanger* 183).

Montoni as an Economic Gothic Villain

Although Catherine comes to realize that she was right about the General, readers familiar with the wider literary field of the Gothic can understand how right she is in a way that Catherine cannot. Understanding how and why Catherine’s reading of the General is so insightful requires unpacking what makes Montoni the exemplary Gothic villain. Too often, critics follow Catherine’s error of believing—or misremembering—him to be a murderer. Since the novel is long and complex, it is worthwhile to remember how Montoni got that reputation. Montoni is a distant relative of Signora Laurentini di Udolpho, the owner of Udolpho castle and its estates. Before the novel begins, he visits her at Udolpho castle and asks her to marry him. She refuses, and shortly after disappears, but her body is never found. This circumstance, and reports that the castle is haunted, lead the heroine Emily St. Aubert (and the reader) to believe that Montoni murdered Laurentini—or effectively buried her alive by imprisoning her in a dungeon—so that he would inherit the castle, which he does after Laurentini disappears and is presumed dead. Catherine indicates that this is what she believes when she meets Isabella in the pump-room and updates her friend about her progress through *Udolpho*, saying, “I am got to the black veil. [...] I am sure it is Laurentina’s [sic] skeleton” (26). Indeed, when Emily pulls back the black veil that is draped over a picture frame, she sees what she believes to be Laurentini’s decaying corpse. It is only at the very end of the novel that Emily discovers that Laurentini was not actually murdered, but was living in a convent as Sister Agnes, tormented by guilt because she convinced her lover, the Marquis de Villeroi, to poison his wife so that they could be together. Contrary to

what Catherine and other readers of *Udolpho* believe throughout most of the novel, Montoni does not murder or imprison Laurentini (371 n 137). To think that Catherine is wrong about the General because he did not murder or imprison Mrs. Tilney is thus to get lost in the same “labyrinth of perplexities” in which Emily finds herself as she tries to puzzle out the mysteries of Udolpho castle and its inhabitants (Radcliffe, *Mysteries* 648).

Although *Udolpho* tempts us to imagine Montoni as a murderer, and even as a supernaturally evil figure, in the end, he is just a cruel and avaricious man. He operates outside the law as the leader of a band of condottieri, to be sure, but the novel focuses on the crimes he commits within the bounds of the law, as he exploits the power the law grants him over his wife and over his niece Emily as her legal guardian. In the course of telling Emily the history of Udolpho castle, her servant Annette tells her that Montoni was in love with Laurentini, but she rejected him because she loved someone else (236). Whether he really loved her or wanted to marry her because she was an heiress we cannot know, but his eagerness to take possession of the castle is suspicious. As Annette tells Emily,

[...] the Signor laid claim to the castle directly, as being the next heir, and they said, [...] he could not take possession of it till so many years were gone by, and then, if, after all, the lady could not be found, why she would be as good as dead, and the castle would be his own; and so it is his own. But the story went round, and many strange reports were spread, so very strange, ma'amselle, that I shall not tell them. (238)

Whether or not the suspicions that Annette's story implies are true, Montoni is quick to take possession of the estate. His avarice is even more evident in his marriage to Emily's aunt, Mme

Cheron, which is quickly soured when they both discover that the other is not as rich as they believed (190), a situation echoed, of course, in the General's discovery that Catherine is not a wealthy heiress. Not only that, but when Montoni discovers that his wife holds estates in Languedoc that are protected from his grasp, he imprisons her (and Emily, effectively) at Udolpho, where they are joined by a company of Montoni's men. There, Montoni torments his wife in an attempt to coerce her into signing over the estate. Telling his wife that she will be confined to one of the castle towers, Montoni says, "there, perhaps, you may understand the danger of offending a man, who has unlimited power over you" (305). When Mme Montoni does die—not by her husband's hand, but as a victim of his tyranny—and Emily inherits the property, she becomes his target. He tries various means to force her into signing the property over to him, including intimidating and tricking her into marriage with Count Morano, a scheme in which Emily describes herself as being "bought" and "sold" (262; see Fitzgerald). He also threatens to subject her to the same torments and imprisonment to which he subjected his wife. Finally, he threatens to withdraw his protection, leaving her at the mercy of his company of ruffians (385). This threat of physical and sexual violence is effective, and Emily signs the property over to him. Lauren Fitzgerald points out that Montoni is strategic in the methods he uses to persecute Emily: he is merely exploiting existing social and economic structures (Fitzgerald), just as Heathcliff does in *Wuthering Heights*, as discussed in Chapter 1. The threat of rape is effective, Fitzgerald and E. J. Clery argue, where his other strategies fail in part because Emily recognizes that this type of violence would negate her value on the marriage market (E. J. Clery, *Rise* 120). Emily—and through her, *Udolpho*'s readers—views Montoni as a larger than life villain, with a "terrible" face and eyes that "flash fire" (Radcliffe, *Mysteries* 190). Inspiring this villainy is not supernatural evil, however, but avarice and the will to satisfy it.

Like many early Gothic novels, *Udolpho*'s setting in France in the 1580s distances it in time and space from the world of its readers. The fate suffered by Mme Montoni and that with which Montoni threatens Emily were, contrary to Henry's later assertions, a real danger for eighteenth-century women. The practice of coverture, like primogeniture, was deeply enmeshed in eighteenth-century English law and culture. William Blackstone's description of marriage in his *Commentaries on the Laws of England* was particularly influential in shaping eighteenth-century legal and economic understandings of the institution and the role of women within it:

By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband: under whose wing, protection, and cover, she performs every thing. (430)

As Blackstone's metaphor of the woman sheltered under her husband's wing suggests, the supposed purpose of coverture was to protect women from want, violence, and legal prosecution (Bailey 352). The cost of these "protections," however, was a married woman's legal and economic personhood: all of her property and her very legal identity were subsumed under her husband's name unless they were specifically protected, as was Mme Montoni's property in Languedoc (Radcliffe, *Mysteries* 352). Although *femmes coverts* were able to make some purchases, and even sometimes appear in court as agents of their husbands, this proxy agency was a product of—not an exception to—women's disenfranchisement, what Finn calls a "natural corollary of their subordination to their husbands" (M. Finn 709; Bailey 354). Blackstone's naturalizing description of coverture was so influential in shaping how this doctrine was

understood that it has become a “historiographical commonplace,” but the practice was contested throughout the eighteenth century, (Finn 704; Bailey). A common argument against the doctrine was that it was a holdover from England’s feudal past, a Norman import that limited women’s natural rights under England’s ancient constitution (Chernock 91–93; Bailey 352). The association of coverture with the Norman Conquest was particularly common among radical thinkers in the 1790s, when associations with all things French was particularly distasteful (Chernock 92). Arianne Chernock discusses treatises that makes this argument, including Elizabeth Chudleigh, Countess of Bristol’s *Laws Respecting Women* (1777),¹¹ which argues that “the Norman invasion was fatal to the rights of women” (Chernock 91). Chudleigh points out that coverture is based on feudal law, which also failed to protect women, particular because it granted landlords the authority to dispose of his female tenants in marriage:

this right was granted to the lord on the presumption, that the natural affection which was supposed to subsist between the lord of the fief and his vassal, would incline the former to choose a fit and proper husband for his ward; but such sentiments, when opposed by present advantage, soon existed in idea only, and the most flagrant abuse of this power was openly committed (xi)

Just as under feudal law, coverture grants a husband power over his wife “on the presumption” that his actions will be guided by “natural affection,” but too often this affection was displaced by self interest or “present advantage,” effectively denying a wife the protection the law claimed

¹¹ *Laws Respecting Women* was one of the many radical works published by Joseph Johnson, one of the most important booksellers and publishers of the Romantic age. He was a friend of Wollstonecraft’s and published *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, Mary* (1788), and *Maria* (with fellow London publisher G. G. and J. Robinson). Wollstonecraft also wrote regularly for his radical periodical, the *Analytical Review* (Hall).

to ensure. Overall, the argument against coverture contested Blackstone's naturalizing rhetoric, painting it instead as an "outmoded" and "imported construct," a feudal relic that had no place in modern commercial society (Chernock 92–93). This argument—popular during the time of the Gothic boom—emphasizes the contest between sensibility and self-interest, one particularly salient when applied to marriage.

In contrast to Blackstone's naturalizing metaphor of protection, cultural representations of life under coverture—such as Wollstonecraft's—widely employ metaphors of imprisonment and live burial. Imprisonment is one of the core motifs of the Gothic, from Sedgwick's view of meaning as "buried alive" under the surface of language (*Coherence* 37), to Mario Praz's conception of Gothic space as a kind of mental prison, characterized by "anxiety with no possibility of escape" (Wilt 10). Far more common for women in Gothic fiction, however, is domestic imprisonment within dungeons, recesses, and other spaces in (and under) their homes. Indeed, this is one of the ways in which the Gothic castle functions as "a fortress not for keeping people out but for keeping them in" (Gamer, "Introduction" xiii). The idea of confinement is embedded in the etymology of coverture, a term derived from the French *couvrir*, "to cover." Blackstone's metaphor of the wife protected under her husband's wing casts a benevolent light on the notion but is answered in Gothic novels by a multitude of married women suffering a fate that Maria describes as being "buried alive": she laments that "marriage had bastilled me for life" ("Wrongs" 77, 137). Although actual live burial is quite rare in Gothic fiction—*The Restless Matron* (1799) and Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853) may be the only examples—instances of domestic imprisonment abound (Furneau 428).¹² In Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), the

¹² Under "live burial," Ann Tracy's index includes figurative and literal examples (197), referring to William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786), Isabella Kelly's *The Abbey of Saint Aspah* (1795), Joseph Fox, Jr.'s *Santa-Maria, or, the Mysterious Pregnancy* (1797), Mrs. RMP Yorke's *The Haunted Palace, or the Horrors of Ventoliene* (1801),

Marchioness Mazzini is imprisoned in an earthen dungeon, a “recess of horror,” for fifteen years, fearing every time her husband leaves that he will not come back, and she will starve (*Sicilian* 176). In Eliza Parsons’s *The Castle of Wolfenbach* (1793), one of *Northanger Abbey*’s “horrid novels,” the Countess of Wolfenbach is imprisoned by her husband with the bloody corpse of her lover. Domestic imprisonment is a common theme in novels discussed in this study as well. In Charlotte Smith’s *The Old Manor House* (1793; discussed in Chapter 1), for example, Monimia is imprisoned by her aunt in a turret (*Old* 61), and in Smith’s *Marchmont* (1796; discussed in Chapter 4), Althea Dacres refers to her banishment to the isolated and mostly ruined estate of Eastwoodleigh as being “buried alive” (*Marchmont* 84, 218). In *Wuthering Heights* (1848; also discussed in Chapter 1), Isabella Linton is imprisoned by her husband, Heathcliff (see Pike). In *Udolpho*, Emily eventually discovers Laurentini “buried alive” in a convent, tormented by guilt. These are just a few examples; the ubiquity in Gothic fiction of women imprisoned, usually by their husbands for financial gain, suggests the cultural importance of the idea of marriage itself as imprisonment and the difficulty of expressing that idea in the face of the “protective” rhetoric that sustained and justified coverture.

As a figure defined by oppressive and violent greed, with a disdain for human feeling, Montoni embodies the danger that women faced under coverture. Mary Poovey reads *Udolpho* as an allegory for the tension between sensibility and capitalism, arguing that “Radcliffe uncovers the root cause of the late eighteenth-century ideological turmoil, the economic aggressiveness currently victimizing defenceless women of sensibility” (“Ideology” 311). She also points out that, in the eighteenth century, the notion of sensibility had moral as well as aesthetic dimensions. Montoni, who explicitly dismisses sensibility in favour of economic self-interest,

Matthew Lewis’s *Romantic Tales* (1808), *Tales of the Dead* (1813), Robert Huish’s *The Brothers, or the Castle of Niolo* (1820), and George Croly’s *Salathiel. A Story of the Past, the Present, and the Future* (1828).

tells Emily, as he tries to bully her into accepting Morano's proposal, that "any objection founded on sentiment, as they call it, ought to yield to circumstances of solid advantage" (317; Radcliffe, *Mysteries* 196). Although Montoni's lack of "sentiment" suggests that his pursuit of wealth and power is rational, his behaviour is actually driven by unregulated passion: Montoni is, Poovey claims, an "Italian incarnation of excess itself" (319). His excessive avarice extends to his activities as a leader of a band of condottieri and a political agitator, activities that eventually land him in prison, where he dies "in a doubtful and mysterious manner, and not without suspicion of having been poisoned" (Radcliffe, *Mysteries* 569). Although Montoni's persecution of his wife is driven by the same avarice as the activities for which he is imprisoned, they are illegal, while his mistreatment and extortion of his wife and Emily are not.

In identifying the General as "a Montoni," then, Catherine anticipates Poovey's argument that Montoni is an embodiment of avarice, specifically that form of avarice that pursues mercenary marriage. In Catherine's view—likely informed by her reading—marrying for money is "the wickedest thing in existence" (Austen, *Northanger* 91). This view, of course, runs counter to the values underpinning Bath's marriage market, in which the General actively speculates. Catherine's observations of the General's behaviour and her knowledge of Mrs. Tilney's fate are the basis of her suspicions, just as her suspicions of Isabella's motives are based on her observations of her behaviour. What little information is available to Catherine and to the reader about Mrs. Tilney suggests that she suffered under coverture. Catherine learns that Mrs. Tilney—the former Miss Drummond—was married with a substantial fortune of £20,000 (48). Eleanor tells Catherine that her mother's favourite walk in the grove was one disliked by the General, and her sidestepping of Catherine's question about whether it was her favourite because of "dejection of spirits" seems an implicit yes (132). Eleanor reveals that the General has no attachment to her

mother's portrait, which Eleanor has hung in her own room. Catherine takes these clues to solidify her suspicions of the General:

Of her unhappiness in marriage, she felt persuaded. The General certainly had been an unkind husband. He did not love her walk; —could he therefore have loved her? ... Here was another proof. A portrait—very like—of a departed wife, not valued by the husband!—He must have been dreadfully cruel to her!

Catherine attempted no longer to hide from herself the nature of the feelings which, in spite of all his attentions, he had previously excited; and what had been terror and dislike before, was now absolute aversion. Yes, aversion! His cruelty to such a charming woman made him odious to her. She had often read of such characters; characters, which Mr. Allen had been used to call unnatural and overdrawn; but here was proof positive of the contrary. (132)

Catherine's overzealous expressions seem, to borrow Mr. Allen's word, "overdrawn," and critics therefore often dismiss her conclusions, as Henry tries to dismiss them. But the substance of her feelings are reasonable and warranted. Compared to Eleanor's sentimental attachment to her mother's walk and her portrait, the General does appear unfeeling. Indeed, the way he values these mementos of his wife seems in keeping with the way he values everything else: according to their social and economic value. Where he sees merely a "cold, damp path," Eleanor sees a way to retrace her mother's steps; the portrait that he is "dissatisfied with" has value to Eleanor because of whom it depicts, not how it looks (131–32). In both cases, the General reveals the value he places on appearances and show rather than genuine feeling. While Catherine's logic

that loving someone means loving their favourite walk may be faulty, her assessment of the General as being unnaturally unfeeling toward his wife is not.

Although we do not have access to Mrs. Tilney's experience of marriage, Eleanor, having taken her place as mistress of the Abbey, is a reasonable proxy, and she feels the General's domestic tyranny keenly. The General's cruelty to his daughter includes rigorous control of her behaviour and careless disregard for her feelings and wishes. Even though the death of Eleanor's mother was "a great and increasing" affliction, occurring when Eleanor was just thirteen, her father provided no governess or other female companion for her; Catherine is the only female companion she seems to have ever had (132). Eleanor must capitulate to her father's wishes; even her daily routine is dictated by his preferences, and the degree of anxiety Catherine causes by risking a deviation from this routine indicates how serious the consequences of displeasing the General can be (121). Although Eleanor is not exactly a prisoner, she cannot escape her situation, as Harry can escape to Woodston. Like many Gothic heroines, she too is prevented from escaping an unhappy family home through marriage, since the General will not allow her to marry the man of her choice, hoping for a more advantageous match. Walking in her mother's favourite grove is the only escape she has the power to enjoy and, like for her mother, much of that enjoyment comes from being away from the General. Eleanor's assertion that, "[a]t that time indeed I used to wonder at her choice," suggests that she values it now for the same reason as her mother did then, as a place to "relieve her spirits." Catherine notices the effect of leaving the General's company as well: "He turned away; and Catherine was shocked to find how much her spirits were relieved by the separation" (131). Eleanor shares hints of the unhappiness of her situation with Catherine during their time together at the Abbey, and declares it outright when forced to tell her friend that she is being sent home: "I trust you will acquit me," Eleanor says,

“for you must have been long enough in this house to see that I am but a nominal mistress of it, that my real power is nothing” (166). The novel recognizes Eleanor’s oppression, describing “the evils of such a home as Northanger Abbey” and noting that Eleanor’s “habitual suffering” has made her particularly deserving of happiness in marriage (185).

The “evils” that Eleanor encounters may not be supernatural, or even criminal, but they are evils nonetheless. Indeed, Eleanor’s happiness is only made possible when her suitor inherits a title and fortune that gain her father’s approval; even this happiness is contingent on his wishes. The General’s regard for his daughter is based on her capacity to increase his family’s wealth and status, since, as the narrator tells us, “never had the General loved his daughter so well in all her hours of companionship, utility, and patient endurance, as when he first hailed her, ‘Your Ladyship!’” (185). Knowing his feelings for his daughter and the self-interested nature of his regard for her, it is reasonable to assume that his feelings for his wife were very much the same. That his value of women is self-interested is evident, too, from his violent change of heart toward Catherine. His apparent esteem for her was, the narrator reveals, based on avaricious designs:

John Thorpe had first misled him. [...] With whomsoever he [Thorpe] was, or was likely to be connected, his own consequence always required that theirs should be great, and as his intimacy with any acquaintance grew, so regularly grew their fortune. The expectations of his friend Morland, therefore, from the first over-rated, had ever since his introduction to Isabella, been gradually increasing; and by merely adding twice as much for the grandeur of the moment, by doubling what he chose to think the amount of Mr. Morland’s preferment, trebling his private fortune, bestowing a rich aunt, and sinking half the children, he was able to represent the whole family to the General in a most respectable

light. For Catherine, however, the peculiar object of the General's curiosity, and his own speculations, he had yet something more in reserve, and the ten or fifteen thousand pounds which her father could give her, would be a pretty addition to Mr. Allen's estate. (181)

The General's imagining of Catherine as an heiress—"an Emily"—thus mirrors Catherine's Gothic flights of fancy. Thorpe's and the General's inflated vision of Catherine's fortune are the product of vanity and self-interest, though, and whereas Catherine reacts to the deflation of her imaginings with humility, the General reacts with outrage. Learning that she has a dowry of £3000, though, and that "the Fullerton estate, being entirely at the disposal of its present proprietor, was consequently open to every greedy speculation," is enough to change his mind in favour of Catherine, especially since Eleanor has been so advantageously married (186).

Although Catherine and Henry have very different ways of reading books and the social world, Catherine's confession of her suspicions about the General is a moment of shared imagination, and as such, it is a transformative moment for both. For Catherine, Henry's admonition is the final in a series of deflations of her Gothic imaginings. For Henry, though, this moment enables him to see his father as Catherine does, as "a Montoni." Catherine's naiveté, sensibility, and imagination—those qualities so often derided by her critics—enable her to read *Udolpho* perceptively: to intuit the self-interested and avaricious nature of Montoni's villainy and to apply that interpretation to her "reading" of a real social world as fascinating and strange to her as Radcliffe's fictional one. Whereas reading, for Catherine, is an immersive experience, Henry reads much more analytically: he understands novels through generic conventions, just as he understands Bath society through its social conventions. By articulating conventions as such,

he makes them available for critique, as is evident, for example, in his discussion with Catherine about the similarities between an engagement to dance and an engagement to marry:

'I consider a country-dance as an emblem of marriage. Fidelity and complaisance are the principal duties of both; and those men who do not chuse to dance or marry themselves, have no business with the partners or wives of their neighbours.'

'But they are such different things!—'

'—That you think they cannot be compared together.'

'To be sure not. People that marry can never part, but most go and keep house together. People that dance, only stand opposite each other in a long room for half an hour.'

'And such is your definition of matrimony and dancing. Taken in that light certainly, their resemblance is not striking; but I think I could place them in such a view.' (54)

Henry's articulation of the conventions of marriage and of dancing, and his placing of them in analogy, allow him and Catherine to discuss them critically, with Henry foregrounding the conventional and legal aspects of both, and Catherine their experiential quality. Henry's attempt to "place" the two seemingly unrelated things "in such a view" that the analogy produces meaning anticipates their later interaction, in which Catherine suggests the analogy between Montoni and the General, in which case they more readily see eye to eye.

Henry's reaction to Catherine's confession is almost always read negatively, as a "rebuke," varying in severity from a "loving chastisement" to a "harangue" (Butler xlii; Johnson, "Introduction" xiii; Loveridge 19). These interpretations assume that Henry is angry or upset, but

a close look at the passage shows that this is not the case. Encountering Catherine alone and unexpectedly in the intimate space of his mother's room, Henry is extremely attentive. She repeatedly tries to leave to dress for dinner and to avoid discussing why she is there, but Henry persists in questioning her, and throughout their exchange he "closely observe[s] her" and is "earnestly regarding her" as he prevents her from leaving. Finally, he concludes that, "[a]s there is nothing in the room itself to raise curiosity, this must have proceeded from a sentiment of respect for my mother's character," implying that he suspects the opposite: that it is the room, and not his mother's character, in which Catherine is interested (Austen, *Northanger* 144). When Catherine begins to hint at her suspicions, he follows her train of thought:

‘Her dying so suddenly,’ (slowly, and with hesitation it was spoken,) ‘and you—none of you being at home—and your father, I thought—perhaps had not been very fond of her.’

‘And from these circumstances,’ he replied, (his quick eye fixed on her's,) ‘you infer perhaps the possibility of some negligence—some—(involuntarily she shook her head)—or it may be—of something still less pardonable.’ She raised her eyes towards him more fully than she had ever done before. (144–45)

Henry's insistent questioning and relentless scrutiny of her throughout this exchange suggests his deep interest in—rather than disdain for—her way of thinking. This is an intimate moment, in which Henry understands what Catherine is implying without her having to say it. When Catherine finally raises her eyes to his, she is meeting his gaze, which has been intently fixed on her all along.

Although, as Johnson notes, Henry is—for once—at a loss for words when he realizes Catherine has “formed a surmise of such horror as I have hardly words to—,” reading his loss of words as a symptom of anger is at odds with his behaviour throughout the scene and indeed throughout the novel, and disregards the intimate nature of the encounter. Rather, his speechlessness makes more sense as a product of this shared imagination, as he works through the shock of seeing his father, as Catherine sees him, as “a Montoni”:

‘You have erred in supposing him not attached to her. He loved her, I am persuaded, as well as it was possible for him to—We have not all, you know, the same tenderness of disposition—and I will not pretend to say that while she lived, she might not often have had much to bear, but though his temper injured her, his judgment never did.’ (145)

Although Henry starts by declaring that Catherine has “erred”—the word that Catherine fixates upon—Henry’s words actually suggest the opposite. His reassurance that his father did suffer upon her death is faltering, echoing Catherine’s faltering and hesitant confession, peppered with dashes and broken sentences. Although he seems to be trying to assure her of his father’s good character, he cannot do so in any convincing way, leaving his sentences unfinished and the subtext clear—to all but Catherine—that, although the General did not murder his wife, his “temper injured her.” He loved her as much as he could, Henry assures Catherine, but what we know and learn is that the way the General loves people is to the extent that they benefit him. Henry ends his reassurance with, “[h]is value of her was sincere; and, if not permanently, he was truly afflicted by her death” (145). We learn from the General’s treatment of Catherine later on, however, that in spite of his courtesy and seeming affection and esteem, he only values her as a

potentially rich daughter-in-law: for her financial value. Looking back at this passage, then, Henry's words take on a different tone, implying that "his value of her" might have had more to do with his wife's money than with her heart.

Henry's attempt to persuade Catherine that what she suggests is impossible in modern-day England is similarly unconvincing, especially when read alongside his previous "Dear Miss Morland" exhortations. Just as he did when trying to persuade Catherine that her suspicions about Isabella and Frederick were unfounded, Henry adopts the rhetorical strategy of posing a series of questions to Catherine. "Dear Miss Morland," he begins again,

consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from? Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you—Does our education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them? Could they be perpetrated without being known, in a country like this, where social and literary intercourse is on such a footing; where every man is surrounded by a neighbourhood of voluntary spies, and where roads and newspapers lay every thing open? Dearest Miss Morland, what ideas have you been admitting?" (145)

Henry attempts to reframe Catherine's point of view, imploring her to "remember" where and when she really is. He reframes the setting as well, recalling her to modern Christian England. Catherine is, as before, persuaded by Henry's words—perhaps more so this time, because her confession has made her more vulnerable to his approval. But when he reminds her to base her

perception of the world on her “understanding,” her “sense of the probable,” and her “observation of what is passing around you,” we see—even if Catherine does not—that her experiences in society and her interpretation of them prove that her perceptions were generally correct. Her misgivings about John were well founded, as were her suspicions of Isabella’s motives; in that case, it was Henry’s assurances that were wrong. Indeed, Henry’s lecture on the picturesque taught Catherine to trust her intuition and her way of seeing the world. Henry’s questions here, though, prompt Catherine to see the world through the social framework of Bath rather than the aesthetic lens of the Gothic, but what he realizes in the course of his admonition—and what readers see, although Catherine does not—is that the Gothic lens reveals a horrid truth about the General’s behaviour that the conventions of polite society conceal. It is Henry, not Catherine, who is wrong.

Similarly, although Catherine is convinced by Henry’s argument that the “atrocities” she suggests could not happen in modern-day England, readers—especially those familiar with the Gothic—know that the institutions Henry cites oppress women rather than protect them. The harm inflicted by women’s education, on women in particular and society in general, was widely acknowledged, especially, of course, by Wollstonecraft, who argued that obtaining a loveless marriage for financial gain was the central objective of women’s education (“Vindication”). As discussed earlier, England’s laws—such as those about coverture—did not protect women like Henry’s mother or Catherine from tyrannical husbands, fathers, or brothers. Lurking underneath Blackstone’s naturalizing rhetoric is the truth that, while pretending to protect women, these conventions stripped them of autonomy and personhood, as well as their fortunes, a truth that Catherine’s Gothic metaphor enables her to articulate. Eleanor’s suffering under her father’s rule, and Catherine’s own experience with John and the General, prove that tyranny can be carried out

in the open, without society's condemnation. Any reader of the Gothic would know that the "voluntary spies" that Henry cites as a source of social surveillance are actually an ominous force, a source of paranoia and dread, as in William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794). Indeed, in the political climate of the 1790s, when *Northanger Abbey* was written, such surveillance was a real threat as well as a fictional one, even more so in the post-Revolution Regency years in which the novel was actually published (Austen, *Northanger* 371 n145; Loveridge 20–21). Even the roads and newspapers that Henry insists are part of this social safety infrastructure are dangerous for women, since women's social (and therefore financial) survival depended on a reputation that could easily be destroyed by gossip, and women travellers were in danger of being robbed and attacked by strangers, not to mention their own companions, as Mrs. Allen's advice about young people riding alone emphasizes (75). Henry knows this, since his fury at his father putting Catherine in danger by forcing her to travel the roads home without escort or money is what instigates their argument. Thus, although Henry's assurances seem convincing when taken at face value, a more critical reading, especially by readers familiar with both Gothic fiction and the realities of Bath society, reveals how wrong Henry is.

Henry's admonition is transformational for Catherine, deflating her "visions of romance" (146) and causing her to abandon the Gothic as a mode of thought. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar compare the effect of Henry's repeated admonitions to "brainwashing" and "gaslighting," manipulations that, in other novels, lead heroines to madness (143). The moment is equally transformational for Henry, though: it amounts to a revelation of love. Henry's address to Catherine becomes more and more affectionate throughout; it begins "Dear Miss Morland" and ends with "Dearest Miss Morland" (Austen, *Northanger* 145). This concluding superlative suggests that his affection for her increases as he speaks, contrary to what Catherine believes,

and it echoes similar expressions of love in Austen's other novels. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Darcy declares his love a second time through his appellation "dearest, loveliest Elizabeth" (Austen, *Pride* 282); in *Emma*, Knightly declares his through his address to "[m]y dearest, most beloved Emma" (Austen, *Emma* 365). In both cases, the word "dearest" amounts to a declaration of love, an appellation with a completely different tone than the politely condescending "my dear Miss Morland."

Henry's affection for Catherine only increases after this exchange, which forces him to confront a painful truth about his father, and likely about his own role in his father's schemes, just as Darcy's love for Elizabeth is increased by the painful truths Elizabeth forces him to confront. Henry is so likable that it is easy to forget that he seems initially to acquiesce in his father's ploy to woo Catherine, something he hints at even as he criticizes John's attempts to distract Catherine from him at the cotillion ball: "We have entered into a contract of mutual agreeableness for the space of an evening, and all our agreeableness belongs solely to each other for that time. Nobody can fasten themselves on the notice of one, without injuring the rights of the other" (Austen, *Northanger* 54). Although Catherine does not realize it, Henry's playful banter hints at his financial motivation for pursuing her acquaintance—which we can assume his father has encouraged him to do—and his awareness of John as a financial and romantic rival. In trying to steal Catherine away, John is "injuring the rights" of Henry to secure Catherine, whom they both believe to be a valuable commodity on the marriage market. For Thorpe and the General, Catherine turns out to be a poor speculation; but for Henry, of course, her worth is realized. He perceives that Catherine's true value lies in her character, her "honest simplicity" (157). Henry's increased affection for Catherine is clear from his uncharacteristically sincere reply to her distress over the letter from James announcing his broken engagement with Isabella:

“To have so kind-hearted, so affectionate a sister,’ replied Henry, warmly, ‘must be a comfort to him under any distress” (150). Just as Catherine inadvertently reveals her feelings for Henry to Eleanor, so too does Henry reveal his to his sister when he imagines Isabella as Frederick’s wife:

‘Prepare for your sister-in-law, Eleanor, and such a sister-in-law as you must delight in!—Open, candid, artless, guileless, with affections strong but simple, forming no pretensions, and knowing no disguise.’

‘Such a sister-in-law, Henry, I should delight in,’ replied Eleanor, with a smile. (151–152)

Henry does not seem to realize he is describing Catherine as a counterpoint to Isabella, and Catherine does not pick up on Eleanor’s smile, but readers certainly recognize Catherine in Henry’s sarcastic description, especially when Henry declares shortly after to Catherine, ““You feel, as you always do, what is most to the credit of human nature” (152). To read Henry’s admonition as if he thinks less of Catherine is therefore to mistake the novel’s ironic tone and to replicate Catherine’s mistake of believing that “Henry Tilney must know best” (111).

The idea of marriage as a transactional exchange, and “society” as a place where those transactions were conducted, is ubiquitous in Romantic-era fiction. The public social spaces that *Northanger Abbey*’s characters frequent, such as Almack’s and Bath’s Pump Rooms, were well known as the trading floors of the marriage market, though, as discussed above, that term was just emerging when Austen was writing. To Catherine, a naïve observer of Bath society, the avarice and self-interested cruelty underpinning this mercenary understanding of marriage is abhorrent, and she reacts with the outrage of one who has not internalized such imaginings.

Catherine's appellation of "a Montoni" thus coins a term for a tyrannical, predatory villain who marries for money and exploits the laws of coverture for financial and social gain. Using the same powers of perception she displays when reimagining Bath through the lens of the picturesque, she draws out an idea in *Udolpho* that she interprets and applies to real life, using the Gothic as a way of expressing and describing something for which there is no other language.

Catherine may not realize the significance of her identification of the General with Montoni, but Austen's assumed readers of *Northanger Abbey*—those familiar with the texts it references—surely would. As Eric Rothstein argues, Catherine's experiences have significance for readers beyond what they have for her: after Henry's admonition, her "heroic" readings "seem pointless for her. For us, however, the novel itself provides the principle of selection" (Rothstein 18). Rothstein's observation is true in the case of *Udolpho* as well. Interestingly, within *Udolpho*, Emily's refusal to submit to Montoni's tyranny marks her—to him—as a heroine of romance. After she inherits what were Mme Montoni's estates, Emily refuses to sign them over to Montoni, even after he threatens her with imprisonment:

'You may find, perhaps, Signor,' said Emily, with mild dignity, 'that the strength of my mind is equal to the justice of my cause; and that I can endure with fortitude, when it is in resistance of oppression.'

'You speak like a heroine,' said Montoni, contemptuously; 'we shall see whether you can suffer like one.' (Radcliffe, *Mysteries* 381)

Montoni's sneering remark suggests that he views her as critics tend to view Catherine, as a young woman with delusions of "heroicism" (E. J. Clery, *Rise* 119). "Radcliffe," Poovey writes,

“uncovers the root cause of the late eighteenth-century ideological turmoil, the economic aggressiveness currently victimizing defenceless women of sensibility” (“Ideology” 311). If Emily’s marriage to Valancourt is a form of “idealized paternalism,” by ending the novel with their marriage, Radcliffe “retreats from the terrifying implications of her discovery and simply dismisses the threat sentimentalism cannot combat” (311).

More recently, though (as described in the Introduction), studies of the Gothic have emphasized its cultural function as a mode for making visible that which is difficult to see. Read this way, the Gothic functions as a dark mirror that reflects to its readers what Clery describes as “the true conditions of irrationality and oppression governing their existence” (*Rise* 173; Botting, “In Gothic” 24; Miles, *Gothic* 115). Miles, for instance, argues for “reading her [Radcliffe’s] texts not as a weak protest against patriarchy, but as a powerful, indeed terrifying expression of experiences elsewhere, until then, scarcely articulated” (*Gothic* 115). Similarly, Samantha Lay contends that the Gothic mode lets women writers imaginatively explore abusive marriages, economic disenfranchisement, and other “frightening scenarios” that women experienced under the law: “Readers act as witnesses to abuse that the law does not acknowledge” (iii). Lay regards this act of witnessing as a form of resistance, since social reform can only begin with “an audience that is aware of the impact of social institutions on the individual” (1). Ellen Malenas Ledoux makes a similar argument in regard to Matthew Lewis’ play *The Captive* (1803).¹³ Describing the powerfully visceral reaction of audiences to the monodrama’s theme of domestic imprisonment, and drawing connections with *Maria*, Ledoux argues that Lewis’ use of the Gothic is a rhetorical strategy, one that “demands that the audience confront married women’s suffering” (4). *Northanger Abbey* argues for reading *Udolpho* as a tool for articulating, and thus

¹³ *The Captive* was staged publicly only once, on March 22, 1803, and this performance was so intense that it reportedly caused audience members to faint and fall into convulsions and hysterics (Ledoux 1).

for making visible, the ways in which women suffer under the “economic aggressiveness” of coverture in particular. By showing, through Catherine, how the Gothic can function as a means to see what is difficult to see and articulate ideas for which no language exists, *Northanger Abbey* enacts in a fictional space the use of Gothic conventions as critical tools, demonstrating how the Gothic can “combat” the forces oppressing women by standing witness to them (see Sedgwick, *Coherence* 4). If commercial society has naturalized marrying for money, then privileging sensibility and human feeling—claiming the right to pursue happiness and ownership of one’s body—is an act of resistance. Catherine’s act of witnessing makes Henry a witness too, and he uses the power available to him to effect change by challenging and defying his father. Henry’s falling out with his father is strangely absent from most discussions of the novel, but it is as much an indictment of the General’s mercenary values as it is a testament to his love for Catherine.

Conclusion

In her introduction to the novel, Johnson argues that *Northanger Abbey* interrogates the relationship between “common life” and “romance” (x). Loveridge similarly proposes reading the novel as if it were titled “Nature and Probability,” since what the novel explores is the relationship between these two ideas, which “are, as might be expected in so overtly literary a work, technical terms from the discourse of eighteenth-century criticism” (1). In Catherine’s experience, these two states are not discrete, but rather part of a continuum. When Catherine is at the Abbey, for instance, waiting for Isabella’s promised letter from Bath, “The anxieties of common life began soon to succeed to the alarms of romance” (Austen, *Northanger* 148). The point at which the two begin to blur is, however, a point of productive tension. As this

examination of Catherine's evaluation of the General as "a Montoni" shows, her tendency to get carried away by her Gothic imaginings is not—as so many studies of the novel claim—the most significant consequence of her reading *Udolpho*. Rather, the most significant consequence is that Catherine's reading of *Udolpho* provides both a framework through which she can understand the General's behaviour and a language with which to express it, a language shared by the community of Gothic readers of which Henry—and *Northanger Abbey's* reader—is a part. Moreover, her reading of this foundational Gothic novel emphasizes the "economic plots" at the heart of most, perhaps all, Gothic fictions, an idea it shares with *Maria*. Austen's novel, so often dismissed as a parody of the Gothic, even cited as the parody that "killed" the Gothic, is in fact evidence that contemporary readers read and understood Gothic fiction as powerful expressions of social critique, in a way that modern literary criticism is still working to do. In this way, *Northanger Abbey* pushes back against the idea of coverture as a natural economic and legal practice with a metaphorical connection between Montoni, the iconic Gothic villain who exploits the law of coverture to tyrannize and oppress them for his own financial gain, and the General, a man of fashion. Catherine's imaginative re-visioning of Mrs. Tilney's marital unhappiness as live burial draws into focus how that motif is used in Gothic fictions as an expression of the horrors of married women's lives under coverture.

Chapter 3: Money, Credit, and the Willing Suspension of Disbelief in William Godwin's *St. Leon*

In Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1796), Emily St. Aubert's servant Annette relates stories popular among the servants at Udolpho castle about "the apparition, that has been walking about of a night on the ramparts, and that frightened the sentinels into fits." Emily asks, "Are you, indeed, so simple, Annette, as to credit these stories?" "Credit them, ma'amselle!" Annette replies, "why all the world could not persuade me out of them" (391). Credit, in the sense of belief, is a central problem in Gothic novels, as characters encounter mysterious and often supernatural phenomena that may or may not have rational explanations. Indeed, although Emily disapproves of Annette's "superstitious weakness" (392), even her powers of reason are several times overcome by the evidence of her senses. When Emily and Dorothée explore the gloomy chamber of the late Marchioness and see the bedclothes move mysteriously. Emily is at first "willing to be convinced that the wind only had occasioned her alarm," until she and Dorothée see "the apparition of a human countenance" on the bed and flee in terror (536). Credit in its economic sense is also a central problem in many Gothic novels. In *Udolpho*, for instance, the story is precipitated by news of St. Aubert's financial ruin, and he tells Emily that their fate rests in the hands of his creditors (59). Although Emily here views the belief in imaginary or irrational things as a weakness, credit—in its epistemological and economic senses—is foundational to the Gothic mode and to modern commercial society, as this chapter demonstrates through an analysis of William Godwin's *St. Leon* (1799) and its use of the motif of the philosopher's stone.

In his *History of Astronomy* (1795), Adam Smith condemns the propensity of ancient philosophers to imagine and believe in impossibly complex theories of observed phenomena in order to uphold a particular worldview. He cites the “system of Eccentric Spheres,” underpinned by an Earth-centric understanding of the universe. Describing the nature of philosophical theories—or “systems”—more generally, Smith writes,

Systems in many respects resemble machines. A machine is a little system, created to perform, as well as to connect together, in reality, those different movements and effects which the artist has occasion for. A system is an imaginary machine invented to connect together in the fancy those different movements and effects which are already in reality performed. (“Essays” 66)

The system of Eccentric Spheres is not faulty because it is a product of the imagination—all systems must be so, since they describe causes and connections that must be imagined from observed phenomena. Rather, it is faulty because it demands an imaginative leap so great that it cannot be sustained. “How many wheels,” Smith asks, “are necessary to carry on the movements of this imaginary machine, the system of Eccentric Spheres! [...] [It] was still too intricate and complex for the imagination to rest in it with complete tranquility and satisfaction” (66).

Although Smith critiques those philosophers who would abuse the powers of fancy in defiance of reason, he argues *for* the essentially imaginative nature of intellectual systems, highlighting the importance of fancy as an intellectual faculty for drawing connections that cannot be directly observed. Smith’s emphasis on imagination is evident in the “system of political economy” he presents in *An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776). Like the

systems of natural philosophy that Smith described in his earlier work, this system of political economy is an “imaginary machine,” one that “connect[s] together in the fancy” the “different movements and effects” related to various branches of economic activity, national and individual (66).

Smith’s recognition of the importance of the imagination as a critical faculty is somewhat surprising given his role as a major Enlightenment thinker. Indeed, in this respect Smith’s views align with those of Horace Walpole, as expressed in his manifesto for the new species of literature he invented with *The Castle of Otranto* (1764):

It was an attempt to blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern. In the former all was imagination and improbability: in the latter, nature is always intended to be, and sometimes has been, copied with success. Invention has not been wanting; but the great resources of fancy have been dammed up, by a strict adherence to common life. (9)

Like Smith, Walpole understands fancy as a valuable intellectual commodity, one that provides “great resources.” Understanding imagination in this way helps explain why Smith presents a figure of fancy—the “invisible hand”—as the mechanism that transforms self-interest into common good as the crux of the economic system he theorizes in *The Wealth of Nations*. The motif of the invisible hand has proved one of the most enduring of Smith’s ideas, although its significance is a matter of continuing debate and little consensus among economists, many of whom read it as an empty metaphor.

¹⁴ Several recent analyses argue for a more complex reading of the metaphor, including Eugene Heath and Peter Harrison, who both study it in the context of its historical usage, including in Smith's other writings. Harrison points out that, in the late seventeenth century, the phrase "invisible hand" was commonly understood to refer to the hand of providence, attributed either to god or, as Smith was likely employing it, to a more secular "general providence" (46). He notes that reading the motif in relation to Smith's earlier writings—specifically, his description of systems of imaginary machines—"seems fatally to undermine the validity of Smith's own efforts to secure an orderly foundation for moral economy," because it precludes them from being "anything more than impressive products of the imagination" (48). This analysis misses the point of Smith's description of "imaginary machines," however. The imaginary nature of Smith's invisible hand motif is not a flaw; rather, this use of the "great resource" of fancy is what gives the invisible hand its power.

As Eleanor Courtemanche notes, "[s]ome economic ideas are too interesting to be left to economists," and indeed, several critics have already drawn connections between Smith's use of the invisible hand motif and Gothic fiction (1). Stefan Andriopoulos, for example, links Smith and the Gothic through the "poetics of invisible agency," arguing that Smith's invisible hand, and those in *Otranto* and Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron* (1778), are manifestations of increasingly naturalized forms of supernatural agency, whether of providence or of the abstract and imaginary space of "the market" (743, 749; see the discussion of "the market" in the Introduction). E. J. Clery similarly regards Smith's invisible hand as a manifestation of providence, also drawing connections with *Otranto*. Anticipating Charles Taylor's notion of a

¹⁴ A survey of the literature discussing the motif of the invisible hand is beyond the scope of this chapter, but Courtemanche provides a useful introduction to reading the motif in relation to literature (Introduction; see also Heath; Harrison; Kennedy).

modern social imaginary, in which society is imagined as an economy (Taylor 76; see also the Introduction), she describes Smith, along with Josiah Tucker and Edmund Burke, as a proponent of “economic theodicy,” a “hybrid discourse” in which “the verbal trappings of providential belief are applied, by a curious twist, to the evolving social science of economics” (*Rise* 8). She links Smith’s use of the invisible hand motif in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), “a metaphor for the workings of the economic unconscious,” to the invisible hand in *Otranto*, an “inscrutable force” that thwarts human intention to achieve a morally just outcome—although, as Clery discusses (and I note in Chapter 1), the moral justice of the ending of Walpole’s novel is dubious at best (*Rise* 66). Jakob Tanner associates Smith’s invisible hand in *The Wealth of Nations*—and the formation of the Illuminati and the American Revolution, all of which occurred (too coincidentally?) in 1776—with the Gothic obsession with conspiracy. Arguing that conspiracy theories are distinctly modern phenomena that attempt to “fill the gaps in the collective imagination” of an increasingly complex society, Tanner reads Smith’s invisible hand as a powerful but unknown agent controlling the economy from the shadows (52, 55). Courtemanche presents the most sustained analysis to date of Smith’s metaphor in relation to literature, focusing on its use in Victorian literary efforts to describe complex social systems. Courtemanche is interested in realist fiction, so the connections between the invisible hand and Gothic that she hints at remain largely unexamined. Like Tanner, though, Courtemanche draws a connection between Smith’s invisible hand and Gothic paranoia. In her discussion of Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* (1818), she notes that Gothic paranoia is an expression of a worldview in which an agent—either God or “some devious elite”—controls the workings of the world (7). This paranoia haunts realist fiction as “the Gothic side” of the invisible hand’s seemingly benevolent interference (197). To date, then, these critical studies of Smith’s invisible hand motif

read it as ambivalent, signifying both a benevolent providential force that transforms our darker impulses into social good and as a dangerously inscrutable agent with the power to manipulate our behaviour for unintended ends. Although Courtemanche notes that, because the workings of the invisible hand cannot be observed, “Smith’s system requires a perpetual leap of imagination to keep it intact,” none of these analyses interrogate the role of belief—or the suspension of disbelief—in any depth (24).

The invisible hand is thus an essential cog in the imaginary machine of Smith’s economic system, one that demands a significant leap of imagination. In its demand that readers believe in the existence of an invisible hand that, through a kind of moral alchemy, transforms self-interest into common good, *The Wealth of Nations* thus engages with a foundational Romantic concept that Samuel Taylor Coleridge later describes as “the willing suspension of disbelief.” Coleridge coins the phrase in *Biographia Literaria* in 1817, in the course of describing the inception of *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) nearly twenty years earlier. He writes,

In this idea originated the plan of the “Lyrical Ballads”; in which it was agreed, that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith. (314)

For Coleridge, then, the goal of his contributions to *Lyrical Ballads*—“The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere,” “The Foster-Mother’s Tale,” “The Nightingale,” and “The Dungeon”—was to provoke a crisis of belief in the reader that would prompt them to push aside their disbelief in

order to engage in the aesthetic experience offered by the poet (Stafford xxix). The suspension of disbelief is thus a pledge of “poetic faith,” a conscious acceptance of truths that the reader knows to be untrue.¹⁵ Although Coleridge coined the now well-known phrase, he was not the only writer to explore the notion. In a well-known letter written the same year that *Biographia Literaria* was published, John Keats expresses the idea of “Negative Capability,” a similar intellectual faculty that involves holding two contradicting ideas in productive tension, such as believing in the (at least theoretical) existence of the invisible hand while also knowing that such a thing does not exist. Like Coleridge, Keats emphasizes the intentional quality of this ability in the course of lamenting that it is one that Coleridge does not possess: “I mean Negative Capability, that is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason” (193). Although Keats emphasizes the necessity of a writer’s capacity for “being in uncertainties” and Coleridge emphasizes the act of faith involved by the reader in suspending disbelief, they are essentially referring to the same phenomenon, one that critics have since identified as one of the foundational aesthetic and intellectual tenets of Romanticism. Jerome McGann, for instance, generalizes the capacity of suspending disbelief as an idea essential to Romantic literature, by which he means poetry by the age’s most canonical male poets:

Romantic poems take up transcendent and ideal subjects because these subjects occupy areas of critical uncertainty. The aim of the Romantic poem—especially in its early or “High Romantic” phases—is to discover the ground of stability in these situations. Later

¹⁵ As Fiona Stafford points out, though, many of Wordsworth’s contributions to the volume are equally “romantic” as Coleridge’s, such as “The Thorn” and “Goody Blake and Harry Gill,” which “offer themselves as ‘supernatural’ or Gothic poems” (xxix). “We are Seven,” in which the speaker identifies as one of seven children—some alive, some dead—has a similar and even eerier effect.

Romantic poems will often adopt a different procedure and attack the early Romantic terms of solution with the merciless critical razors of their despair. (73).

McGann's "areas of critical uncertainty" not only map directly onto Keats's "uncertainties, Mysteries, [and] doubts" but also onto the Gothic, a mode of literature obsessed with mystery that demands its readers be "capable of being in uncertainties." The place of Coleridge's "shadows of imagination" in this schema of disbelief is clearest when considered in relation to Anne Mellor's notion of Romantic irony, which, like McGann's formulation, is founded on the urge to create the illusion of order in a chaotic universe, to "discover the ground of stability" in a landscape of shifting sand.¹⁶ With its recognition of the generative power of this uncertainty, Mellor's view of Romantic irony as a "form or structure that simultaneously creates and de-creates itself" aligns closely with the productive uncertainty—the "shadows of imagination"—that Keats and Coleridge describe (5). The suspension of disbelief that enables poetic faith requires readers to perform a kind of intellectual gymnastics in order to hold truths and untruths in mind simultaneously, without resolution. In this way, it is similar to the intellectual faculty of "doublethink" described in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949).¹⁷

The invisible hand is only one component of the economic system that Smith describes, and just as it demands the suspension of disbelief, so does the system as a whole. As Kathryn Sutherland remarks in her introduction to *The Wealth of Nations*,

¹⁶ I am thinking here of Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Ozymandias" (1818) for me the clearest literary expression of Romantic irony.

¹⁷ Although a discussion of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in the context of economic Gothic is beyond the scope of this study, it is worth noting that Orwell's vision of a dystopic totalitarian society characterized by the pervasive threat of torture and imprisonment owes much to Romantic Gothic, and in its interest in paranoia and conspiracy shares some similarities with William Godwin's *Things as They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794).

the economic structure which is here propounded is one way of making sense of and connecting the evidence available in discrete form in the real world, but the model itself does not have objective existence in that same world. [...] As a way of regulating contiguous fragments, system-making is essentially an imaginative exercise, and one that is inexhaustible. (xli)

Sutherland's reference to the "imaginative exercise" of "regulating contiguous fragments" brings to mind the characteristic Gothic trope of the fragmented, bloodstained, or otherwise unreadable found manuscript, exemplified in the mouldering parchment Adeline de Montalt discovers in Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest* (1791) (see Dent), an incident parodied by Catherine Morland's discovery of old washing bills in *Northanger Abbey* (discussed in Chapter 2). In consequence of their elisions, the meaning of these found manuscripts—and of Gothic novels that employ the device of narrative fragmentation¹⁸—must be generated by the imaginative reader to create a meaningful text: a working narrative "system." Although the imaginative power that generates such systems may be "inexhaustible," it is fueled by belief. The cultural, historical, and economic conditions that, as Clery argues, enabled "the emergence of the supernatural *into* fiction" also enabled belief in Smith's invisible hand, and thus the emergence of commercial society and the modern social imaginary founded upon it (*Rise* xiii; Taylor). As discussed in Chapter 1, the increasing secularization that accompanied and drove the emergence

¹⁸ Fragmentation is a fascinating and understudied device that is foundational to the Gothic and exploits the aesthetic power of Keatsian "uncertainties, Mysteries, [and] doubts," as exemplified in John and Anna Laetitia (Barbauld) Aikin's "Sir Bertrand, a Fragment" (Keats 193; Aikin and Aikin 127–137). Friedrich Schiller's *The Ghost-seer; or, Apparitionist. An Interesting Fragment, Found Among the Papers of Count O****** (1795) and Charles Robert Maturin's *Melmoth, the Wanderer* (1820) are excellent and complex examples of Gothic fragmentation, demanding that readers imaginatively (re)construct stories from fragmented and nested narratives.

of commercial society meant that divine authority declined as the authority of capital increased. This increasing secularization also contributed to an epistemological crisis related to money.

As Alexander Dick describes, the British economy in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was a complex, tangled, confusing mess: the banking system included the Bank of England as well as private banks and other institutions that exchanged money, and money existed in a confusing variety of forms, including coins and paper banknotes, bills of exchange, and bullion (1). Amidst the confusion and complex interactions of material goods, ideas, and lived practices that characterized discourses of money around the turn of the nineteenth century, gold held special significance as both the source and limit of value. As Dick notes,

Gold was, by tacit consent, the general equivalent for everything, the universal standard of value. Held in reserve, but exchangeable on demand, gold served as the natural limit for credit and debt: the amount of gold held by banks marked the real boundary beyond which all modes of fiscal speculation could not go. (2)

Gold is thus important not only as a material signifier and embodiment of value but also as an imaginative boundary that limits credit, debt, and speculation and provides a centre of value around and through which the economy circulates.

The turn of the nineteenth century, though, witnessed a shift in how gold and money were imagined. Previously, the value of gold was determined by the king, and therefore backed by divine authority (4). Repeated financial crises resulting from decades of war were widely and vehemently debated in the press, bringing economic issues to the public's attention, with wide-

reaching cultural, political, social, and economic effects. Mary Poovey points out that “the very fact that we no longer notice that money consists of various kinds or that its function depends on writing means that money has been *naturalized*”; that is, money only ever becomes visible as a thing when it is defamiliarized, such as in moments of financial crisis (*Genres* 3–6). Two such events were particularly contentious: the suspension of cash payments in 1797 and the adoption of the gold standard in 1816. Throughout the seventeenth and much of the eighteenth centuries, money in the form of coin had (or, more precisely, was believed to have) intrinsic value because of the material it was made of—gold or silver. Paper currencies issued by the numerous banks throughout the nation had no value on their own, but only as a form of credit, a portable token of exchange that had value as long as the bearer believed it could be taken to the bank and traded in for gold. In 1797, though, in response to a shortage of gold during the Napoleonic Wars, the British government suspended cash payments, meaning that paper money could no longer be exchanged for gold. Paper money thus became a fiat currency, a symbol of value abstracted from the material value it represents, and the limiting function of gold that Dick describes no longer applied (2). In 1816, the Government introduced the gold standard: gold coins were no longer in circulation, but were held by the banks in the form of bullion; and gold became the standard against which the values of all other commodities were determined (7). The adoption of the gold standard was revolutionary, as Dick argues, because it displaced authority away from the divine and toward the market. The value of gold was now determined by market forces and fluctuated just like the value of any other commodity.

Both the suspension of cash payments and the adoption of the gold standard exposed the problem of the relativity of value, and necessitated a way to create a stable economic foundation on the shifting sands of market value. The political economist David Ricardo, for example,

strongly supported the adoption of the gold standard, but wrestled with this problem, nevertheless. In *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (1817), Ricardo points to the influence of scarcity and desire on value: rare things are more valuable simply because they are rare; this relativity is a particular problem when it comes to using gold as the standard of value since its value is not fixed (Dick 24). Ricardo resolves this problem, however, through an imaginative leap, choosing to believe in a standard—a fixed value—that does not really exist:

If, then, I may *suppose myself* to be possessed of a standard so nearly approaching to an invariable one, the advantage is, that I shall be enabled to speak of the variations of other things, without embarrassing myself on every occasion with the consideration of the possible alteration in the value of the medium in which price and value are estimated. [...] although I fully allow that money made of gold is subject to most of the variations of other things, I shall suppose it to be invariable, and therefore all alterations in price to be occasioned by some alteration in the value of the commodity of which I may be speaking. (qtd. on Dick 25)

Just as Smith uses an imaginative cog to resolve a logical problem in his economic system, so does Ricardo resolve the problem of a fluctuating standard of value by self-consciously “supposing” something to be true that he knows to be false. In other words, Ricardo argues that, if we imagine gold’s value to be fixed, it effectively is. Both the suspension of cash payments and the adoption of the gold standard contributed to a significant shift in how value was understood and imagined: no longer tied to gold, but instead as a matter of consensus (Poovey, *Genres* 3–6). In order for this modern economic system to work, those living within it must

exercise their collective belief in the value of paper money, knowing all the while that money itself—the pieces of paper—had symbolic rather than intrinsic value. Dick links Ricardo's rhetoric with Coleridge's discussion of the willing suspension of disbelief, since it is only by "supposing" the immutability of gold that Ricardo's solution is possible. In this way, Dick connects the adoption of the gold standard with Romantic literary aesthetics (ix). Although Dick describes the effects of the suspension of cash payments in distinctively Gothic terms, as an event that "signals the advent of a ghostly, insidious, and fragile currency," Gothic literature is conspicuously absent from his discussion (10).

The Suspension of Disbelief and the Explained Supernatural

The ability to suspend disbelief at individual and societal levels is closely associated with the rise both of the Gothic and of commercial society. Clery argues that the eighteenth century witnessed a profound shift in the way Britons understood truth and their relationship to it. She cites the phenomenon of the Cock Lane Ghost as a turning point in the social and cultural history of apparitions: a shift from credulity to skepticism. In early 1762, the haunting of a house in Cock Lane, London, by the ghost of a young girl named Fanny Lynes, who had supposedly been murdered, became a popular attraction that drew visitors from across the social classes, not just the superstitious masses but also the fashionable and sophisticated elite. The Cock Lane ghost quickly became a cultural phenomenon that inspired pamphlets, ballads, and theatrical tie-ins: "a ghost had become one of the most fashionable metropolitan diversions" (*Rise* 15–16). Whereas some visitors—including Samuel Johnson—believed the ghost was real and saw an opportunity to prove the existence of spirits (18), for most it was a spectacle, and indeed, the ghost was proven to be a hoax only weeks after it first appeared (32). The incident of the Cock Lane ghost

is significant to the history of Gothic fiction, Clery argues, because it marks a shift in how the public believed in ghosts and other supernatural phenomena. Walpole, for instance, visited Cock Lane after a night at the opera, suggesting that for him, the supposed haunting might have been merely another form of fashionable entertainment. Essentially, Clery argues, ghosts had become commodities, spectacles to be consumed like the opera or the theatre. The Cock Lane ghost created a new cultural phenomenon: the “spectre as spectacle” (25).

Like any aesthetic experience, though, the success of the Cock Lane Ghost spectacle depended on its ability to inspire “poetic faith”; that is, to maintain an illusion of truth that enabled the audience to suspend their disbelief and, at least momentarily, believe that the spectacle was real, even though they knew it was not. Indeed, as Clery notes, because of its similarity to a theatrical performance, the Cock Lane ghost “marginalized” the issue of belief: one’s enjoyment of the spectacle did not depend upon one’s belief in the ghost, just as one’s enjoyment of a play does not depend on one’s belief that the events witnessed are real (27). Clery describes this phenomenon in her analysis of the presence of tragic ghosts on the eighteenth-century stage:

The affirmation of the tragic ghost takes to the limit the suspension of disbelief on which all dramatic effect depends. It is not simply an object of terror, as a real ghost might be. Nor is it a source of the detached amusement to be derived from a mock ghost. The effect it produces is pleasurable in so far as the object is known to be fictitious and enjoyed as part of the dramatic artifice, but terrible that, simultaneously, disbelief is suspended far enough for the passions to operate *as if* the object were a reality. Given that there is no room for the supernatural in a rationalistic world, the making “real” of ghosts in the

response to dramatic fiction necessarily involves an enchanted sense of possibilities of the aesthetic, and of its separateness. (35)

The phenomenon that Clery describes is applicable to literature as well as the stage; in both cases, the “aesthetic” of the ghost on stage and on the page enables speculative or anti-rational thought because of its inherent contradictions. Rather than one rational truth, literary and theatrical ghosts embody the possibilities of multiple truths and holds them in productive tension.

Similarly, the aesthetic experience of “dreadful pleasure” so characteristic of Gothic literature—which Clery alludes to above as the “pleasurable” and “terrible” effect of the theatrical ghost—depends upon the novel’s ability to evoke emotion—such as terror—and the reader’s capacity to experience it empathetically. For the modern subject, though, a return to a state of credulity is impossible, and the only alternative is to simulate credulity by suspending disbelief (47). Because, like the novels of sensibility from which it draws, Gothic novels attempt to inspire feeling in their readers, they must present a fictional reality that is improbable enough to let the imagination take flight and just probable enough that disbelief can be suspended. This effect is not easy to achieve, and is not always successful, as is the case in *Otranto*. Walpole’s novel pushes credulity to the limit, asking readers to believe in the existence of a giant helmet falling from the sky, a portrait that comes to life and steps out of its frame, and a spectral, corpse-like hermit. Many readers found this to be all too much, including Clara Reeve. In the preface to *The Old English Baron*, her rewriting of *Otranto*, Reeve explains that her goal is to tone down the improbability that causes Walpole’s novel to fail.

it [*Otranto*] palls upon the mind, [...] the machinery is so violent, that it destroys the effect it is intended to excite. Had the story been kept within the utmost verge of probability, the effect had been preserved, without losing the least circumstance that excites or detains the attention. (138)

Its excessive use of the improbable, and the supernatural in particular, works to “destroy the work of imagination, and, instead of attention, excite laughter. I was both surprised and vexed to find the enchantment dissolved, which I wished might continue to the end of the book” (3). In other words, the excess improbability interferes with the reader’s ability to suspend disbelief. Although it was not successful for many readers, Walpole’s innovation—possibly, as Clery suggests, drawing on his encounter with the Cock Lane Ghost—is to exploit our credulity by pushing to its limits our capacity to suspend disbelief.

In the context of Gothic fiction, the suspension of disbelief is often evoked by the layering of multiple truths, as exemplified in the device of the explained supernatural. Adam Miller cogently defines this in relation to Radcliffe’s writing:

The term refers to the author’s habit of supplying natural causes to phenomena that appear, on first blush, to be the effect of some supernatural agent. Typically, the “reveal” occurs towards the end of the novel, leaving both readers and characters in suspense, only to deflate the story’s phantasmagorical possibilities with mundane—and sometimes improbable—explanations. The effect, according to some of Radcliffe’s contemporaries, is at best a vague disappointment and at worst a feeling of having been duped by cheap, gothic tricks. (528)

The explained supernatural continues to be regarded as a “cheap, gothic trick” by many modern critics; Terry Castle, for instance, calls it a “clumsy device” (xxiii). Although the explained supernatural deflates the sensation of fear through its unsatisfactory explanations, it would be a mistake to assume that this amounts to a failure. Rather it accomplishes a different kind of effect and evokes a different kind of fear, often substituting natural for supernatural horror, and evoking a feeling of uncanny dissociation or unsettling uncertainty, rather than visceral horror.

At its core, the narrative device of the explained supernatural is a palimpsestic layering of truths: the subjective truth of the perception of the seemingly supernatural event and the rational explanation. The aesthetic force of the device arises from the unresolved tension between these two truths, emphasized by the sensation of deflation or anticlimax experienced by many readers when the events are eventually explained. Just as Keats laments the aesthetic effects of Coleridge’s insistence on resolving inconsistencies, mysteries in Radcliffe’s novels are most pleasurable and compelling when they are left unresolved, and she exploits this fact to great effect, especially in *Udolpho*. Although it includes no truly supernatural elements, Emily is surrounded by mysteries and unanswerable questions: among other, the mysterious portrait she witnesses her father weeping over; his strange instructions to burn his personal papers after his death; the mysterious music floating in the air; the poem that appears carved into the gazebo; and the novel’s most famous mystery, the veiled picture. The supernatural atmosphere in the novel is a product of this complex of mysteries; this supernatural charge makes even mundane occurrences feel otherworldly.

Consider Emily’s encounter with the veiled picture in Castle Udolpho, an incident that has become iconic and which spawned its own chapbook, *The Veiled Picture; or the Mysteries of*

Gorgono (1802). This incident is highly mysterious—the anticipation of Emily’s pulling back the curtain is built up carefully, yet readers are denied a view of what Emily sees—the narrator refuses to describe it, and Emily immediately faints away. The mystery of what is behind the black veil is sustained for hundreds of pages (414 in my edition) and is only resolved at the very end of the novel. It was, the narrator tells us,

a human figure of ghastly paleness, stretched at its length, and dressed in the habiliments of the grave. What added to the horror of the spectacle, was, that the face appeared partly decayed and disfigured by worms, which were visible on the features and hands. [...] the figure before her was not human, but formed of wax. (Radcliffe, *Mysteries* 662)

Thus, what Emily believed to be a spectral or at least mysterious mouldering corpse is actually a *memento mori*, a natural object, but one that inspires religious awe and existential horror.¹⁹ For the reader, then, our perception of the veiled picture as an object of supernatural horror and mystery is overwritten by the knowledge of what Emily really saw: overwritten, but not erased, by the revelation of the truth. For her, the mystery is never resolved, since she never learns the truth about the object (Castle xiv). Emily’s experience of terror lingers, for her and for readers who participate empathetically in her encounter with it.

¹⁹ Perhaps because the revelation of what is behind the black veil feels so deflationary, readers and critics seem to lose interest in the object once it is revealed to be a wax figure. Not only is the figure horrible to look upon, though, but as a *memento mori* it has significance within this Gothic novel that is largely unexamined. One important precursor of the Gothic was the “Graveyard” school of poetry, exemplified by Thomas Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” (1751), which meditates upon the physical and metaphysical nature of death (see Davison, *Gothic*; Parisot; Quinn; Andrew Smith, *Gothic*). Additionally, one of the best known *memento mori* in Western art is the large and unsettling skull in Hans Holbein the Younger’s painting *The Ambassadors* (1533), which employs anamorphosis—a form of aesthetic distortion that, as I argue in the Introduction, is a useful analogy for how the Gothic does its cultural work.

An even clearer example of the explained supernatural is Emily and Dorothee's encounter with the apparition on the late Marchioness's bed. They see the bedclothes move and, as soon as her initial fright has passed, Emily tries to explain what she and Dorothee saw in a rational way, thinking that someone else must have snuck into the room undetected and is hiding there in order to frighten them "for a frolic," a belief she maintains even when Dorothee insists that she is the only person with access to the keys and that she locked the door behind them (Radcliffe, *Mysteries* 536–537). Although Emily cannot shake the sense of wonder at what she has witnessed, she determines to downplay her own fear for the sake of the Count and his family, insisting to herself that "time [...] may explain this mysterious affair" (537). Word of the supernatural encounter spreads, though, and a maid sees an apparition near the north apartments a short time afterward. Montoni's attempts to restore order to his household are ineffectual, since "fear had rendered their minds inaccessible to reason" (543). Contrary to the commonly held belief that Gothic heroines are slaves to their feelings, Emily embodies the mixture of reason and sensibility that most Gothic heroines either possess or aspire to. She cannot resolve the two truths of what she saw and what she knows to be true; instead, she holds both truths in mind until the secret is finally revealed (in just under a hundred pages, this time), and she discovers the ghost to be a flesh and blood smuggler. Although her fears of the supernatural are deflated, again the event retains a sense of natural horror, since Emily and Dorothee were potentially in real danger from the intruding bandito.

These examples of the explained supernatural demonstrate how essential the willing suspension of disbelief is to the Gothic's evocation of empathetic feeling, especially terror and horror. This capacity is one that must be developed, since, as Coleridge and Keats emphasize, it is intentional; and it is distinct from a simple state of belief because it requires an act of will on

the part of the reader, particularly in the context of the shifting boundaries between credulity and disbelief that Clery describes as characteristic of late eighteenth-century English thought. Deidre Lynch argues that this capacity was vital for readers as the realist novel emerged as the dominant literary form in the early nineteenth century, and that the Gothic thematizes its own fictionality in order to teach readers how to participate in the literary system of the realist novel: they “foreground that particular mental gymnastics” that enables us to believe in fiction as a separate realm from real life (“Early” 185). Given the importance of the willing suspension of disbelief for the credit-based economic system, and the Gothic’s preoccupation with individual experiences with it, we can extend Lynch’s argument in order to read Gothic novels as also helping readers to understand and participate in modern commercial society.

William Godwin’s *St. Leon* (1799) and the Philosopher’s Stone

Through its use of the motif of the philosopher’s stone, Godwin’s *St. Leon* exposes the importance of belief—and the suspension of disbelief—to the modern, credit-based economy. Published two years after the suspension of cash payments, *St. Leon* examines the consequences of money being unbounded by material limits and abstracted from material sources of value, as it became when paper money was no longer backed by stores of gold. *St. Leon* has long been recognized as a generic fusion, drawing from historical fiction, the confessional narrative, the picaresque, the travel narrative, and others (Flanders; Brewer, “William”; Maertz), and it is particularly recognized for its fusion of the Gothic and the philosophical novel (Lévy). William Brewer notes that Godwin immersed himself in Gothic fiction before writing *St. Leon* (“Introduction” 20), and this influence is clearly visible: in addition to the motifs of surveillance, pursuit, and imprisonment (see Lévy) that it shares with Godwin’s first novel, *Caleb Williams*,

St. Leon is an important example of the Rosicrucian strand of Gothic fiction, influencing Percy Shelley's *Zastrozzi* (1810) and *St. Irvyne; or, The Rosicrucian* (1811), Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Maturin's *Melmoth*, and Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *Zanoni* (1842) (38). The novel is also notable as the originator of the "longevity narrative," which may be considered an early form of time-travel fiction, and of the Gothic figure of the alchemist (Charise 908; Brewer, "Introduction"; Tracy). The alchemist figure seems particularly important within the Godwin–Shelley circle, appearing in Percy Shelley's two Gothic fictions listed above, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and "The Mortal Immortal" (1833) in addition to *St. Leon*.²⁰ In spite of all this, and perhaps because it is more ponderous and less gripping than *Caleb Williams*, *St. Leon* is not widely read or studied. Although several critics note that Godwin likely drew on the Gothic in order to attract a wider readership for his book (Flanders; Brewer, "Introduction"; Lévy), Wallace Austin Flanders argues that one of its greatest innovations is its use of the supernatural and other elements characteristic of the Gothic to heighten the novel's philosophical elements (533).

Unlike *Caleb Williams*, though, which has an obvious connection with Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and its Influence on Morals and Happiness* (1793), the place of *St. Leon* within Godwin's body of work and within contemporary philosophical debates is a bit more obscure. Andrea Charise argues convincingly for reading the novel alongside Godwin's "Of Health, and the Prolongation of Life," published as an appendix to *Political Justice*. Many critics also situate the novel within Godwin's debate with Robert Malthus on the subject of population and scarcity, pointing out that Malthus published *An Essay on the Principle of*

²⁰ Tracy lists only a two instances of alchemy in her index (202), including Clara Reeve's *The Exiles, or, Memoirs of the Count de Cronstadt* (1788), which predates *St. Leon* but includes alchemy only incidentally, and in James Hogg's *The Three Perils of Man, or, War, Women and Witchcraft. A Border Romance* (1822).

Population (1798) as a response to Godwin's appendix, and *St. Leon* was published a year later (Brewer, "William" and "Introduction"; Charise; Collings; Crump). By 1799, the Gothic had long been hybridized with the genres of moral, political, and economic philosophy, although it was, as William Hazlitt notes in reference to *Caleb Williams*, "a new and startling event in literary history for a metaphysician to write a popular romance" (145). *St. Leon* is distinct—if not unique, since Wollstonecraft's novels do this too—in its function as critique of the author's own philosophical ideas. As numerous critics note, and as Godwin mentions himself in the preface to the novel, *St. Leon*'s idealization of domestic affection corrects one of the most contentious ideas in *Political Justice*. Godwin argued that "justice, pure, unadulterated justice" would call for a man to save Archbishop François Fénelon²¹ over a chambermaid, even if she were his wife or mother (in later editions, a valet), since personal relationships do not alter the value of a person within society (*Enquiry* 82–83). Beyond correction, though, several critics identify a more complex relationship between Godwin's philosophical and fictional works. As I discuss in Chapter 5, and as Tilottama Rajan notes, the intersections between theory and fiction in the works of Godwin and Wollstonecraft highlight the textuality of their political theory. Moreover, Godwin's novels are extensions of the kind of thought experiment he performed in the Fénelon anecdote. Several critics describe *St. Leon* as an imaginative space in which Godwin could enact or play out his theories in fictional form: through his novels, Godwin "tested out his theoretical ideas in the contrived environment of fiction" (Batsaki 175; Charise; Collings; Flanders). Most of these analyses read *St. Leon* as an testing ground for working through Godwin's revised ideas about domestic affections, although social-economic concerns are an important thread throughout. Although many mention the importance of the Gothic as enabling the free reign of

²¹ Fénelon was the author of *Les aventures de Télémaque, fils d'Ulysse* [The Adventures of Telemachus, Son of Ulysses] (1699).

imagination necessary for such speculative inquiry, these discussions tend to focus on the ability of the philosopher's stone to confer immortality through an *elixir vitae*. Here, I focus instead on the philosopher stone's other ability, that of generating an infinite supply of gold, and how this permits a speculative inquiry into the nature of money and the importance of credit—belief—for its proper functioning.

Although Brewer and other critics contend that the Gothic elements are introduced into *St. Leon* along with the stranger, Zampieri, others have pointed out that one of the core conflicts in the novel is also the core conflict of the Gothic: that conflict between ancient (feudal) social and economic values and those of modern commercial society (see Brewer, "Introduction"). Critics have read this conflict in various ways in the novel, such as through the shift from alchemy, associated with feudalism, to modern chemistry, associated with commerce (Maertz); and a shift from feudal historical rootedness to modern rootlessness (Kaiserman). Most relevant to this discussion is the vein of criticism that considers *St. Leon*'s interrogation of economic transformation: from feudalism and its associated values of chivalric generosity to commercialism and its tendency towards avaricious self-interest (Brewer, "William" and "Introduction"; Sue Chaplin; Maertz; Rajan; Weston). A particularly influential argument is Justine Crump's contention that *St. Leon* depicts gaming as a symptom of this social shift, in which the gaming table substitutes for the field of battle, and the gambler's motives shift from displaying honour and generosity to indulging his avarice.²² Batsaki takes up the idea of gaming in relation to scarcity and probability, positing the market as the "reality principle" of the commercial world (188). In his gaming and his use of the philosopher's stone—both of which

²² Although Crump makes this point in relation to *St. Leon* specifically, the idea of the gaming table as a substitute for the battlefield is related to the general shift from feudal to commercial society, as discussed in the Introduction and by Taylor and Clery (*Feminization*), among others.

generate wealth that exists outside the formal economic system (Crump)—St. Leon alienates himself from the economy and from society by violating the market law of scarcity, as well as the natural laws of life and death (Sue Chaplin; Charise).

In addition to engaging with characteristic Gothic themes, the first part of the novel involves natural—as opposed to supernatural—horror as a consequence of St. Leon’s intemperate gaming. Having fled with his family from Switzerland to Lake Constance, and recovering from a fever, St. Leon becomes aware that his family is starving and has, moreover, been giving him the majority of their food to aid his recovery. His reaction depicts their desperate poverty in Gothic terms. Crying “Horror, horror!” St. Leon declares they are “perishing by inches” and chides Marguerite for allowing him to consume hers and their children’s share of their food, comparing himself to a cannibal or vampire: “Why have I been suffered,” he asks, “with accursed and unnatural appetite, to feed on the vitals of all I love?” (Godwin, *St. Leon* 147).²³ His comparison of himself and Ugolino della Gherardesca²⁴ highlights their starvation as a kind of prison (147 n1), and his family as living corpses, wasting away within it. He laments, “I seemed to read the wan and emaciated traces of death in their countenances.” Death is stamped on Marguerite even more clearly: “Her colour was gone; her cheeks were sunk; her eye had the quickness and discomposure expressive of debility. I took hold of her hand, and found it cold, emaciated, and white” (148). Confronted, after this, with the refusal of his starving children to accept any of what little food they have left, that the others might have more, something snaps in St. Leon:

²³ See Chapter 4 for a discussion of vampirism and as a form of economic predation.

²⁴ Ugolino was a late thirteenth-century Italian noble who was imprisoned for treason along with his sons and grandsons; all were left to starve to death; he is featured in Dante’s *Inferno* (Godwin, *St. Leon* 147 n1).

Avarice descended, and took possession of my soul. Haunted, as I perpetually was, by images of the plague of famine, nothing appeared to me so valuable as wealth; nothing so desirable as to be placed at the utmost possible distance from want. An appetite of this kind is insatiable; no distance seems sufficiently great; no obstacles, mountains on mountains of gold, appear an inadequate security to bar us from the approach of the monster we dread. (151)

Again, St. Leon describes starvation and poverty in Gothic terms, as a haunting, monstrous figure. The avarice this dread inspires is itself horrific, since it is hyperbolic and “insatiable.” This moment, in which St. Leon sees his family consumed by want, and imagines that even “mountains of gold” would be insufficient to quell the avarice this monster has awoken in him, is an important context for his acceptance of the stranger’s secret. He does not make the decision idly, or merely out of vanity, but is motivated by first-hand knowledge of want. In this way, St. Leon’s experience with limitless wealth must be understood in relation to his painful encounter with extreme scarcity.

In some ways, the power granted by the philosopher’s stone—to create limitless wealth—is a Gothicization of inflation, more commonly described by the Romantics as devaluation. Inflation refers to an increase in the overall price of goods, as opposed to an increase of one good in relation to another, which Adam Smith and others argued had to do with relative scarcity and demand. In *The High Price of Bullion* (1810), for instance, Ricardo links the high price of gold to the deregulation and resulting depreciation of paper currency:

If in London, where Bank of England notes only are current, one million be added to the amount in circulation, the currency will become cheaper than elsewhere, or goods will become dearer. Goods will, therefore, be sent from the country to the London market, to be sold at the high prices, or which is much more probable, the country banks will take advantage of the relative deficiency in the country currency, and increase the amount of their notes in the same proportion as the Bank of England had done; prices would then be generally, and not partially affected. (35)

In essence, inflation has to do with the value of money: in general, as the amount of money circulating within the economic system increases, its purchasing power decreases, and the overall cost of goods rises. Although St. Leon's ability to create unlimited gold has the potential to reduce its value, his perceived lack of personal credit—the dishonour with which the mysterious gold stains his character—actually diminishes its value.

It is not the material qualities of the gold that St. Leon creates with the philosopher's stone or its quantity which affects its value; rather, it is a problem of signification. St. Leon's narration is frustratingly silent on the details of the stranger's secret: "My design in writing this narrative," he reminds us, "is not to teach the art of which I am in possession, but to describe the adventures it produced to me" (Godwin, *St. Leon* 185). We can assume, though, that the gold he produces is materially identical to the natural metal. St. Leon's adventures demonstrate the problem of the relativity of value, as discussed above: although gold is "the universal standard of value," its value is highly variable (Dick 2). When St. Leon's first attempt to bribe a jailor fails because he values honour and loyalty to his employer over wealth, he laments that "the power of money was subject to limitations, of which previously I had not been in the slightest degree

aware” (Godwin, *St. Leon* 248). In her discussion of gaming in the novel, Crump notes that the gaming table and the philosopher’s stone are both sites of exchange outside of normal economic channels, and for this reason, the wealth—or, more precisely, the value—they produce is in some sense unreal. The money is a signifier of wealth, but it is generated outside of regular economic processes, “subvert[ing] the proper channels of economic exchange” (401). Although Crump links this problem with usury, which likewise produces wealth from nothing, it is also relevant to paper money. This problem can also be understood in terms of signification, in that paper money unbacked by gold is a signifier without a signified: or, to borrow Jerrold Hogle’s term, a “ghost of a counterfeit” (“Ghost”). Although *St. Leon*’s supernatural gold is materially identical to natural gold, its mysterious origin strips it of its value in the marketplace, which is largely based on belief.

The nature of *St. Leon*’s wealth and the authenticity of his gold are challenged in various ways, but always at issue is the matter of its origin: its place within the legitimate economic system. It is first challenged by Gaspar de Coligny, a Frenchman visiting the court of Duke Maurice in Dresden at the same time that *St. Leon* visits there with his son Charles. Coligny refuses to recommend them to the Duke because he is not satisfied with *St. Leon*’s account of where his money came from. He remembers *St. Leon*’s misfortunes in France and has heard of his further misfortunes abroad, and asks for an explanation:

I dare say you can clear up the difficulty, and account for this second revolution in your fortune, upon which I shall then be the first to congratulate you. I cannot suspect a man, with your high descent and the illustrious character you formerly maintained, of any thing dishonourable. But you have not sufficiently considered the account we all owe to one

another, and the clearness of proceeding we are obliged to maintain, not only to our own hearts, but in the face of the world. (Godwin, *St. Leon* 204)

Coligny thus calls St. Leon to account, and his sympathetic acceptance of St. Leon's gaming losses suggest that it is not the nature of the explanation that most concerns him, but the fact of St. Leon having one at all. As it happens, he does not, having not imagined, apparently, that he would not have to justify his fortune beyond its mere existence, and shocked that the possession of wealth would be a means of staining his honour and his children's: "Was that which I had regarded as the instrument of their glory, to become the medium of their ignominy and disgrace?" (205). St. Leon's "first lesson," as he puts it, is that his honour and status in the world depend upon his personal credit, "account we all owe to one another." The lesson is driven home when he faces the same demand from Charles, who has been accused of being "the son of an adventurer and a sharper" (208) and cannot offer him an explanation either. He entreats him to be calm and offers the amount of his wealth as an antidote to the evil of its source, but Charles is not appeased:

"My wealth, boy, is unlimited, and can buy silence from the malicious, and shouts of applause from all the world. A golden key unlocks the career of glory, which the mean and the pennyless are never allowed to enter."

"I am not such a novice, as not to have heard the language of vice, though I never expected to hear it from a father. Poverty with integrity shall content me." (211)

Charles points out that, no matter the source of the wealth, if it necessitates acting dishonourably it is not worth having, a point with which St. Leon evidently disagrees, since he clings to the idea that the good he can do with that money outweighs the cost of bearing it. Interestingly, Charles does not question what his father means by his claim that his wealth is “unlimited,” and even if he thinks, as Coligny seems to do, that St. Leon is cheating at the gaming table, it is difficult to imagine where he thinks the fortune must come from. These challenges from Coligny and Charles, both initially sympathetic to St. Leon, reveal the most immediate problem created by the alchemical gold—because it exists without precedent, outside of the legitimate economic system in which all other money circulates, and thus cannot be explained, it does not confer the status that St. Leon thinks it does and therefore does not have the value that he thinks it will to him or his children. Instead, it decreases their social value by casting doubt upon their honour in a way that cannot be undone, as Charles points out, by the money itself.

This connection between the value of money and its origin relates closely to the nature of credit in the emerging commercial economy. As Margot Finn argues, macroeconomic histories focus on trade at a national or international scale, and thus elide the importance of microeconomic transactions, which were firmly embedded in social relationships (7). Indeed, as Finn notes, without formal financial instruments to evaluate the financial risk of extending credit to a particular person, credit was extended based on personal relationships and social markers that signified the ability to pay one’s debts, such as fine clothes, apparent social status, and personal reputation (9). For this reason, she argues, the notion of character, long tied to ideas of moral and social worth, took on new meaning as a measure of financial worth as well:²⁵

²⁵ Lynch discusses the changing nature and uses of literary characters in relation to the commercial economy at length, though focusing mainly on realist fictions (*Economy*).

Where early modern debt relations had been predicated on conceptions of mutual trust, modern consumer credit was shaped most decisively by notions of personal character. [...] Character functioned [...] in English culture more broadly, at once as the basis upon which lenders extended credit to borrowers and consumers and as a broader social and cultural measure of personal worth. Perceptions of personal worth, in turn, registered the successful use of goods and services obtained on credit to construct creditworthy characters. Credit thus reflected character, but also constituted it. (19)

Within this context, it is clear why St. Leon's character is such a strong determinant of the value of his money.

During his multiple imprisonments, St. Leon learns another important lesson about the nature of money: that he is wrong to assume that money can get him what he wants. Rather, its value is variable and contingent. When he is first in possession of the secret, he believes that money can solve any problem that confronts him: as he tells Charles, wealth can "buy silence from the malicious, and shouts of applause from all the world" (Godwin, *St. Leon* 211). When St. Leon is imprisoned for the first time, in Constance, upon suspicion of having murdered Zampieri, he feels certain that his reputation will protect him; and if not, his wealth will offer a means of escape, in that he can offer generous bribes to his keepers. Monluc, the French courtier who offers to look into St. Leon's case, lays bare his situation:

But your sudden wealth immediately after this disappearance, is especially material. It is a broad and glaring fact, that men cannot shut their eyes on, if they would. The chain and combination of events, that precedes systematically from link to link, is the criterion of

guilt and the protector of reputation. Your case, as it now stands, is scarcely to be termed equivocal: upon the supposition of your criminality all is plain and easy to be accounted for; upon any other supposition it appears an inscrutable mystery. (241)

Just as Coligny and Charles view the money as worthless or counterfeit because it has no apparent origin within the legitimate economic system, so too does Monluc conclude that the source of the money must be corrupt and that the money, and the honours it allows St. Leon to enjoy, are worthless. His reference to probability, “the chain and combination of events, that precedes systematically from link to link,” brings to mind Smith’s repeated references in *History of Astronomy* to “chains of events” that explain natural phenomena: causal links that, to extend his “imaginary machine” metaphor, move the gears in that system as a bicycle chain moves its wheels. These chains are often imaginary, such as the “invisible chain” posited to explain the movements of the planets when no other explanation was known, or the invisible hand (Adam Smith, “Essays” 76). The problem with St. Leon’s explanation, Monluc tells him, is that the causal chain linking his poverty and his newfound wealth is invisible, so the most logical explanation is that St. Leon is a criminal. St. Leon’s refusal to reveal the truth about the source of his wealth, either here or in any of the other scrapes in which he finds himself, is a bit of a mystery, as several critics have noted. Monluc’s argument that St. Leon has a moral obligation to clear his name, since “the secret of a villain no one is bound to observe,” is convincing, and yet St. Leon refuses to do so, even when his honour and that of his family is at stake (Godwin, *St. Leon* 242). One would imagine that St. Leon fears that his explanation is too incredible to be believed. Yet Marguerite guesses the secret and seems strangely unsurprised at the existence of such supernatural powers. Her offhand revelation of such an extraordinary discovery, and her

remark that “I am astonished that a conjecture so obvious should have offered itself to my mind so late,” leave us wondering why others—like Monluc—are not similarly able to guess the source of St. Leon’s wealth (225). Since nothing terrible happens to St. Leon after Marguerite learns the truth—at least, no supernatural vengeance falls upon him—St. Leon’s decision not to reveal his secret is apparently a matter of honour rather than strict necessity.

St. Leon’s final experiment is his most ambitious, and it positions him as a Smithian figure, building an economic system essentially from scratch in Buda, Hungary, a country decimated by centuries of war and privation. Whereas in his experiments in Italy and France, St. Leon used his gold to purchase the trappings of wealth and to attempt to buy his freedom from imprisonment, in Buda he consciously employs a different strategy, one in which he manipulates the economic system itself. He does this, he explains, because he recognizes that the wellbeing of the Hungarian people depends upon a functioning and sustainable economy. It is not raw wealth that they need, but rather the necessities and comforts that wealth can purchase, and the economic, social, and political structures that enable the wheels of this system to turn. He says,

I was aware that, in the strictness of the term, money was not wealth; that it could be neither eaten nor drunk; that it would not of itself either clothe the naked or shelter the houseless; and that it was unable, but by a circuitous operation, to increase the quantity of provisions or commodities that the country afforded. (363)

Here, St. Leon articulates the difference between money as a sign of wealth and wealth proper, and uses his money as a medium for building and transferring real wealth—food and shelter—rather than as a means of displaying empty signs of it. The “circuitous operations” that St. Leon

plans begins with hiring labourers to rebuild the country's infrastructure. With this "stimulus package" (Batsaki 187), he hopes to inject into the country a certain amount of money in order to stimulate trade as well as the infrastructure necessary for the economy and its subjects to become self-sufficient. He explains,

I was anxious to leave the rest of the great process of human accommodation to its course. While I employed labourers, and paid them their wages, there would be, in the mildest and most salutary mode, a continual influx of money into the market. The increase of the precious metals would give new alacrity to the operations of traffic; the buyers would come forward with double confidence; the venders would be eager to meet the activity and spirit of the demand. Ardour and hope would revisit the human mind.
(Godwin, *St. Leon* 364)

St. Leon demonstrates a significant understanding of the workings of political economics in his plan, articulating a view of an "imaginary machine" reminiscent of Smith's, in which individuals pursuing their own self-interest unknowingly and unintentionally contribute to growing the wealth of the nation. As well, St. Leon's plan indicates his belief that, given an initial input of capital, the economy of Hungary will regain its natural state of functionality, one that has been disrupted by conflict and neglect but which can be reinstated. Indeed, his assertion that, given the right stimulus, "the great process of human accommodation" will take "its course," indicates that he views a prosperous economy as a natural state of being, and the present state of the country as unnatural.

Of course, this experiment fails, like those that came before, because the wealth St. Leon attempts to transfuse into the economy of Buda is external to its—indeed, to any—economy. Much like a body that rejects a blood transfusion, the economic and social structure of Buda rejects St. Leon's attempts to resurrect it, as if recognizing his money as corrupt. Whereas his previous experiments were self-interested—designed to regain the honour of his family, the welfare of his children, or his bodily freedom—his experiment in Buda is largely altruistic. Although his motives are disinterested—he wants to “relieve and assist, to the utmost of my power, the inhabitants of the country in the extremity of their distress” (363)—his system is not built upon a blank slate, and the established political, social, and economic forces in Hungary resist his interference. His decision to assume the role of a merchant in order to disguise his true role in the country's economic rejuvenation is telling; he understands he must appear to be acting out of self-interest in order to deflect suspicion. One of the reasons his plan fails is that the bashaw does not believe that anyone would invest so much in Buda without an ulterior motive. Indeed, St. Leon's encounter with the misanthropic Bethlem Gabor emphasizes that St. Leon's experiment fails, not because his economic theory is unsound, but because the human subjects that comprise it are too immersed in the values of commercial society to believe that a man would act contrary to his own self-interest. At the same time, his experiment suggests that the invisible hand is a necessary component of the system, since his purposeful attempts to add to the nation's wealth—to act as the invisible hand—fail. His experience in Buda also shows how essential the force of self-interest is to economic systems and suggests that this is a universal truth, rather than, for example, a function of national character.

Although St. Leon's tale before Zampieri's appearance involves numerous natural horrors, up until that point it could be read as a sentimental novel rather than a Gothic one. St.

Leon's family has been saved from starvation by the justice delivered by the Swiss government when he arrives, so their salvation is due to the workings of civil justice rather than the supernatural. To what purpose, then, does Godwin employ the motif of the alchemist and his philosopher's stone? In his last book, *Lives of the Necromancers; or, An account of the most eminent persons in successive ages who have claimed for themselves or to whom has been imputed by others the exercise of magical powers* (1834), Godwin argues that humankind's ability to conceive of the past and the future, to work towards a better world, and to imagine what could be, are its greatest strengths. For this reason, it is important to understand our imaginative as well as our lived history:

The record of what actually is, and has happened in the series of human events, is perhaps the smallest part of human history. If we would know man in all his subtleties, we must deviate into the world of miracles and sorcery. To know the things that are not, and cannot be, but have been imagined and believed, is the most curious chapter in the annals of man. [...] It is here that man is most astonishing, and that we contemplate with most admiration the discursive and unbounded nature of his faculties. (vii)

Although these objects of belief—gods, witches, necromancers, and alchemists—are not real, our belief in them has real effects in the world. Moreover, we tend to forget that they are imaginary, and “we become the passive and terrified slaves of the creatures of our own imaginations” (xiv). Charise notes that Godwin's appendix is written in a speculative mode, as a philosophical musing about the conditions that would make immortality possible (919). Such speculation, she writes, “intends to productive confusion of the real and the imaginary by

attempting to traverse the epistemological distance between things as they are and things as they could, would, or should be” (918). Godwin’s evocation of the philosopher’s stone in *St. Leon* thus enables him to speculate, not unlike how he speculates about immortality in his appendix, about what would happen if the belief in the value of money were to fail. In doing so, however, he expresses a truth about things as they are: that the value of gold, and of money in general, is as imaginary as the philosopher’s stone.

In its disavowal of realism as a preferred literary mode, Romantic Gothic literature was a focal point for public debates about truth, imagination, and probability in the context of the emerging commercial society (E. J. Clery, *Rise*; Lynch, “Early”). As such, it provided what Lynch calls a “training ground” for new ideas” (“Early” 184–185; Batsaki 175). Being a Gothic novel, the “environment” of *St. Leon* is not just fictional, but hyperbolically so, employing the supernatural (or, more precisely, science fiction) motif of alchemy to ask what would happen if economic ideas were pushed beyond the limits of reality. Dick notes that gold provided a “natural limit” or “real boundary” that circumscribed the limits of “financial speculation” (2). *St. Leon* removes this “natural limit,” to allow unlimited fictional and financial speculation within the literary and imaginary field of the novel, which foregrounds the role of social relationships and social perceptions in the functioning of the economy. Although in *St. Leon* it is alchemical gold that functions as a sign of value divorced from its material origin (that is, natural gold), we can easily transpose *St. Leon*’s experiences to Godwin’s own day in which it was paper money that had become a floating symbol of wealth, transformed into an object of value, not through chemical alchemy, but through the alchemy of imagination.

Conclusion

As Kathryn Sutherland notes in her introduction to *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith's economic system was part of a broader and multifaceted study of human life and experience that did not recognize generic boundaries between economics and philosophy, or even economic writing and fiction, to the extent that we see them today, an idea that Poovey discusses at length in relation to Romantic writing in general (*Genres*). Rather, Smith's theory presents "an ambitious science of man, comprising enquiries into human nature, social relations, ethics, the nature of progress, the origins of language, the history of institutions, religion, the maintenance of government, and the history of astronomy" (Sutherland xl). Indeed, this idea that the boundaries between things are illusory is essential to Romantic thought, including the concepts of Romantic irony and the suspension of disbelief. According to Dick, mainstream Romantic literature works to "normalize" the problem of the contingency of value, something necessary for the working of the modern credit economy (ix). As this chapter demonstrates, however, Gothic literature depicts a world in which those boundaries are transgressed: in which the workings of the suspension of disbelief are exposed and challenged, in what amounts a form of resistance against the naturalization of the status quo. Gothic literature finds horror in this state of suspension that is unnatural, yet also inescapable. In this context, understanding the economy as an "imaginary machine" gets at the idea that the economy is an imaginary construct. It is not natural, but created, and it is sustained only by our continued belief in it. Recognition of this is important because it means we can alter the machine and how it works. We are its engineers. Courtemanche points out that Smith imagines a system that functions as if by natural law, and as if human behaviour were as rational and predictable as the movements of the stars (24). the

invisible hand, though, does not belong to a singular power—a “celestial designer” (Sutherland xxxvii)—but to the community of individuals who imagine it into being.

Chapter 4: Dreadful Debts: The Economic Origins of the Literary Vampire

The vampire is one of the most canonical and persistent of Gothic figures, familiar today in its post-modern incarnation in popular literature and film, including Anne Rice's *The Vampire Chronicles* (1976–2018), Joss Whedon's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003), and Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* series (2005–2008). Most histories of the literary vampire trace its lineage through Victorian vampire tales, such as Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872), and James Malcolm Rymer's *Varney the Vampire* (1845–1847)²⁶ to a point of origin in John Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819). Polidori's Lord Ruthven is generally regarded as the first modern literary vampire, distinct from Romantic vampires in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Christabel* (1816), Byron's *The Giaour* (1813), and Robert Southey's *Thalaba, the Destroyer* (1801), which seem more closely related to the folkloric vampires of Hungary and Serbia as described in Antoine Augustin Calmet's influential *Dissertations upon the Apparitions of Angels, Dæmons, and Ghosts, and Concerning the Vampires of Hungary, Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia* (1759). These romanticized and sexualized vampires seem to have little to do with political economy, but all are ultimately descended from an account of a Hungarian vampire named Arnold Paul that appeared in the *London Journal* in 1732.

Throughout the rest of the eighteenth century, the figure of the vampire circulated through the public press, novels, and the cultural imagination as a figure of political-economic predation and

²⁶ The Authorship of *Varney the Vampire* is unconfirmed. Some evidence suggests that it was written by Thomas Peckett Prest, but the majority suggests it was written by Rymer (Bleiler ix).

exploitation. Here, I trace the circulation of the Arnold Paul story to situate the roots of the literary vampire within the discourse of political economy. To this end, I focus on two novels that engage with political-economic vampirism that were published before Polidori's tale: Frances Burney's *Cecilia, or Memoirs of an Heiress* (1782) and Charlotte Smith's *Marchmont* (1796). In *Cecilia*, the heiress heroine's guardian, Mr. Harrell, is desperately in debt and preys upon her inheritance to postpone his own ruin. Although Juliet McMaster refers to him in passing as a vampire, his vampirism is not explored further in her study or in any other one to date (221). The vampirism implicit in Burney's novel is made explicit in Smith's, which features a villainous attorney actually named Mr. Vampyre. Notably, both novels associate vampirism with debt, drawing on the connection between the national debt, exploitative taxation, and vampirism that was established in an article in *The Craftsman* from 1732 that draws on the Arnold Paul story to describe the phenomenon of "political vampyres" (D'Anvers). The national debt had, by the end of the eighteenth century, become a fixture of political economy and a continuing source of anxiety, but the emerging credit-based commercial society established the new phenomenon of widespread and persistent personal debt, the corollary of the expansion of personal credit (discussed in Chapter 3). *Cecilia* and *Marchmont* are not usually read as Gothic novels, but here I argue that they engage with the idea of "political vampyres" on an individual, rather than national scale, drawing on the Gothic in order to depict debt as a monstrous, predatory force.

The Age of Debt

The eighteenth century in Britain saw the Age of Enlightenment and the Age of Sensibility, but it was also an age of debt. P. G. M. Dickson describes the period between the Revolution of 1688

and the Seven Years War (1756–1763) as a “Financial Revolution,” characterized by the systematization of government borrowing that enabled England to gain military victory over France and secure its dominance in global trade. This system included networks of local banks, the development of new financial instruments for borrowing and investing, and most significantly, the founding of the Bank of England in 1694 and the establishment of the national debt as a lasting fixture of the political and economic landscape. Many objected fiercely to the national debt for moral, political, and financial reasons: as Julian Hoppit points out, “the national debt could be likened to planting usury at the heart of civil society, to line the pockets of a few financiers. It was complained by some, especially in the Nine Years War, that the national debt was more concerned to tie creditors to the regime [of William III] than in finding money” (*Land* 128). Under William and Mary, financing the Nine Years War (1688–1697) resulted in a national debt of £17.3 million; during the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–1714), it ballooned to £36.2 million (123). Because the amount of government debt generated through this new system was too large to be paid through taxation alone, it necessitated a system of government borrowing to service it (Dickson 11). As Alexander Dick describes (and as discussed in relation to credit in Chapter 3), by 1797 the national debt was so large that banks no longer had enough coin on hand to back the amount of credit in circulation. The result was the suspension of cash payments, and as Dick discusses at length, this shift in economic practice had far-reaching implications for politics and culture—including literature—since money was no longer linked in imagination with a physical object (chapter 1). From the ballooning of the national debt in the first few decades of the century to the emergence of the consumer economy and entrenchment of personal debt near the end, debt is an essential feature of the century and of course its literature, on both a macro (national) scale and a micro (individual) one.

Issues of credit and debt and related issues such as speculation and taxation were central to the eighteenth-century British cultural imagination as well as its economic history. The South Sea Bubble, a rapid inflation and deflation in the price of stock in the South Sea Company in the 1720,²⁷ for example, highlighted how economic events affected everyday life (5). The “continuous and violent” public debates about the national debt revealed how debt was restructuring power relations between the nation and its citizens: the power lenders held over the government were regarded by some as “a revolutionary blow to ancient principles of social order” (D. G. Campbell 135; Hoppit, *Land* 126). Furthermore, the financial manipulations and complex maneuvers necessary for arranging and maintaining the public debt were a source of confusion and suspicion, making it “a popular symbol of both financial wizardry and dangerous innovation” (D. G. Campbell 135).

The notion of debt was, then, complex and multifaceted, and this complexity is expressed in representations of debt in Romantic Gothic fiction. A debt, by definition, is something that is owed: an obligation to do or pay something to someone else. It is this sense of impending payment that is most closely linked with Gothic dread. In real life and realist fiction, carrying and paying a debt may be inconvenient, but it does not inspire existential terror. In Gothic fiction, though, financial debts are often conflated with metaphysical ones, as in Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764; as discussed in Chapter 1). Debt is even more clearly linked with metaphysical dread in Ann Radcliffe’s *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), in which Pierre de La Motte and his family flee from their home in Paris to evade “his creditors and the persecution of the laws” (1). La Motte loses his fortune at the gaming table, and takes to

²⁷ The South Sea Company was held a trade monopoly in most of South America, but was primarily in the business of selling stock in order to reduce the national debt. A detailed account of the South Sea Bubble and its repercussions can be found in P. G. M. Dickson’s *The Financial Revolution in England* (chapters 5 and 6), and an evaluation of its historical effects in Julian Hoppit’s “The Myth of the South Sea Bubble.”

defrauding other gamblers in order to recover it. The novel is infused with the dread La Motte feels at the prospect of being captured, and begins with his frantic flight through the countryside in the middle of the night, in which he is driven by “the terror of pursuit” (3). Continuing their flight after they fortuitously rescue Adeline, the novel’s heroine, from her captors, La Motte compulsively peers from the carriage window, “and often did imagination suggest to him the sounds of distant pursuits” (9–10). Although La Motte’s fears are not completely unfounded—after settling at the abandoned abbey in Fontanville Forest, the servant Peter encounters men in the nearby town of Auboine who are looking for La Motte (50)—the extreme terror and dread he feels at the prospect of being arrested for his debts characterize the debt itself as predatory and monstrous.

“Political Vampyres”

The focus of this chapter, though, is a different sort of predatory monster: the literary vampire, which originated in Eastern European folktales and whose lineage is closely associated with taxation and debt. The Arnold Paul story mentioned above is widely understood as the ultimate source for the English literary vampire (see, for example, Maynard; Senf); Katharina Wilson traces the history of the word “vampire” in English and notes that its emergence coincides with the “vampire epidemic” of which Arnold Paul was a part (583). The Arnold Paul story was circulated throughout the public press in a variety of contexts that are examined for the first time here. The following history of the literary vampire, as it is employed as a rhetorical tool for discussing and understanding political economy—a “political vampyre”—demonstrates that, by the late eighteenth century, when *Cecilia* and *Marchmont* were written, vampirism was well established as a metaphor for describing predatory economic practices.

The Arnold Paul story as recounted in the *London Journal* appears in a piece called “Extract of a Private Letter from Vienna,” which is printed side by side with “A Caveat against Bubbling,” a piece that warns of the consequences if the “*wild Projects*” of the 1720s are forgotten and the types of “*Visionary Schemes to gain Wealth*” that brought about the South Sea Bubble are allowed to be repeated (Civicus 1).²⁸ This piece provides an important context for the vampire report and may well have influenced Caleb D’Anvers’ interpretation of the tale.

The report in the *London Journal* is prefaced by a brief introduction that describes the phenomenon as “a sort of Prodigy [...] namely, of Dead Bodies sucking, as it were, the Blood of the Living; for the latter visibly dry up, while the former are filled with Blood” (“Extract” 2). It acknowledges that “The Fact at first Sight seems to be impossible and even ridiculous; but the following is a true Copy of a Relation attested by unexceptionable Witnesses, and sent to the Imperial Council of War” (2). What follows is a report dated January 7, 1732, from Medreyga, Hungary, describing the expedition to investigate reports of a local man turned vampire: Arnold Paul (presumably an Anglicized version of his name) (figure 1).

Figure 1 Transcription of “Extract of a Private Letter from Vienna”

We have received certain Advice of a sort of Prodigy lately discovered in Hungary, at a Placed called Heyducken, situate on the other Side of the Tibiscus, or Teys; namely, of Dead Bodies sucking, as it were, the Blood of the Living; for the latter visibly dry up, while the former are filled with Blood. The Fact at first Sight seems to be impossible and even ridiculous; but the

²⁸ This piece appears to contain the first (or, at least, first surviving) usage of “vampyre” or “vampire” in an English periodical, based on my search of Eighteenth-Century Collections Online (ECCO) and the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection.

following is a true Copy of a Relation attested by unexceptional Witnesses, and sent to the Imperial Council of War.

Medreyga in Hungary, Jan. 7, 1732

Upon a current Report, that in the Village of Medreyga certain Dead Bodies (here called *Vampyres*) had killed several Persons by sucking out all their Blood, the present Enquiry was made by the Honourable Commander in Chief; and Capt. Goschutz of the Company of Stallater, the *Hardnagi* Bariacrar, and the Senior Heyduke of the Village, were severally examined: Who unanimously declared, that about 5 Years ago a certain Heyduke named Arnold Paul was killed by the Overturning of a Cart Load of Hay, who in his Life-time was often heard to say, that he had been tormented near Caschaw, and upon the Borders of Turkish Servia, by a *Vampyre*; and that to extricate himself, he had eaten some of the Earth of the *Vampyres* Graves, and rubbed himself with their Blood.

That 20 or 30 Days after the Decease of the said Arnold Paul, several Persons complained that they were tormented ; and that, in short, he had taken away the Lives of four Persons. In order to put a Stop to such a Calamity, the Inhabitants of the Place, after having consulted their *Hardnagi*, caused the Body of the said Arnold Paul to be taken up, 40 Days after he had been dead, and found the same to be fresh and free from all manner of Corruption; the he bled at the Nose, Mouth, and Ears, as pure and florid Blood as ever was seen; and that his Shroud and Winding Sheet were all over bloody; and lastly, his Finger and Toe Nails were fallen off and new ones grown in their room.

As they observed from all these Circumstances, that he was a *Vampyre*, they according to Custom drove a Stake through his Heart; at which he gave a horrid Groan, and lost a great deal of Blood. Afterwards they burnt his Body to Ashes the same day, and threw them into his Grave.

These good Men say farther, that all such as have been tormented or killed by the *Vampyres*, become *Vampyres* when they are dead ; and therefore they treated several other dead Bodies as they had done Arnold Paul's, for tormenting the Living.

Signed,

Batrueer, *first Lieutenant of the Regiment of Alexander.*

Flickhenger, *Surgeon Major to the Regiment of Furstemburch.*

—three other Surgeons.

Gurschitz, *Captain of Stallath.*

Source: Unsigned. "Extract of a Private Letter from Vienna." *The London Journal* (1720), 11 Mar. 1732, p. 2. 17th–18th Century Burney Collection Newspapers.

The Arnold Paul story was partially reprinted in *The Craftsman* for May 20, 1732,²⁹ framed with a story signed by Caleb D'Anvers (a pseudonym of Nicholas Amhurst) that recounts a conversation between himself, a young woman, and a physician about the veracity of the story. The young woman argues that the tale is believable because it is detailed and related by reputable and authoritative witnesses. The physician counters with an invective against "romantick Stories," which his "*young, female Opponent*" counters with a reminder that the physician himself lately believed and tried to convince others to believe the story of Mary Toft, "the famous Rabbit-Woman of Godalmin," who claimed to have given birth to rabbits (1). The piece in *The Craftsman* thus mediates the original account of Arnold Paul in the *London Journal* by

²⁹ *The Craftsman* (1726–1752) was an anti-Walpole newspaper established by Lord Bolingbroke and William Pulteney with Nicholas Amhurst as its editor, who published under the name Caleb D'Anvers. It became "the unofficial mouthpiece of the opposition" (Varey 58).

relating it to other tales of the impossible circulating in the press and placing it within the framework of public debates about reason, credulity, medical science, and the limits of possibility. Being reluctant to doubt the young woman, D'Anvers resolves the problem of credulity and belief by reading the vampire as a political metaphor:

A Man, who hath any Degree of Complaisance, is loth to contradict a *pretty Girl*, who forestalls his Judgment in so agreeable a Manner. I desired therefore to read over the Account very attentively before I gave my Opinion upon it, and clapping on my *political Spectacles*, I soon discovered a secret Meaning in it, which I was in Hopes would moderate the Dispute.
(1).

D'Anvers reads the tale as an allegory in which Hungary is being preyed upon by the Turks and the Germans, a reading he justifies by noting that it is from “the Eastern Part of the World, which hath been always remarkable for writing in the allegorical Style” (1). He then relates his metaphor to existing ones about leeches: “what, I pray, is a more common Phrase for a *ravenous Minister*, even in this Part of the World, than a *Leech*, or a *Blood-sucker*, who preys upon human Gore, and fattens Himself upon the Vitals of his Country?” (1). Leeches are also referenced in the piece’s epigraph from Horace: “Non missura Cutem, nisi pelna Cruoris Hirudo” [“a leech that will not leave the skin until it is gorged with blood”] (1; J. R. Stone 76). By relating the political vampire metaphor to existing political rhetoric, D'Anvers justifies his reading of the Arnold Paul story and draws connections between the politics of Turkey and Germany and those of England.

D’Anvers’s vampire metaphor differs from the leech metaphor, though, in that it employs the supernatural. Although their blood-sucking is unpleasant, leeches are natural creatures and have certain medicinal functions. Vampires are unnatural and malevolent. A leech’s bloodsucking is limited to its own lifespan; the political vampire’s spreads unnaturally beyond the boundaries of life and death. The trope of the “ravenous Minister” who grows fat upon the backs of his subjects is thus transformed and made new in the form of the political vampire. D’Anvers’s reading of the Arnold Paul tale further emphasizes the significance of its unnatural associations, particularly his description of

a plundering Minister [who] carries his Oppressions beyond the Grave and continues to torment Those, whom he leaves behind Him, by anticipating the *publick Revenue*; and entailing a Perpetuity of *Taxes* and *Gabels* upon the People, which must drain the Body politick by Degrees of all its Blood and Spirits. (1)

D’Anvers draws a clear link between the vampiric activity of the “Prodigy” observed in Hungary and Walpole, the Prime Minister and foremost “plundering Minister” in England: just as the vampire steals the living spirit of his victim in order to prolong his life unnaturally, so does the English minister steal the life blood of the “Body politick”—its wealth—by “anticipating the publick Revenue,” that is, going into debt. D’Anvers argues further that the idea of the vampiric curse spreading to its victims is also “perfectly agreeable to my System; for those Persons, who groan under the Burthens of *such a Minister*, are often obliged to sell, or mortgage their Estates, and therefore may be said, in a proper Sense, to torment their *unhappy Posterity* in the same Manner” (1). D’Anvers thus links vampirism with debt and other encumbrances upon

estates that are passed through generations via inheritance, tracing the evils of “ravenous Ministers” beyond the grave. Moreover, in its evocation of the dead exerting their will upon the living—particularly in relation to property—D’Anvers’s metaphor resonates with the idea of mortmain (as discussed in Chapter 1). This interpretation also makes sense of the idea that Arnold Paul was “tormented” before his death, a detail that the original tale does not elaborate upon, and suggests that to save himself, Paul passed on the torment to his own victims.

D’Anvers continues his interpretation by noting that Paul’s body’s lack of decomposition is consistent with an allegorical interpretation since “it is the *Mind*, not the *Body*, which is the Author of all Wickedness; and a Man can no more carry his *bad Qualities*, than his *Riches* with Him into the Grave. He leaves his *Corruption*, as well as the *Fruits* of it, in this World, to stink in the Nostrils of his Posterity” (1). Evoking the conflict between the authority of landed wealth and the new monied interest, D’Anvers further argues that many instances of vampires can be found in his own country, in the public and the private sphere, although the way they spread ruin is different: “I look upon all *Sharpers*, *Usurers* and *Stockjobbers* in this Light, as well as *fraudulent Guardians*, *unjust Stewards*, and the *dry Nurses of great Estates*” (1). Those with more political might and more wealth have greater powers: “Nothing but the Power of a *Tr[easur]y* can raise up a *compleat Vampyre*; and *England* hath seen many such within a Century, or two” (2). D’Anvers acknowledges that the manner in which the body was secured seems less figurative, but argues that driving a stake through the heart is not unlike the custom of staking those who die by suicide, a superstitious practice “designed only as a Mark of Ignominy, to deter others from the same Practices.” The blood that oozed from the body after the staking works, he argues, to “refund the *corrupt Wages*, which He had suck’d out of the Veins of his

Countrymen” (1). He concludes, however, that a better way of stopping the vampire would be to prevent its influence from spreading in the first place:

I leave it to be considered whether instead of driving a Stake through the Body of a *corrupt Treasurer*, when He is dead, it would not be more adviseable to administer a *certain, Parliamentary Emetick*, which will make Him disgorge all his ill-gotten Wealth, whilst He is alive. I look upon This as the most effectual Method to destroy a *great, overgrown Vampyre*, and secure our Posterity from his tormenting Oppressions, when an End is put to his natural Life, and his Carcass is rotten in the Ground. (2)

D’Anvers uses the political vampire metaphor to argue for stopping government corruption before its effects have a chance to spread to future generations. He suggests that, rather than wait for the vampire to die, we should force him to “disgorge all his ill-gotten Wealth” and prevent the corruption—“his tormenting Oppressions”—from spreading. Essentially, D’Anvers identifies those who use their political power to economically exploit others—including the taxpayers—as vampires, an influential metaphor for economic predation with a distinctly Gothic inflection.

The Arnold Paul story circulated in a number of other publications—including the surviving examples described here—for decades after its first appearance. It was reprinted in the *Grub Street Journal* just five days after its first telling, on March 16, 1732 (“Friday”). Three days after D’Anvers’s piece appeared in *The Craftsman*, on March 23, *The Daily Courant* printed “The Craftsman’s Apology,” a satirical apology from “Honest Caleb” for his article in *The Craftsman* that points out that the two ministers D’Anvers praises in “Political Vampyres,” the Earls of

Godolphin and Oxford,³⁰ did not in fact die poor, and that not all who die rich are corrupt.

“Whether this *Imposition* on the *Publick*,” it states, “or the being possessed of *exorbitant Grants* from the *Crown*, do most properly entitle your Patron to the *Denomination* of a *Vampyre*, I leave you to explain, in your next *Conversation* upon this Subject” (1).³¹ Two days after that, on May 25, the *Daily Courant* ran another response to the D’Anvers piece, this time a satirical poem ridiculing belief in the supernatural called “To Caleb D’Anvers on The Craftsman of 20 May, 1732” (figure 2), which calls D’Anvers a “Political Night-Mare” (1).

Figure 2 Transcription of “To Caleb D’Anvers on The Craftsman of 20 May, 1732.

To CALEB D’ANVERS,

ON THE

CRAFTSMAN of May 20, 1732.

SINCE such mean Subjects can your *Spleen* inspire,

As *Chairs* that *turn*, and your new vamt *Vampyre*;

For once, good *Caleb*, listen to a Muse,

Who in such Tracts a Theme as low pursues.

Our *Cornish Peasants*, as *Hungarians* dull,

Whene’er they *sleep* too soon on *Bellyfull*,

Are apt to feel across their Breast a Stitch;

Which they impute to some old neighb’ring *Witch*:

³⁰ Sidney, Earl of Godolphin, led the Treasury from 1690–1696 and from 1702–1710, and was instrumental in the War of the Spanish Succession (Hoppit, *Land* 126). Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford, was a long-time political enemy of Henry St. John, Lord Bolingbroke (see note 6) who defected from the Whigs to the Tories and led the Treasury from 1711–1714. Paul Langford and Julian Hoppit offer detailed accounts of this political context (Langford, *Polite* chapter 2; Hoppit, *Land* chapter 4).

³¹ The “patron” here referred to is no doubt Bolingbroke, who founded the vehemently anti-Walpole periodical *The Craftsman* with William Pulteney in 1726. Bolingbroke contributed numerous pieces to the paper (“Craftsman”).

And, as the Pain torments them in their Sides,
 They curse the *Weight* with which the *Beldam* rides;
 Breathe short from Fear, while the weak Pulse beats low;
 And sigh and struggle with fantastic Woe.
 Tho' plain, my Story's true —— Then let us try
 It, as you've done the *Vampyres*, to apply:
 For *Cornish Peasants* —— put a *Land at Peace*,
O'ercharg'd with *Plenty*, and *grown sick* with *Ease*;
Factions from thence, like *Indigestions* bred,
 Oppress the *Stomach*, and disturb the *Head*:
 Vain Fears distract the *Heart*, the *Mind* corrode,
 And tire the *Spirits* with a fancy'd Load.
 If aptly thus Comparisons may hit,
 Each *Craftsman* then is but a weekly Fit,
 Rais'd by ill *Fumes* of *Anger* and *Despair*;
 And *D'Anvers* a —— POLITICAL NIGHT-MARE.
 Source: “*To Caleb D'Anvers on The Craftsman of 20 May, 1732.*” *Daily Courant*, 25 May 1732,
p. 1. 17th–18th Century Burney Collection Newspapers, [https://www.gale.com/c/seventeenth-
 and-eighteenth-century-burney-newspapers-collection](https://www.gale.com/c/seventeenth-and-eighteenth-century-burney-newspapers-collection).

This poem in the *Daily Courant* was followed two days later, on May 27, by a satirical letter
 entitled “To the Author of the Daily Courant,” which mocks the self-indulgent style of the
 D'Anvers piece (Phileleutherus). This piece also turns the tables on D'Anvers by professing him
 to be one of the “prodigies” he describes, a suitable companion for Mary Toft:

This same Creature's bearing the Name of *Caleb D'Anvers* is a Male-Monster, and can infinitely exceed the *Godalmin* Rabbit Woman in bringing different Species from the same Stock. For this *Miracle Monger* can change innumerable Sorts of *Beings* into contrary Species, turn *Prime Ministers* into *Vampyres*, *Parliaments* into a *Nest of Blood suckers*, *Foreign Princes* into *English Exchequer Leeches*, wise and honest *Statesmen* and *Politicians* into *Blunderers*, *Plunderers*, and *living Oppressors*. In short, this wonderful Piece of Nature has the Supernatural Power not merely of sucking Men's Blood, which is a Trifle to what he can do, but he can suck Men's Reason away [...] (1)

The gist of these responses, exemplified by the piece in the *Daily Courant*, is to satirize D'Anvers as someone trying to deceive the reading public by preying on their superstitions, which the poem "To Caleb D'Anvers" dismisses as the consequence of indigestion. The D'Anvers piece is reprinted in *The Gentleman's Magazine* in May, with many sections silently omitted and the title "Political Vampyres" added (Cave); this version has become an important source for Gothic criticism, having been reprinted in E. J. Clery and Robert Miles's *Gothic Documents* (25–26).

The Arnold Paul story continued to circulate through the end of the century. In 1751 it appeared in Antoine Augustin Calmet's influential *Traité sur les apparitions des esprits et sur les vampires ou les revenans de Hongrie, de Moravie, &c.*, first translated into English as *Dissertations upon the Apparitions of Angels, Dæmons, and Ghosts, and Concerning the Vampires of Hungary, Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia* in 1759 (see Maynard 129). It seems to cross over into the women's literary sphere in 1760, when "Some very extraordinary Accounts of the Vampyre of Hungary" are advertised to be published in the *Lady's Magazine; or, Polite*

Companion for the Fair Sex in September 1760.³² From this point, and perhaps because of its use in “Political Vampyres,” the metaphor of the political vampire appears in the popular press independent of the Arnold Paul story. *The Craftsman* uses the political vampire metaphor on June 5, 1736, in a piece that includes a footnote referring readers to the original tale in the *London Journal* and the D’Anvers piece from 1732 (“To Caleb”). This piece is reprinted in the *Country Magazine* later that month (“Craftsman, June 5, No. 518”). *Fog’s Weekly Journal* also uses the political vampire metaphor in June 1732 (“Late”). The metaphor appears in the *Public Ledger* for October 3, 1760, in a fictional letter by Oliver Goldsmith in the persona of Lien Chi Altangi (The British Library), without any reference to the Arnold Paul story, suggesting it has become absorbed into the public imagination:

a corrupt magistrate may be considered as a human hyena, he begins perhaps by a private snap [of human flesh], he goes on to a slice among friends, proceeds to a meal in public, from a meal he advances to a surfeit, and at last sucks blood like a vampyre. (1)³³

Here, the “corrupt magistrate” is described as animalistic and cannibalistic, ultimately transforming into a supernatural creature when his corruption reaches its peak.

A similar metaphor appears in a closing statement by John Philpot Curran at the trial of Oliver Bond, whom he is defending against a charge of high treason for his role as leader of the

³² This piece is listed in an advertisement for the *Lady’s Magazine* in the *Public Advertiser* (see “This Day”). I have attempted to locate a copy of this issue of the *Lady’s Magazine* to see whether it is actually a reprinting of the Arnold Paul story, but without success. Many thanks to Dr. Sydney Ayers, who was kind enough to look for it on my behalf in the British Library, only to discover that the Library’s copies of this volume were destroyed during WWII.

³³ Goldsmith assumed the persona of Altangi in order to satirize London society. The letters were collected and published as *The Citizen of the World* in 1762 (The British Library). See also Alan Bewell’s examination of the figurative meanings of the hyena.

Society of United Irishmen and in the Irish Rebellion of 1798, an unsuccessful protest against British Rule (“Mr. Bond’s”). Curran ends his defense by warning the jury against crediting the testimony of an informer (Thomas Reynolds), arguing “the *reign of the Informer* is the *suppression of the law*.” He describes the informer as one who feeds upon the destruction of the country: “Your country,” he says, “will be desolated, or only become the gaol of the living, until the Informer, fatigued with slaughter and gorged with blood, shall slumber on the sceptre of his perjury.” He concludes by calling on the jury to resist this monster by acquitting their “fellow-citizen, that worthy and virtuous man, who takes refuge in your verdict, from the vampyre who seeks to suck his blood” (3).

The political vampire metaphor takes another turn in 1822, in an installment of William Cobbett’s *Rural Rides*. In the course of a ride from Hampshire to Sussex, he describes the effects of enclosure and improvements:

it is manifest to every man who has eyes to see with, the that villages are regularly wasting away. This is the case all over the parts of the kingdom where the tax-eaters do not haunt. In all the really agricultural villages and parts of the kingdom, there is a *shocking decay*; [...] As to this rascally heath, that which has ornamented it has brought misery on millions. The spot is not far distant from the Stock-Jobbing crew. The roads to it are level. They are smooth. The wretches can go to it from the ‘Change without any danger to their worthless necks. [...] It [Sunning Hill] is a spot all made into “grounds” and gardens by *tax-eaters*. The inhabitants of it have beggared twenty agricultural villages and hamlets. (599–601)

Cobbett's description of rural spaces "wasting away," undergoing "*shocking decay*," and having resources consumed by "*tax-eaters*" and "the Stock-Jobbing crew" echoes D'Anvers' description of "ravenous Ministers" who feed upon public coffers. In this sense, Cobbett's phrase "tax-eater" echoes the idea of the "political vampyre," though stripping it of its supernatural connotations. As this history of the Arnold Paul story and the idea of the "political vampyre" shows, the figure of the vampire described in the *London Journal* was quickly taken up and applied in an economic context, and was still in circulation decades later when *Marchmont* and *Cecilia* were written.

D'Anvers's piece in *The Craftsman* is notable, then, for its role in transforming an account of a folkloric vampire in Hungary into a powerful and persistent metaphor for political-economic corruption. In what seems to be the only study to examine this piece in any depth, Ed Cameron reads D'Anvers's article as an example of what he calls the "neoclassical endeavor" of "the reduction of the literary tale to anti-Whig political allegory," an endeavor that involves "taming the fabulous tale by spreading a symbolic meaning onto the supernatural content" (21). Cameron reads the piece in *The Craftsman* as attempt to defang the vampire tale by reducing it to mere metaphor. Although this is true to some extent—D'Anvers emphasizes that his rhetorical move is an attempt to reconcile the two competing views of the reality of the story—Cameron's interpretation elides the fact that the vampire in D'Anvers' interpretation may not be supernatural, but it is definitely real. Using vampirism as a metaphor rather than a simile, the piece redefines what a vampire is: vampires are not *like* ravenous ministers; ravenous ministers *are* vampires, who really do torment and suck the life from the living and extend their torment to the dead.

D’Anvers does not argue that the Arnold Paul story is literally true, since doing so would align him with the gullible Doctor. Instead, he argues that it is figuratively true, an allegory of Hungarian politics. In seeming to defang the folkloric tale, though, he is actually giving it new teeth. Noting the political context of Hungary, he states “I believe you will make no Doubt that this Relation of the *Vampyres* is a Piece of that Kind, and contains a secret Satire upon the Administration of *those Countries*.” Arnold Paul, he notes, was a Heyduke, a position in which he would have the power to oppress those beneath him. Later, D’Anvers concludes his argument as follows:

I think I have said enough to convince you that We are not to understand this Account according to the *Letter*; in which Sense it appears *ridiculous* and *impossible*, to use the Words of the *admirable News Paper* now before us; whereas in the *other figurative Sense*, which I have put upon it, nothing can be more rational, obvious and intelligible. The Histories of all Countries, and especially our own, supply us with so many Instances of *Vampyres*, in this Sense, that it would fill up Volumes only to enumerate them. (1)

D’Anvers’s thus reads the account of Arnold Paul as it was reported in the *London Journal* as a work of political allegory. Although he does not know the precise political circumstances in which it originates, he knows enough about politics to generalize about the ubiquity of corruption in every corner of the world. In the figure of the vampire, D’Anvers finds a metaphor that reaches beyond the idea of corrupt ministers as merely leech-like and unpleasant, depicting them instead as unnatural, and their corruption as a kind of contagion. His own rhetorical move, then, is not to transform an instance of exotic, supernatural folklore into a political metaphor—

although he certainly uses the metaphor in this way to attack Walpole—but rather to read the folklore as itself already metaphorical. Cameron suggests a similar point when he notes that “[t]he suggestion that the uncanny elements of Gothic works of literature contain insights and convey meaning beyond the text itself actually predates the formation of the Gothic proper” (20). Reading the Gothic as political and as deeply embedded in its historical moment is therefore not a recent critical innovation. Rather, the understanding of Gothic metaphor as a way of articulating political economic ideas predates the emergence of Gothic fiction by about 30 years.

Frances Burney’s *Cecilia* and Domestic Vampires

D’Anvers’s primary focus is on government corruption—“political vampyres”—but he also refers to similar examples of vampires who prey upon individuals. As noted above, D’Anvers states that “*private Persons may be Vampyres, in some Degree,*” including “*fraudulent Guardians*” (1). *Cecilia* draws upon the idea of vampiric “fraudulent Guardians” in its depiction of Harrel, one of Cecilia Beverley’s three dangerously incompetent guardians. Debt is also a central concern of the novel, one that it explores by drawing on the Gothic. McMaster explores the novel’s engagement with the Gothic in relation to the scene of Harrell’s suicide at Vauxhall. She notes that, by placing Cecilia “in figurative and literal darkness and doubt, Burney achieves the disturbing power of Gothic, while keeping her in surroundings that are familiar and almost painfully realistic” (209). She also describes Harrel’s behaviour as vampiric: “He is a blood-sucker, a vampire, wasting her substance to give substance to himself. Financially speaking, he is one of the undead, one who can never achieve solvency” (221). McMaster’s reading, based on a closely focused analysis of the Vauxhall scene, stops short of reading *Cecilia* as a Gothic novel. Here, I build upon her reading to argue that the novel draws upon elements of the Gothic—and

the idea of political vampires already in circulation—in order to critique the naturalization of personal debt within commercial society by depicting it as a cause—and symptom—of economic vampirism.

Cecilia engages with the literary Gothic as it was emerging in the 1780s. It was published after Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron* (1778) and before Sophia Lee's *The Recess* (1785), and although it predates the Gothic boom by nearly a decade, its affinities with the genre are clear. Property, inheritance, and the legitimacy of bloodlines are its central concerns, and it presents all three of Cecilia's guardians' estates in some form of ruin. The Delviles' stately but uncomfortable ancient estate is lifeless, looking to its noble past without an eye to its barren future. The Harrels' fashionable life and house in continual process of improvement contrasts with Briggs' home, which is decaying due to his miserly hoarding and neglect. Cecilia, like numerous Gothic heroines, is persecuted by a suitor she despises, and Harrel, assuming the role of the tyrannical Gothic father, attempts to trade her hand in marriage to that suitor as payment of his debts. Like the Vauxhall scene that McMaster analyzes, the carnivalesque masquerade at the Harrel's home is also characterized by disorientation and danger, as Cecilia is harassed by a duplicitous family friend scheming after her fortune, unrecognizable in his disguise as a devil. In her introduction, Margaret Anne Doody argues that *Cecilia* is a novel of social critique, "nothing less than an examination of a whole society as a structure and a system" ("Introduction" xviii). In the "money-mad world" that Cecilia steps into (xxi), individuals are powerless to escape or change the system; rather, they must find a way to live within it. Doody writes that "*Cecilia* exhibits a social superstructure of money-getting, spending, party-giving, while also clearly indicating that social foundations are unsound and uneasy, that shifts and ruin and fragmentation (in all their revolutionary and romantic senses) may be expected" (*Frances* 141; see also D. G.

Campbell 132).³⁴ Although Doody does not identify this world in the process of falling as Gothic, the connection is clear, especially since the impending and inevitable collapse of this world generates a pervasive sense of dread.

This dread inspires a sense of frenetic social movement that verges on being out of control. In “Gothic Criticism,” Chris Baldick and Robert Mighall argue against reading the Gothic as a bourgeois literature in which the bourgeoisie is “paralyzed by dread”; rather, they argue, we need to read Gothic literature according to bourgeois values, which hold that “everything is a source of profit except perfect stasis” (284). The bourgeois Harrel, indeed, responds to his dreadful debt not with stasis, but with constant motion. In his attempts to evade his creditors, his simultaneous projects for improvements, excursions, social engagements, and gaming, he seems incapable of stopping or even slowing down. Like Baldick and Mighall, D. Grant Campbell reads the bourgeois experience in terms of space and movement. Specifically, he argues, the Harrels and their circle exist in liminal spaces “within dilated and suspended economic transactions” (131). Although Campbell describes this space as “economic stasis,” it is perhaps more accurate to think of it as a state of suspension, with collapse desperately held off by continual and frenzied motion, similar to the chaotic and terrifying sense of “*tremendum*” that Mijay Mishra associates with the Gothic sublime (294).

Because the social world in the novel is built upon credit, it is in constant danger of collapse (see Chapter 3). Cecilia’s first realization that credit is the foundation of fashionable life happens when she encounters Mrs. Hill, the wife of a carpenter in dire financial straits whose bill Harrel has repeatedly refused to pay. Cecilia assumes the unpaid bill is merely an oversight, but

³⁴ Doody’s comments are in relation to a passage in the novel in which Mr. Gosport muses about the slow decay that is ruining Delvile castle from the inside out, a clear reference to the decay of the aristocracy. Doody notes that his use of “foundation” and “superstructure” in this context seems “anticipatory” of Marx’s concept of ideological superstructures ideologies, rather than coincidental (*Frances* 140–141).

learns from Mrs. Hill that Harrell is putting off paying any of his creditors because he cannot pay them all:

This speech opened to Cecilia a new view of life; that a young man could appear so gay and happy, yet be guilty of such injustice and inhumanity, that he could take pride in works which not even money had made his own, and live with undiminished splendor, when his credit itself began to fail, seemed to her incongruities so irrational, that hitherto she had supposed them impossible. (Burney 85)

Through Cecilia's inexperienced eyes, we see the Harrels' lifestyle for what it is, a whirling frenzy of expenditure—of both money and energy—that cannot be sustained. Because Cecilia is new to this world, she sees the “injustice and inhumanity” that it engenders that others cannot or will not see. She perceives that the Harrels' credit has “already begun to fail,” and realizes that their momentum is not sustainable. Harrel knows this too, of course, and he therefore experiences dread analogous to the dread Manfred faces upon contemplation of his prophesied dispossession in *Otranto*. Indeed, as Doody has pointed out, the novel repeatedly conflates economic collapse—personal ruin—with death, primarily through its use of the term “execution” (“Introduction” xviii). Tellingly, when Cecilia leaves the house in order to ask Briggs (who has authority over her fortune) for the first sum she promises Harrel, she encounters a crowd waiting for a public execution at Tyburn. As Peter Sabor points out, the novel uses the word “execution” to refer exclusively to the seizure of goods in lieu of payment of debt (Burney 974 n176), and the juxtaposition of the public execution about to happen and the impending execution upon Harrel's estate makes this link absolutely clear.

The precariousness of the novel's "social superstructure" (Doody, qtd on D. G. Campbell 132) is evident in its vulnerability to the actions of individuals, even Cecilia, marginalized as she is by her gender. This precariousness is due to the fundamental instability of the system's foundation. The spaces of suspension that Campbell describes are imaginative ones: the Harrels behave as if they own things that they have not yet paid for, enacting a fantasy of wealth that has no basis in fact. But the Harrels are not the only ones to live this way; indeed, they are only one of many families trapped in this collective fantasy. In her naiveté, Cecilia is shocked by the immorality and dishonesty of this system, but as she becomes drawn into it herself, she realizes that the system unsettles easy distinctions between right and wrong, since seemingly moral behaviour can and does lead to harm. Cecilia's encounter with Mrs. Hill reveals one of the more confounding properties of the credit economy: even though it is predicated on the belief that debts will eventually be repaid, the system is such a complex and precarious assemblage of credits and debts that, if a debt *is* repaid, it threatens to undermine the entire structure.

Mr. Harrel is himself in a precarious position, since he is in debt beyond any hope of solvency, and creditors in the eighteenth century had considerable legal power over debtors (D. G. Campbell 135). He does not hesitate to abuse the power he holds over Cecilia as her guardian to shore up the ruins of his own fortunes, though, even knowing that, in doing so, he is damaging hers irreparably. Doody describes Harrel's behaviour as predatory, noting that Cecilia's fortune is lost "in a series of depredations" ("Introduction" xv), primarily through her entanglement in Harrel's private debts. Although she agrees to borrow against her inheritance in order to postpone his ruin—knowing that she cannot prevent it—he uses the money to gamble and loses, deepening rather than lessening his ruin. Cecilia incurs her own debt as well, buying books that are in one sense a "luxury" (Burney 103), but in another a necessary moral antidote to the

debauched entertainment that life with the Harrels affords. Although she “was restrained by no expense from gratifying her taste and her imagination,” she views purchasing books as an investment in her happiness and philosophical development and therefore worth the money (103). Moreover, her use of credit differs essentially from Harrel’s because she has money to cover her debts, although she cannot immediately access it. Harrel, on the other hand, borrows with no ability or intention to repay his debts. Cecilia regards the preparations for the masquerade, for example, which directly follows her book-buying venture, as “wantonly accumulating unnecessary debts,” in contrast to her own spending (103).

Cecilia’s involvements in Harrel’s debts are by choice, but she is also compelled by her sense of humanity. She offers to pay his tailor’s debt of £300–400 when Harrel is beset by a “gripping attorney” and Mrs. Harrel’s brother, Mr. Arnott, says it would cause him difficulties to lend it (140). Cecilia undertakes this debt out of sympathy for Arnott and a sense of the injustice of Harrel’s abuse of his kindness, rather than from affection for Harrel or a belief that it will materially help his situation. She is not blind to the danger Harrel is in or under the illusion that she will be repaid; rather, she is painfully aware of the fate awaiting the Harrels and the dangers of her involvement in

the ruinous levity of Mr. Harrel, and the blind security of his wife; she saw in their situation danger the most alarming, and in the behaviour of Mr. Harrel selfishness the most inexcusable; such glaring injustice to his creditors, such utter insensibility to his friends, took from her all wish of assisting him [...] (175)

Tellingly, Arnott opposes her wish of lending Harrel the money, whereas “Mr. Harrel seemed rather to prefer it” (175); he recognizes Cecilia as a valuable new source of credit, since he has exhausted nearly every other.

Harrel is quick to manipulate Cecilia’s sense of humanity in order to compel her to lend him money. When she is prevented from accessing her own fortune by Briggs and the elder Delvile, and therefore of fulfilling her promise to answer for Harrel’s debt, Harrel convinces her to engage a moneylender, an idea at which “[t]he heart of Cecilia recoiled” (188). She agrees, but knowing that she borrows £600 and gives him only £350, Harrel tries to manipulate her into giving him another £200, which she easily perceives and refuses: her “generosity, however extensive, was neither thoughtless nor indiscriminate” (191). This example shows how eager and willing Harrel is to bleed Cecilia’s fortune dry, even though he is supposed to be protecting her. Mr. Mockton, the family friend who covets Cecilia’s fortune, recognizes the danger Harrel has put Cecilia in by involving her with moneylenders, and so lends her the money himself, a gesture undoubtedly motivated, however, by the desire to put her in his power. Cecilia thus falls prey to Harrel, not because she is naïve or ignorant, but because of her empathy and her sense of humanity.

Harrel’s manipulation of Cecilia’s humanity is clearest when he faces executions by three creditors and threatens to kill himself if she does not immediately swear to do everything in her power to help him. Arriving home from a visit to Mrs. Delvile, she comes upon Harrel who seems “wild and perturbed,” and tells her to find his wife and prepare her for “tidings of horror” (263–265). Cecilia realizes from this, and his assertion that he will “conclude the whole business at once” (264), that he intends to kill himself and tries to stop him:

‘What is it you mean? what tidings of horror? whither are you going?’

‘To hell!’ cried he, and rushed out of the apartment. [...]

Her terror was now inexpressible; she believed him in the very act of suicide, and her refusal of assistance seemed the signal for the deed: her whole fortune, at that moment, was valueless and unimportant to her, compared with the preservation of a fellow-creature: she called out with all the vehemence of agony to beg he would open the door, and eagerly promised by all that was sacred to do every thing in her power to save him. (265–266)

Harrel, who has locked himself in his dressing-room, does open the door when he hears this, and is holding an open razor. He tells her he was just about to cut his own throat, but promises to stop if she swears to help him: “if indeed you will assist me, I will shut this up, —if not, I will steep it in my blood” (265–266). Cecilia refuses to swear at first, but relents when he repeats his threat. Harrel puts his life in Cecilia’s hands, and in the moment, his life—no matter how despicable he is—is worth more to her than her fortune. She is thus compelled to borrow £7500 from the moneylender, and the bailiffs are dismissed (271). Harrel’s hyperbolic reference to blood and Cecilia’s horror at the notion of suicide clearly invoke the Gothic, as does the disorientation of feeling she experiences when Harrel, “who but a few hours before was plunging uncalled into eternity,” insists she accompany him and his wife to the Pantheon in order to preserve the appearance of normalcy and therefore their social credit (273).

The scene at Vauxhall preceding Harrel’s suicide is, as McMaster discusses at length, overwhelmingly Gothic in its disorienting immediacy and in its use of dramatic irony, such as Harrel’s euphemistic references to “going abroad” and assurances that he will discuss his debts

“to-morrow” (398 ff). The scene is horrible for Cecilia even before Harrel’s death, since she feels manipulated and appalled at the violent and wild behaviour of the Harrels. She knows what Harrell’s situation is, since Monckton tells her he is ruined beyond any hope of solvency (295), but upon Mrs. Harrel’s supplication that Cecilia accompany them to Vauxhall, she reluctantly agrees, declaring “I know no longer what is kind or what is cruel, nor have I known for some time past right from wrong, nor good from evil!” (396). Although Cecilia’s propriety and reason are emphasized throughout the novel, the persecutions she suffers at the Harrels’ home and the strangeness of their behaviour unsettle her innate moral sense. By the time she is compelled to accompany the party to Vauxhall, she is “half distracted by the scenes of horror and perplexity in which she was perpetually engaged” (397); indeed, the preceding scene, in which Harrel threatens his wife with violence and shows other signs of madness, would not be out of place in a Radcliffe novel. The “scenes of horror and perplexity” only increase as the evening wears on, as Harrel gets more inebriated and the box they secured at Vauxhall for supper gets more crowded with creditors and acquaintances. Although Mrs. Harrel is most concerned about being “seen in such mixed company,” Cecilia is “half distracted” with worry about how they can safely get home without Harrel as he leaps out of the box, still believing he is fleeing to the continent. As the narrator tells us, though,

[t]his, however, was but the apprehension of a moment; another and a far more horrible one drove it from her imagination: for scarcely had Mr. Harrel quitted the box and their sight, before their ears were suddenly struck with the report of a pistol. (412)

The Gothic nature of this moment is emphasized by the way the description of the sound temporarily suspends the movement that has been swirling around Cecilia, and the way it assaults their ears—it “struck” them as if with violence. The horror does not end here, either—one horror follows another as Cecilia learns that Harrel’s death was not instant, but that he “lingered [...] about a quarter of an hour, but in a condition too dreadful for description” and died in the arms of a waiter (417). The inhumanity of Sir Floyer—Cecilia’s detested suitor—and Mr. Marriot add to her distress, since their rivalry over who will escort her and Mrs. Harrel home force her to decline both of their offers, and their danger is only over when Mortimer Delville—her preferred suitor—arrives and takes them home.

Although Harrel’s suicide seems to literalize the execution-as-death metaphor, in the end it has very little effect. Before they leave for Vauxhall, Harrel declares that “the only legacy I can leave her [Mrs. Harrel], is a warning which I hope she will remember forever” (397), but Mrs. Harrel quickly forgets and barely mourns her late husband, and marries again to begin another life of happy profligacy (940). Rather than a will, Harrel leaves behind a packet containing “a roll of enormous bills” held together with a note that reads “*To be all paid to-night with a BULLET*” (430). Ironically, although Harrel declares his blood to be payment of his bills, to his creditors his life is worth nothing: his bills remain unpaid, and Cecilia and Mrs. Harrel arrive home to Portman-Square to find an execution underway. The waiters at Vauxhall exhibited greater humanity than Harrel’s supposed friends, but even his final supper came with a bill, which Floyer and Marriot grudgingly pay (423). Although McMaster emphasizes the incident’s place within the novel—about half-way through, and therefore a turning point (209)—Campbell notes that, on the contrary, “Harrel’s violent death does not signify any apocalyptic change; it is merely symptomatic of the ingrained violence of English society which renders

change impossible” (136). This is perhaps the most Gothic aspect of the novel: the terrifying banality of Harrel’s horrific death and the circumstances leading up to it.

Harrel’s vampiric persecution of Cecilia and his using her as collateral on loans to pay his gambling debts are villainous, putting him on par with other Gothic villains who persecute and abuse the young women in their power in order to extort their property. Harrel’s villainy is also vampiric, though, in the way that it spreads its corruption to those around him. It is difficult to feel sorry for Floyer and Marriot, since they were willing to accept Cecilia as security for Harrel’s debts, or for his creditors Mr. Hobson and Mr. Simkins, whose behaviour is so off-putting. But Harrel had debts with them all that are left unpaid. Moreover, Harrel leaves debts to tradesmen that, as we see from the case of the Hills, can devastate entire families in ways that debts of honour incurred over a gaming table do not. The worst corruption, though, is the effect of Harrel’s duplicity in decimating Cecilia’s paternal fortune, which nearly prevents her marriage with Delvile. Although Cecilia resents being taken advantage of by Harrel, she refuses to sacrifice her sense of humanity for the sake of her fortune. When Delvile arrives at Vauxhall and learns what has happened, it is her humanity that he praises: “Human nature can rise no higher! I believe indeed you are its more perfect ornament!” (422). Similarly, it is his humanity, and particularly toward his destitute friend Mr. Belfield, that Cecilia loves about him. Although it endangers her, Cecilia’s humanity—the value she places on human lives and happiness, regardless of how they serve her own interest—and her refusal to sacrifice it, sets her apart from the crowd and is the source of her eventual happiness.

Charlotte Smith's *Marchmont* and Legal Vampires

Charlotte Smith's *Marchmont* is, like *Cecilia*, centrally concerned with debt and the social, economic, and legal structures that frame it. And like *Cecilia* and *The Romance of the Forest*, *Marchmont* envisions debt as predatory, a source of horror and dread. Unlike those novels, though, in which debt is a nebulous force whose presence is felt rather than seen, in *Marchmont*, predatory debt is personified in the figure of Vampyre, an attorney set upon Marchmont and Althea Dacres by her would-be suitor, the equally villainous attorney Mr. Mohun. Even though the novel features a character named Vampyre, its role in the history of vampire fiction has gone unexplored and its Gothic nature unacknowledged, although Kate Davies and Harriet Guest mention in passing that it "follows the plot structure characteristic of gothic novels" in their introduction (xxv). By naming one of the novel's villains Vampyre, Smith invites us to read him in the context of the "political vampyre" trope that had, by the time the novel was written in the mid 1790s, been absorbed into the discourse of political economy. Davies and Guest note that 1796, the year in which *Marchmont* was published, was "an important year in the history of British women's writing," seeing the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*, Mary Hays's *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, and Burney's *Camilla: or, a Picture of Youth* (vii). It was also the middle of the Gothic boom, in which numerous Gothic novels were published, including Elizabeth Bonhôte's *Bungay Castle*, Regina Maria Roche's *The Children of the Abbey*, and Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk*. *Marchmont*, like many of those Gothic novels, has been largely forgotten, but it is unique in its depiction of a type of vampirism that is both explicitly Gothic and explicitly economic: one that that explains, describes, and makes visible a complex political economic concept using a supernatural metaphor.

Marchmont's debts are themselves evidence of vampiric economic predation at work. They are not, like so many other Romantic debts, from gaming or dissipation; rather, they were incurred by his father and generations before him, partly because of their political activities. When Marchmont inherits Eastwoodleigh, the building is in ruins and the estate is bankrupt. Marchmont tells Althea that his family was never very wealthy, but were devoted Royalists who were dispossessed in the Civil Wars and again in the rising of 1745 when they were suspected Jacobites, and their fortunes never recovered. Although Marchmont's father refused to sell the estate or any part of it, he mortgaged it heavily: "the mortgages (the interest of which his want of oeconomy never allowed him regularly to pay) by degrees devoured the estates themselves" (Charlotte Turner Smith, *Marchmont* 62–63). Marchmont's imagery of debts that "devoured" his family estate resonate with the idea of Vampyre as a blood-sucker. For Marchmont, his family debt functions as a sort of mortmain (as discussed in Chapter 1): the debt of his ancestors is like a dead hand, a relic of his family's feudal past that threatens to destroy his future.

The all-consuming debt incurred against the estate is manifested in the house of Eastwoodleigh, which neglect and want of money for repairs has left in ruins, and which the locals believe to be haunted. The estate is both an embodiment of the ruined house of Marchmont and the site of Althea's imprisonment, standing in for a Gothic castle in both respects. The estate has been emptied out of its assets, including its woods, so that all that is left is a hollowed out structure that is more of an encumbrance than an asset. When Althea's father, Sir Audley, sends her to live there as punishment for her refusal to marry Mohun, his wife, Lady Dacres, tells her that Sir Audley considered tearing down the house in order to sell the materials, but that the income from the sale would not even cover the expense of its demolition, and it remains "a mere heap of ruins" (69). Lady Dacres also informs Althea that the Marchmonts have

been subject to several executions, but refused to leave the house, emphasizing the extent of the decimation of the family fortunes. Reading *Marchmont* alongside *Cecilia*, which conflates the senses of “execution,” emphasizes the idea that the beings who haunt the estate are the financially undead Marchmonts themselves.

Althea’s banishment to the ruins of Eastwoodleigh draws on the trope of the imprisoned heroine, found in any number of Gothic novels. Lady Audley cruelly taunts Althea with the house’s reputation for being haunted:

I suppose that some of his ancestors, who the country people say still walk there, would be kind enough to discover to this poor descendant some of the money and jewels which they had concealed in their troubles. But the dead were no civiler to him than the living; not a ghost rummaged out a guinea for him—nor any thing else [...]. (70)

Lady Audley’s satirical tone emphasizes her unfeeling attitude toward the Marchmonts, and she mocks their current troubles as well as their political loyalty. Althea understands that Lady Audley is trying to convince her that marrying Mohun is a fate less cruel than living at Eastwoodleigh, but she overcomes any irrational fears and adheres to her resolution to suffer any punishment rather than sell herself to a man she hates. Mrs. Grimsby, Lady Audley’s housekeeper, warns Althea that, at Eastwoodleigh, she will “live among spirits and ghosts, for they say that it swarms with ‘em,” and that by going there, she is “burying herself alive” (84–85), like so many persecuted Gothic heroines. Althea’s first impression of the house conforms to its Gothic reputation: she notices “neglected plantations,” “waste,” and “masses of broken wall,” and notes that it “seems like the remains of an immense castle” (70). The uncertainty around the

actual size of the house lends a feeling of mystery, since it is so vast that even the housekeepers, the Wansfords, do not know their way around (96). Althea shudders as she approaches it, and feels like she is entering a prison as, in some ways, she is (see Chapter 2).

After settling in, Althea does not regret her choice of the “melancholy tranquility” of the estate over the “splendid wretchedness” of marrying Mohun (119), but when the stormy winter comes she struggles not to succumb to imaginary fears. She is plagued by a “comfortless sort of feeling that assailed her,” which turns into “a dread [...] which she could not immediately conquer” that only worsens when she and the Wansfords are imprisoned in the ruin by snow (122–123). When she is unable to contact her father, whom she has learned is quite ill, her isolation makes her indeed feel as if she has been “buried alive” in the ruin (220). Mrs. Wansford, a former family servant and one of Althea’s only companions in her new home, echoes Mrs. Grimsby’s story, telling Althea that the house is haunted by a Marchmont ancestor who died in a battle on the estate (90). The novel draws attention to Althea’s role as a novelistic heroine, although it is a role she disavows. Lady Dacres, for instance, mocks her seemingly romantic refusal to marry Mohun, accusing her of being in love or a reader of novels, both of which she denies (69). The narrator does characterize her as a heroine, though, noting that “Althea was therefore fated to undergo that sort of persecution which has filled so many novels, and either disoblige her only parent and protector, or devote herself for life to a man she detested” (55). Althea speaks with uncharacteristic sensationalism when she refuses to marry Mohun, telling her father, “I never will sell myself to a man I abhor—I never will take an oath to love and honour a being a loath and detest” (79). Her unvarnished equation of marriage and prostitution echoes Smith’s description of her own marriage (see Labbe, “Introduction” 11) and further associates her plight with that of the typical Gothic heroine.

Although the Marchmonts' lack of domestic economy and admirable, though financially unwise, loyalty to the Stuart cause are cited as contributing to the ruin of the family fortunes, corruption is an even greater factor. The novel emphasizes that the tragedy of the Marchmonts' situation is more significant than the injustice of their defaulting on their debts:

The last Marchmont lived only long enough to see the inevitable destruction of his house—to see the son he so passionately loved likely to become a destitute wanderer, and his wife and daughters destined to indigence.—His heart was broken, and his eyes closed on this cruel prospect; while his unhappy son, by hazarding his personal liberty, rescued, with difficulty, his poor remains from the inhuman gripe of the law. (Charlotte Turner Smith, *Marchmont* 129)

The elder Marchmont lived in a state of dread, knowing that the “destruction of his house” was “inevitable” and foreseeing the destitution and misery his family would face when he was gone. Even in acknowledging the Marchmonts' mistakes, the novel ultimately blames its ruin on the “inhuman gripe of the law,” envisioned as an unfeeling, monstrous, and grasping hand. Althea observes, seeing the razed woods and neglected lands, that “[t]he iron ploughshare of oppression, in the form of law, seemed every where to have passed over the domain” (95). The Marchmonts have suffered oppression for centuries thanks to their Royalist politics, and in the more recent past they have been the victims of the inhumane self-interest of Sir Audley and Mohun. Lady Dacres inherited the mortgages of old Marchmont's estate in Devonshire and others, and has foreclosed them. When Althea meets Marchmont's mother and sisters, they have left the main estate of Eastwoodleigh and are living in a small house also belonging to the estate in Surrey, but

Sir Audley is about to turn them out. Althea meets Marchmont when he visits Sir Audley to ask whether they may stay through the winter, since he believes his mother will not survive the harsh weather without proper accommodation. Although Sir Audley is within his legal rights to turn the Marchmonts out, his unfeeling refusal to accommodate the family for a few months more—and apparently without cause, since he is not using the house in Surrey himself—appalls Althea, who is “shocked and mortified to think he was an inexorable creditor” (60).

In the matter of the house in Surrey, Sir Audley is acting within the law, but the dealings by which he came to have power over the Marchmonts are legally suspect. The narrator reveals that, not only was Lady Dacres’ father a usurer, but that he also hired an attorney who exploited the “necessities” of Marchmont’s father “and that the estates, of which Sir Audley had become possessed in consequence of that transaction were by no means so honestly come by, or so clear in the title by which he held them, as a very scrupulous man might have wished” (115). In addition, the family debts, for which Marchmont is being persecuted, were his father’s as well, and Marchmont only took them on under duress to stop his father’s creditors from seizing the body on the way to his father’s funeral and prevent what he believed would be the fatal consequences to his mother (117). The unlawful mortgages may have been motivated by self-interest, but driving Marchmont to ruin by seizing his father’s body—an object of value to nobody except his family—is an act of inhuman cruelty.

No matter how legitimate Marchmont’s debts are, he suffers persecution at the hands of his creditors all the same. Language of predation dominates Marchmont’s experience, as he is “pursued” by his rapacious creditors, and “tormented” and “perplexed by [their] threats” (117). The novel does not shy away from its critique of the Poor Laws and those related to debt, particularly how they are twisted to persecute and oppress those whom they are supposed to

protect. These critiques are expressed by multiple voices. The narrator, for instance, voices sympathy for the persecution Marchmont undergoes:

Such was the sad fate of Marchmont, that though guilty of no crime, and though he had devoted himself to distress from the purest motives of integrity and filial piety, he now found himself pursued like a felon, and had the horrors of perpetual confinement before his eyes. (118)

The novel thus asserts that, contrary to what the laws might say, Marchmont is not a criminal because he is in debt through a series of misfortunes rather than fraud or recklessness. Moreover, his life is described as a Gothic nightmare, in which the dread of imprisonment lingers in front of his view as a monster from which he cannot escape. Desperate to avoid imprisonment, mostly because he knows that once he is imprisoned he has no chance of supporting or protecting his mother and sisters, Marchmont is forced into concealment at Eastwoodleigh, fearing that his creditors

would inevitably avail themselves of that most improvident law, which enables a creditor to imprison the debtor who cannot pay him when he is at liberty; —as if an unhappy man, torn from his friends, deprived of his credit, depressed in his talents, and probably ruined in health, could do more to pay his debts, than when he is at liberty to pursue his interest, or make the most of his industry—a law which confounds innocence with guilt, and equally punishes intentional fraud and inevitable misfortune; yet which exists no where in such force as in a country boasting of its enlarged humanity and perfect freedom. (118)

Marchmont's experience is that his creditors pursue him because of his family name, believing that his friends and relations will settle at least some of his debts when he is imprisoned. He finds in his creditors and in the law no compassion or evidence of "enlarged humanity," even though his debts are due to "inevitable misfortune" rather than "intentional fraud," as is the case, for instance, with *The Romance of the Forest's* La Motte or *Cecilia's* Harrel.

Through its depiction of Marchmont's experience as a debtor pursued by monstrous, predatory creditors and their agents, the novel points out the flawed logic that enables the law to be corrupted into a force that oppresses those it is supposed to protect and enables economic vampires to prey upon the vulnerable. Marchmont's experience with Vampyre emphasizes not only the corrupt nature of debt but also the corrupt legal system that leaves debtors like him vulnerable to persecution and extortion. He tells Althea that, after taking on his father's debts, he learned that Vampyre's actions were "entirely illegal," but that it was too late, and he has neither the knowledge of the law nor the resources to seek restitution: "I found all my attempts at redress set aside by certain rules and forms, of which I understand no more than I do of the causes, why the best of all possible laws are often abused, to the very worst of all possible purposes" (185). Mohun and Vampyre pursue Marchmont knowing that he has no ability to pay his debts, and indeed increase their efforts to persecute him as time passes, suggesting that his debt signifies something other than money.

Marchmont equates the law with vampirism by tying Mohun's despicable nature directly to his profession. This is clear in the account Althea gives of her first impression of Mohun in a letter to her aunt, Mrs. Trevyllian:

He is a tall, awkward, rawbone figure—with a countenance it is impossible to look at without disgust, for it has the most disagreeable expression I ever saw: —when he speaks, which is always more than any body in the room, it reminds me of the voice and manner of the man whom I heard plead against those poor creatures who were prisoners at Exeter, the only time you ever took me into a Court of Law, so that I suppose it is the usual manner of lawyers, and Mr. Mohun cannot divest himself of it in private company.

(16)

The word “rawbone” suggests that Mohun is skeletal, not merely tall and thin, although his physical slightness is belied by the power of his voice and manner which, as Althea notes, is a result of his profession—he is an attorney in private life as well, a sort of personification of corrupt law. Althea’s “disgust” for his person and manner turn into “terror” when he touches her waist (17). Although Althea does not know why he inspires this feeling in her, his villainous nature is clear from their first encounter.

Mohun’s villainy is easier to understand than Vampyre’s, since it stems from his self-interest and, in the case of Althea and Marchmont, from sexual jealousy. When they meet for the second time at her father’s estate, Capelstoke, his interest has become offensively overt: he stands, “surveying Althea with the sort of a look that a sagacious jockey puts on when he is about to purchase a horse—and those who had taken the trouble to examine his countenance might have seen his approbation” (50). This metaphor conveys the idea that Mohun wants to “buy” Althea in marriage (in part, as we learn later, because he has power over her father) as an investment that will make him money, as well as the lewdness of his gaze. In comparing Althea to a horse to be bought and ridden for financial gain, the narrator draws upon the idea of

marriage as prostitution (which Smith considered her own experience to have been) and the financial benefits for Mohun of marrying Althea. When he becomes a co-executor of her father's will, Mohun exercises his power over her by refusing to send her the money she is entitled to and which she badly needs, driven by jealousy in his "ferocious heart" (371). His motives become unmistakable when he makes Althea—who is now married to Marchmont—an indecent proposal after imprisoning him for debt, offering to have Marchmont released and provided with work "on condition of her allowing him to renew his acquaintance as one of the intimate friends of her father, and looking upon him as the most devoted and attached of these friends" (426). Although his language is oblique, it is clear that he wants Marchmont to "prostitute his wife" (Davies and Guest n189). Althea's reaction to this "daring and cruel insult" emphasizes its unnaturalness and the Gothic leanings of the novel: at first, she is "petrified with horror" that he might imprison her, and remains anxious and melancholy after returning to Marchmont in prison (Charlotte Turner Smith, *Marchmont* 426). In this way, Mohun takes on the role of the Gothic villain who persecutes the heroine for her property and her person, becoming what *Northanger Abbey*'s Catherine Morland would describe as "a Montoni," in reference to *The Mysteries of Udolpho*'s prototypical villain (see Chapter 2).

If Mohun's person is repugnant and his behaviour unfeeling, at least his motivations are decidedly human. Vampyre, on the other hand, is inhuman and monstrous with much less clear motivation. Althea first encounters Vampyre in a state of dread after Wansford reports seeing strange footprints in the snow. Soon after, the family is harassed by two men whom, though Althea realizes they are bailiffs rather than supernatural creatures, still "terrify" her: one has

a face which could not, without an affront to the species, be called human. Squalid and despicable as this wretch was, he seemed to be invested with some authority over the other; whose great athletic figure impressed terror, while that of his companion raised abhorrence. (133)

These men are described as monsters: inhuman and terrifying. But although Althea feels a pervasive sense of mystery and dread about the house, she is not superstitious and does not believe in ghosts; rather, the monstrosity of the men derives from their inhumanity rather than from supernatural power. Even worse, the man she later knows to be Vampyre follows her out of the room in a menacing way: “[t]he man, stalking slowly up quite close to her, while she shrunk from his approach, in a loud and slow voice, whose sound alone would have conveyed a perfect idea of the hideous monster that uttered it, then spoke” (134). Wansford and some farmhands manage to get rid of the men, but this terrifying encounter makes Althea realize that they are searching the house for Marchmont. Wansford says he thought the man was “Jack-Ketch himself”—a hangman or a figure of death—but that he learned from men in the village that “his name is Vampyre; that he is an attorney, and has been the ruin of a great many families, for that he is the greatest rascal in all the country!” (139).

Vampyre is thus described as not merely villainous, but inhuman, and his motives purely malicious. Althea’s neighbour at Eastwoodleigh, Mrs. Moseley, tells her what she knows about him, which the narrator summarizes as “that certain ruin followed wherever this disgrace to his profession and to human nature once infixing his empoisoned fangs; and that his insidious friendship was not less fatal to his employers, who were always his dupes, than was his enmity to those against whom they engaged him” (145). The reference to “fangs,” and the sense that

Vampyre spreads corruption and ruin all around him, align him clearly with his namesake. Marchmont calls Mohun's agents "harpies" of the law, and Vampyre a "*fiend*" and "miscreant," and he reveals that it was Vampyre who coerced Marchmont into taking on his father's debts by threatening to seize his father's corpse (155). He tells Althea that he does not blame her father for the persecution he suffers, since Mohun had already set Vampyre upon him, and "the happy talons of this venomous reptile" would not "relinquish an employment" once it had begun, describing him as a "blood-hound" (155, 157). Mrs. Wansford describes him and his men as looking like "assassins" and "banditti," further emphasizing the Gothic nature of these figures (211). Althea's second encounter with Vampyre makes her aware of her powerlessness and oppression at the hands of the law, embodied by a man who "seemed to be some subaltern agent of Mammon and Moloch let loose to blast all to whom his *evil eyes* were turned, and commissioned to poison the happiness and blast the hopes of youth and honour" (210). Later, she equates him explicitly with Satan: "[I]ike that fiend whom he resembled in malignity, the Satanic agent of abused law [...] his face that was libel on the human countenance" (211, 213). The use of legal metaphor here makes the connection between legal corruption and monstrosity unmistakable. Overall, the impression is that Vampyre is persecuting and horrifying the Marchmonts because he can, not because he has anything to gain from it, and that he is driven by a sadistic pleasure in ruining people rather than a need for financial gain.

The novel repeatedly compares Mohun with natural noxious creatures—"a reptile," "a wretch," and a "scorpion," for instance—language that is repeated throughout the novel. These characterizations emphasize the difference between Mohun and Vampyre. One is abhorrent, but naturally so, a very human sort of inhumanity. Vampyre, on the other hand, is an agent of a corrupt—and therefore unnatural—system of law. In this way, *Marchmont* echoes the distinction

between leeches and “political vampyres” that D’Anvers articulates, as discussed above.

Whereas Mohun is unpleasant, he does not inspire the terror that Vampyre does. Althea feels safe from Mohun at Eastwoodleigh, for example, but not from Vampyre: their first encounter “impressed her with dread”; knowing that Marchmont is going to flee from his hiding spot in the ruins, “[s]he imagined that the satellites of the brutal Vampyre lurked round the house” (178). In troubling this sense of natural and unnaturalness by drawing on Gothic tropes and characterizing the novel’s villains as monsters, Smith’s novel highlights the disconnect between what the law is supposed to do and what it actually does, who it is supposed to serve and who it actually serves.³⁵

In the Preface to *Marchmont*, Smith notes that she has “made enemies” through her characterization of certain types, but she makes no apologies for her depiction of attorneys and their agents:

I have no hesitation in saying, that in the present work the character most odious (and that only) is drawn *ad vivum*—but as it represents a reptile whose most hideous features are too offensive to be painted in all their enormity, I have softened rather than overcharged the disgusting resemblance. [...] the destructive monster, armed with the power of doing mischief, and robbing legally—the wretch without feeling or principle, without honesty or pity—is a nuisance widely diffused, and spreading frequent desolation. That there are

³⁵ Although, regrettably, a discussion of debtor’s prisons, such as the one Marchmont and Althea are eventually imprisoned in, as Gothic spaces is beyond the scope of this chapter, the idea of imprisonment emphasizes the Gothic nature of debt in *Marchmont* and other novels that engage with the Gothic. Just as debtors are buried alive in debtor’s prisons, debtors who walk free are also suffering a kind of living death, existing under the threat of their debts being called in, and living on borrowed time. Davies and Guest discuss *Marchmont*’s contribution to public debates about the treatment of debtors in some detail (ix–xi).

honest and good men in the profession I believe, for I know two; but I have reason to suppose that the majority are so much otherwise, that it would be well for the world if they were restrained by means more adequate to the purpose than those ever practised in *the present order of things*. (3)

Here in the preface, Smith emphasizes two ideas: that the corrupt attorney's power derives from the law and that her critique is of a widespread social problem, not a product of her personal experience alone. Indeed, her reference to the "destructive monster" who uses political, social, or other forms of power for "robbing legally" strongly echoes D'Anvers's idea of the "ravenous Minister" (1). Smith asserts that her purpose is to prevent people from hiring attorneys to persecute debtors in future: "some purpose," she writes, "will be answered if the representation should deter any individual, who has a drop of manly or human blood in his heart, from sharpening the fangs of one of these scourges of the earth against the innocent and defenceless" (Charlotte Turner Smith, *Marchmont* 3). We can read Smith's critique, therefore, as a broad social commentary that she undertakes with the authority of personal experience, one that draws on contemporary imaginings of "political vampires" and relocates them into the social economic sphere.

The Modern Economic Vampire and Commercial Society

These two vampire tales provide an insight into how debt—the national debt, as well as personal debt—was imagined in the late eighteenth century, when there was no language yet available to articulate many of the economic processes and forces that resulted from the Financial Revolution that Dickson describes, and whose effects were felt even if their causes and consequences were

unknown. Just as the Arnold Paul story provided D'Anvers with a metaphor with which to articulate the nature of the particular form of corruption engendered by the Financial Revolution, the same metaphor is employed in these two novels to articulate similar vampires working within the social and domestic sphere, rather than the political one: the “fraudulent guardians,” “sharpers,” and “usurers” that prey upon the young women whose lives Romantic novels explore. This type of vampire is truly modern in that it is a product of the modern social imaginary that Charles Taylor describes in *Modern Social Imaginaries*, in which social relationships are reimagined as economic, transactional ones.

Significantly, in both novels, these villains are not the outliers in the novels' social structures; rather, those who value humanity and domestic affections above profit and self-interest are. As Campbell notes in regard to *Cecilia*,

Harrel's consumerism, gambling, borrowing, ruin, and death signify no revolutionary upheaval, but merely society's institutionalized aggression and indifference. Against this pallid consumerism stands Cecilia with her sympathy and courage, who recognizes genuine distress and who insists almost quixotically upon paying her debts. (142).

Davies and Guest similarly note that the novel “finally represents hope of redemption only in the form of isolated acts of individual benevolence, expressing a pessimism that was for Smith both political and personal” (viii). Just as Cecilia's humanity makes her vulnerable to persecution and manipulation by the vampiric Mr. Harrel, so too are Althea, Marchmont, and their loved ones endangered by their strong sense of humanity in the corrupt commercial society that the novel depicts.

Chapter 5: Blood Sugar, “Transformation,” and the Dehumanizing Potential of Consumption

Victoria, the protagonist of Charlotte Dacre’s 1806 novel *Zofloya, or The Moor*, is a study in the dangers of luxury. Her mother abandons her husband and children for her lover, and Victoria, who is never taught self-denial or self-control, grows into a woman defined by her passions, not only “the darker passions, revenge, hate, and cruelty,” but also sexual desire (133). Her excessive, luxurious desire for her husband’s brother, Henriquez, manifests as a series of terrible dreams, one of which includes a vision of one of Henriquez’s attendants, an enslaved Moor named Zofloya:

she beheld advancing a Moor, of a noble and majestic form. He was clad in a habit of white and gold; on his head he wore a white turban, which sparkled with emeralds, and was surmounted by a waving feather of green; his arms and legs, which were bare, were encircled with the finest oriental pearl; he wore a collar of gold round his throat, and his ears were decorated with gold rings of an enormous size.

Victoria contemplated this figure with an inexplicable awe, and, as she gazed, he bent his knee, and extended his arms towards her. While in this attitude, her mind filled with terror, she looked upon him with dread, and essaying to fly, she stumbled and awoke. (136)

Zofloya's opulent white and gold clothing augmented with emeralds and pearls, his gold jewellery, his bare arms and legs suggestive of nudity, and the dark skin that identifies him as a Moor all bespeak oriental luxury, opulence, exoticism, and sensuality, as does his supplicant pose. Victoria admires his "noble and majestic form," and she seems to gaze at him with desire. But the "inexplicable awe" she feels at the sight of him is mixed with "terror" and "dread"—the feeling of impending doom. She is right to be afraid, since after Zofloya encourages Victoria to rape Henriquez and murder his beloved, Lilla, he reveals himself to be Satan in the possession of the Moor's body and drags Victoria's soul to hell. In encoding Victoria's excessive sexual desire in a dream-vision of the exotic and opulently attired Zofloya,

³⁶ Dacre's novel Gothicizes the dangers of luxury. Luxury—denoting excess, and associated with desire and consumer goods—was a significant social issue in the late eighteenth century and into the nineteenth, one that intersected in complicated ways with the emergence of polite, commercial society.³⁷ The texts examined in this chapter engage with the idea of consumption, making use of the Gothic's distorting and literalizing aesthetic in order to test the limits of commercial society's acceptance of self-interest; that is, to test how far the invisible hand can reach. First, I examine the motif of blood-stained sugar as it is used in Abolitionist poetry and prose, arguing that this motif, which Timothy Morton calls "blood sugar," draws on Gothic horror to confront readers with their complicity in the brutalities of the transatlantic slave trade. Next, it examines "Transformation" (1830), a short Gothic tale by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley that literalizes the idea of the human body as a commodity that can be exchanged. This chapter argues that the Gothic provides an imaginative field in which writers can interrogate

³⁶ I am referring to the vision as "Zofloya" for clarity, but the entity that she sees in her dream is, it becomes clear, Satan taking Zofloya's form; later, Zofloya's apparent death and mysterious revival strongly suggest that he was killed so that Satan could take possession of his body.

³⁷ See, for instance, E. J. Clery's study of luxury in relation to polite society in *The Feminization Debate*.

issues related to consumption, and particularly its dangers, including the blurring of boundaries between people and things.

The concept of luxury has a long and contested history. John Sekora notes in his foundational study that luxury is an amorphous concept whose meaning is highly contextual, but it has biblical origins that associate it with sin. It refers generally to an excess, that which is unnecessary, including “idleness, extravagance, and dissolution in society” (4, 18, 23). It is also associated with nature, though, and with pleasure, both innocent and sinful. Because of its association with social disfunction, luxury evoked dread; as Sekora points out, “condemnations of luxury possess a quality rare outside Gothic fiction and eschatological homilies—an eloquence of horror” (10–11). Indeed, Robert Miles notes that “luxury” and “gothic” were, in the late eighteenth century, both subject to “discursive overdetermination,” functioning as conceptual “pivot[s]” upon which debates about race, class, gender, and other culturally ambivalent ideas could turn (“Gothic” 42). With the emergence of commercial society which, as Paul Langford points out, is “fundamentally about consumption” (*Polite* 3), luxury became increasingly associated with another fraught concept: the consumption of goods.³⁸ In *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), for instance, Adam Smith defines “luxuries” simply in opposition to necessities, those commodities necessary to support life and to maintain a common level of decency. Smith asserts that, in using the term “luxury” to describe other commodities, he does not intend “to throw the smallest degree of reproach upon the temperate use of them” (qtd in Roberts 24).³⁹ Indeed, the consumption of goods—including luxuries—is the necessary engine of

³⁸ Like Sekora, Langford views luxury as a foundational concept in eighteenth-century thought, and argues that “A history of luxury and attitudes to luxury would come very close to being a history of the eighteenth century” (*Polite* 3).

³⁹ Smith condemns slavery in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (*The Theory of Moral Sentiments* 241–242), as discussed by Daniel Klein (92–93).

Smith's economic system, capitalism. As Morton explains in his study of spice, reconciling the desire for luxury goods and their role in the economy on the one hand and the moral implications of luxury on the other was an ongoing cultural struggle, one that Smith addressed through the trope of the invisible hand (177 see also Chapter 3). As E. J. Clery argues in relation to the emergence of Gothic literature, changes to Britain's economy raised fears about the cultural and social effects of trade, and the consumption of commodities and luxury goods in particular. As she writes,

the transformative effect of trade on the fabric of the nation raised apocalyptic fears. What transfixed observers was not so much innovations in production and transportation, signs of the coming machine age, but instead the new potential for consumption: the disaccumulation of wealth on an unprecedented scale, a process not merely 'feminine,' but actively, virulently emasculating. (*Rise* 102)

Just as the emergence of credit as a financial tool made possible a great deal of economic expansion, it also engendered a culture of debt (as discussed in chapters 3 and 4). Likewise, the "new potential for consumption" made possible by credit-based investment tools and the military expansion which they enabled had its own dangers. As this passage indicates, the potential for excessive, luxurious consumption "raised apocalyptic fears." In her study of women and shopping in the eighteenth century, which she calls "the age of the commodity," Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace traces a shift and convergence in the conceptions of "commodity" and "luxury": "the evolution of commodity away from what is commodious and the evolution of luxury away from what is lascivious," amounting to "a convergence of commodity and luxury"

(55–56). That is, a luxury was increasingly understood as something that was expensive rather than something that was sinful (57).

The concepts of consumption and consumer were important for the emerging commercial society, and for modern economics more generally. Whereas the Industrial Revolution had to do primarily with production, its corollary—the consumer revolution—had to do with changing patterns in and attitudes toward consumption (see C. Campbell 51). Campbell challenges the widespread idea that this increase in consumption was due to social emulation, an effort by the middling classes to gain social status by emulating their social superiors. He argues that it is just as likely that goods were consumed for their pleasurable properties, especially luxury consumables like tea, coffee, sugar, and chocolate. Moreover, he argues that this consumer revolution cannot be explained by economic theory alone, but must be considered as the result of a change in the “values and attitudes that govern consumption” (52). This shift was thus due to the emergence of a socially mobile middle class with the disposable income, leisure time, and “Romantic ethic” that placed value on aesthetic pleasure (56–61). Fashion in dress and domestic spaces, he argues, was important because taste was associated with refined sensibility, and therefore an indication of aesthetic and moral virtue (269). Indeed, just as “commodity” and “luxury” shifted in meaning over the eighteenth century, so did the words “consumer” and “consumption,” coming to refer to the purchase and use of goods, although “consumption” retained a sense of destruction, evident in its use to describe the wasting disease tuberculosis. This shift in the meanings of these terms points to a larger shift in how individuals imagined and understood themselves and their place in society. As discussed in the Introduction in relation to Charles Taylor’s notion of modern social imaginaries, an important feature of commercial society was that people were imagined as consumers, and as more and more consumable goods

were produced and made available and affordable, a person's identity was increasingly informed by the goods they consumed and displayed, such as fashionable (or unfashionable) clothing . Consumption is thus a complex idea that intersects with political, social, and cultural structures (Brewer and Porter 2–3). Although the late eighteenth century is not consumption's point of origin, it is a point of rapid expansion and reconceptualization and, as Taylor argues, the point at which consumption and consumerism became part of how we understand ourselves and society.

Blood Sugar and the Consumable Body

It would be difficult to overstate either the importance of West Indian cane sugar to the eighteenth-century British economy or the extent of the atrocities perpetrated in its production. As a luxury commodity, though, sugar was ambivalently valued and censured, associated with the domestic world of the tea table and with debased appetites. Through widespread use and habituation, sugar had become a necessity, and was even considered a biological necessity by some (Coleman 344; Sussman, "Women" 48–49). Sugar production also depended on slave labour for its profitability, and as such, sugar brings into focus the central ethical problem of commercial society and its foundation in self-interest: how far can self-interest be pursued before it can no longer be recuperated into the public good? That is, how far can the morality of self-interest be pushed until the invisible hand fails? In his discussion of the blood sugar trope, Morton focuses primarily on sugar, since he is situating his analysis within a larger argument about what he calls the "poetics of spice" (Morton 4) Here, in order to situate the trope within Gothic discourse, I focus on the poetics of blood.

Blood is a complex and ubiquitous symbol within Gothic literature. It denotes lineage and kinship through the metaphor of "bloodlines," as well as the related notions of race and

nationality. It is associated with reproduction and regeneration, whether through menstruation or as an oblique reference to semen (see Hughes 73), as well as with religion, as in transubstantiation. Blood also registers emotion by bringing a blush to the cheek, growing hot with passion, or chilling with fear. Blood is an analogue for wealth and for the animating life force, both of which literary vampires feed upon (as discussed in Chapter 4). As William Hughes notes, no matter what it symbolizes, blood “literalizes the metaphorical through the physiological” (73). Because blood is so laden with symbolism, its corruption or loss has devastating consequences. As a symbol of life, its loss bespeaks injury, illness, death, and violence, transgressing the body’s natural boundaries and signifying the inevitability of what Reyes calls the “suffering body” (Hughes 73; Reyes 62; Williams 75–76). For all these reasons, blood evokes a sense of “fearful disgust” (Reyes 62).

In the Gothic, blood also serves as evidence of violent crime and its attendant guilt in a variation of the phenomenon of cruentation, in which the corpse of a murder victim begins to bleed in the presence of its murderer (see Gaskill 216–219). The appearance of blood—natural or supernatural—as a sign of guilt may be traced to *Macbeth*. Lady Macbeth’s guilt-induced madness manifests in the obsessive washing of her hands, upon which she perceives spectral spots of blood that cannot be removed: “Here’s the smell of the blood still—all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. O, O, O.” (*Macbeth* 5.1.48–50, 195). Although it is not widely recognized as a proto-Gothic moment, Lady Macbeth’s lament “Out, damned spot” (*Macbeth* 5.1.33, 194) exemplifies the motif of the Gothic blood stain. In her analysis of archetypal Gothic structures via George Colman’s drama *Blue-Beard; or Female Curiosity* (1798), Anne Williams notes that when Bluebeard’s wife opens the door to the secret and forbidden room, the key becomes stained with blood, a spectral sign of Bluebeard’s crime that

alerts him to his wife's disobedience (40). Other examples of spectral blood abound. In Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), a statue bleeds from its nose as Manfred pursues Isabella through the castle (85). The Bleeding Nun in Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) and the ghost of Evelina in his *The Castle Spectre* (1797) both bleed from the mortal wounds inflicted on them by their murderers (*Monk* 166–67; "The Castle" 197; see Bruhm 61). In Radcliffe's *Gaston de Blondville* (1826),⁴⁰ spectral bloodstains appear on the murderer's clothes, replicating those on the victim.⁴¹ Natural blood commonly serves as evidence of violence and wrongdoing as well. In Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), Adeline finds a rusty and bloodstained dagger in addition to a mouldering manuscript which proves that the Marquis de Montalt murdered her father. The eponymous heroine of Frances Burney's *Cecilia, or Memoirs of an Heiress* (1782) realizes her guardian Harrel has killed himself when she sees a waiter covered in blood (as discussed in Chapter 4), and in Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Emily believes (mistakenly) that a trail of blood she finds on the castle stairs is evidence that her aunt has been murdered. The motif is also used figuratively in Maria Regina Roche's *Clermont* (1798), when Clermont tells Madeline that the "characters" of "the dark volume of your father's fate [...] are marked by horror, and stained with blood" (80). These examples indicate that, in Gothic literature, spots of blood—whether spectral or real—are evidence of violent crime, and it is in this context that I read the trope of blood sugar.

The blood sugar trope is commonly used in the literature of the British Abolition movement, which sought to end the transatlantic slave trade and the practice of slavery in the

⁴⁰ *Gaston de Blondville* was written in 1803, but was published posthumously in 1826.

⁴¹ It is difficult to tell from Tracy's index how bloodstains function precisely, but she lists 15 novels that feature bloodstains and 4 that feature messages written in blood (196, 202). Many thanks to Lawrence Evalyn for helping me locate these examples.

British Empire.⁴² As Debbie Lee notes, the launch of the Abolition movement coincided with the peak of the transatlantic slave trade in the 1780s (17), and this also coincides with the rise of Gothic literature. The Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade was founded in 1787, which recruited William Wilberforce to the Abolition cause. In 1789, Wilberforce introduced anti-slavery trade resolutions in the House of Commons, on the grounds of “British national guilt” (17), and in 1791, Wilberforce introduced a bill to abolish the British slave trade, which was defeated. The Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade took effect in 1807, which abolished the transatlantic slave trade within the British Empire, but not the practice of slavery itself. The Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 abolished slavery in most of the Empire, with the significant exception of territories controlled by the East India Company. The movement was closely tied to issues of natural rights, and intersected and overlapped with other movements—political, economic, aesthetic, and literary—which shared that concern.⁴³ In a 1795 lecture, for example, Samuel Taylor Coleridge contrasts natural wants with unnatural ones, aligning the consumption of sugar with “luxury, barbarity and social injustice” (Morton 175). Its ties to early feminism are clear as well, since slavery was frequently used as an analogy for women’s oppression, such as in Hannah More’s description of marriage as a slave market in “The White Slave Trade” (1799) (Coleman 354) and in Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Wollstonecraft refers to woman as “made by her education the slave of sensibility,” which only prepares her for the further “slavery of marriage” (257, 295), and draws an explicit comparison with slaves on West Indian sugar plantations:

⁴² It would be impossible to do justice here, in this examination of the blood sugar motif, to the complexity of the sugar trade or to transatlantic slavery. I can only gesture toward it by referring toward Sidney Mintz’s study of the history of sugar and Lee’s *Slavery and the Romantic Imagination* (Mintz; Lee).

⁴³ A more detailed survey of literature related colonialism and imperialism in relation to the Gothic is, regrettably, beyond the scope of this chapter, but Matt Clavin and Laura Doyle provide useful overviews. See also Patrick Brantlinger’s foundational study about “Imperial Gothic.”

Why subject her to propriety—blind propriety, if she be capable of acting from a nobler spring, if she be an heir of immortality? Is sugar always to be produced by vital blood? Is one half of the human species, like the poor African slaves, to be subject to prejudices that brutalize them, when principles would be a surer guard only to sweeten the cup of man? (282)

Although this analogy between slavery and women's oppression seems distasteful now, given the relative conditions of English women and enslaved Africans, it demonstrates the transatlantic slave trade's influence on the cultural imagination, and particularly its utility as a metaphor for articulating and working through the problem of people as commodities. Moreover, its prevalence points to the importance of the slave trade and Abolition in larger debates about natural rights and, more particularly, their limits.

Given the highly charged nature of the Abolition debate and its chronology, and the Gothic's basis in sensibility, concern with individual liberties, and alignment with Jacobinism, it is surprising that British Gothic fiction does not engage more explicitly with the problem of slavery. Lee's study of slavery and Romantic literature focuses primarily on poetry—including Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (1798) and John Keats's *Lamia* (1820), both often considered Gothic poems—but does analyze Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and the autobiography *The History of Mary Prince* (1831). Some examples are found in Matthew Lewis's drama *The Castle Spectre* (1797), through Hassan, an enslaved African (Lee 63–64); John Moore's *Zeluco* (1789), which addresses the immorality of slavery both directly (46–48) and through the character of Hanno; and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), in the figure of

Rochester's West Indian wife Bertha, as explored in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). Other Gothic fictions that approach issues related to race, colonialism, and imperialism are often studied under the umbrella of "imperial Gothic."⁴⁴ Many of these studies focus on works of American or British Victorian Gothic, which they were written well after the height of the English Abolition debates. Patrick Brantlinger's foundational study of imperial Gothic, for example, which focuses on the period after the collapse of the West Indian sugar trade in the 1820s, does not discuss its importance to Romantic literature or its legacies. Romantic Gothic authors would certainly have been aware of the practice and the controversy surrounding the transatlantic slave trade, though. Lewis and William Beckford, for instance, inherited fortunes built on sugar plantations (Goddu, "African" 72).

One body of writing related to Abolition and the sugar trade that critics have connected with the Gothic is the collection of accounts, histories, biographies, and pamphlets describing the Haitian Revolution. From 1791 to 1803, the French colony of St. Dominigue, the most profitable sugar-producing French colony in the West Indies, transformed into an independent republic, drawing strength from the newly written French constitution. Although Britain eventually supported the new republic against Napoleon's forces, the uprising contributed to fears of revolutionary uprisings in the British West Indian islands inspired by those in France and St Domingue, a transatlantic version of "*la Grand Peur*" (Hoermann 184). In a study of historical, political, and biographical writings related to the Haitian Revolution that were read on both sides of the Atlantic, Matt Clavin argues that they drew on established literary conventions, particularly the Gothic, for rhetorical purposes (3; see also Hoermann). Clavin notes that these

⁴⁴ H.L. Malchow's *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, for example, reads *Frankenstein* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) as examples of coded Gothic racialization, for example. Teresa Goddu's discussions of American Imperial Gothic are also useful (*Gothic*; "African").

writings were, like other publications, commodities on the literary marketplace, designed to sell as well as to advance a political view, and that part of the reason they drew upon the Gothic was to attract readers, for example by using titles that promised lurid details about the bloody massacres and other horrors unfolding in St. Domingo (13). “[T]hese writers,” he says, “like their Gothic counterparts, invited readers to peer in on a series of violent acts that were too gory, horrible, and repugnant to imagine” and that were inflicted upon men, women, and children, including crucifixion, dismemberment, hanging, rape, and torture (14–15).

The style of Gothic that Clavin describes is “horror Gothic,” exemplified by *The Monk*. Unlike “terror Gothic,” the style of Gothic literature that foregrounds fear based in obscurity (exemplified by Radcliffe’s novels), horror Gothic emphasizes fear based in direct encounters with violence or the supernatural. Fred Botting notes that the key attribute of Edmund Burke’s influential notion of the aesthetic sublime is the distance between the reader and the object of fear, since it is this distance that makes possible the Gothic’s characteristic mixture of “terror and pleasure” (*Gothic* 7). Gothic horror threatens to collapse this distance, pushing the sublimity of the Gothic to its limits.⁴⁵ Accounts of the Revolution draw on the aesthetic of Gothic horror in their description of “Gothic scenery,” for example, dominated by ruined and burned buildings, loathsome dungeons, and such gruesome evidence of violence as piles of bodies, dismembered limbs, and rivers of blood (Clavin 19). They also describe people on both sides as monstrous, capable of committing unthinkable atrocities, and Black rebels in particular as animalistic and often cannibalistic (22). Many of the accounts also employ the Gothic trope of “indescribability,”

⁴⁵ One such narrative is John Gabriel Stedman’s *Narrative, of a Five Years’ Expedition, Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (1796), to which William Blake contributed engraved illustrations. Among these illustrations is the allegorical illustration “Europe supported by Africa & America” (Object 17 [Bentley 499.16]), and several depict violence against enslaved men and women. One of these, titled “A Negro hung alive by the Ribs to Gallows” (Object 3 [Bentley 499.2]), is quite gruesome, showing blood flowing from the man’s wound and onto the ground, which is littered with human bones; skulls on pikes are shown behind the gallows, and a ship sailing away in the background (*William Blake*).

declarations that the events that are being described cannot be captured or explained in words, a trope that “whets the appetite” of readers who are invited to witness the horrors voyeuristically, even though the writers insist their purpose is to educate them (24–27). Drawing on these identifiable Gothic tropes and “crafting the Haitian Revolution as a Gothic tale” serves two purposes: to convince readers on both sides of the Abolition debate that slavery cannot be abolished without violence; and to frame unthinkable horrific events—those perpetrated upon the enslaved population by their oppressors, and by both sides once the Revolution began—within a framework familiar to readers, enabling it to “become thinkable” (4, 29). Clavin notes that writings about the American and French revolutions, as well as pro- and anti-slavery discourse, make use of the Gothic as well, and for similar reasons (28). Although he focuses on accounts of the Haitian Revolution specifically, the use of Gothic discourse that Clavin identifies is evident in Abolitionist writing as well, including that which promoted the abstention from sugar. Describing the Haitian Revolution in Gothic terms provided a framework for readers to conceptualize unthinkable atrocities; similarly, the blood sugar trope provides a language with which Abolitionist writers captured not only the atrocities of sugar production, but also the consumer’s complicity in them.

A constellation of poems from 1788, for instance, figure the blood, sweat, and tears of the slaves that produce sugar as things that make the cane grow, including Ann Yearsley’s “A Poem Written on the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade,” an unsigned poem in the *Scots Magazine* titled “The Slaves: An Elegy,” and William Cowper’s “Sweet Meat has Sour Sauce” and “The Negro’s Complaint.” The trope congeals, as it were, into the more specific idea that sugar is tainted with blood—and, importantly, that eating sugar means eating this blood—in Mary Birkett’s “A Poem on the African Slave Trade. Addressed to Her own Sex,” (1792), published as part of a campaign

to elicit support for William Wilberforce's anti-slavery bill (Teakle and Birkett Card 139).⁴⁶

Birkett, an Irish Quaker, explicitly marks sugar as a luxury and addresses her poem to her fellow women, arguing that, by consuming sugar, they are complicit in the abhorrent practices by which it is produced. She refers repeatedly to the disconnect between the luxuries they enjoy and the conditions that enable them:

How little think the giddy & the gay
While sipping o'er the sweets of charming tea,
How oft with grief they pierce the manly breast,
How oft their lux'ry robs the wretch of rest,
And that to gain the plant we idly waste.
Th'extreme of human mis'ry they must taste! (141, 1.22-27)

It is, she argues, the "lux'ry" of the British for whom the slaves suffer because they work to satisfy the demand created by our desires. She emphasizes luxury again while calling out the hypocrisy of Christians who turn a blind eye to slavery, asking whether one of God's laws is that "Man shall his fellow, ravage, sell &slay; / And one unhappy race shall always be / Slave to another's pamper'd luxury" (5.6-8). Invoking the political relations between the empire and its colonies, she refers to slaves as "sad vassals of our lux'ry" (13.6, 144).

In addition to her references to luxury, Birkett employs language familiar to readers of Gothic novels in order to convey the horrors of sugar production, referring, for example, to enslavement as "a living death" (1.10, 141). She describes slave-dealers as men who "Dare lave

⁴⁶ Birkett is sometimes called by her married name, Mary Birkett Card.

their hands impious in human gore, / And barter souls for lust of ore;" (3.3–4, 141). But the most powerful image of blood is that of the sugar that has been tainted with it, which she invokes in an address to British women to take political action by boycotting the product of slavery:

Yes, sisters, yes, to us the task belongs,
'Tis we increase or mitigate their wrongs.
If we the produce of their toils refuse,
If we no more the blood-stained luxury choose
If from our lips we push the plant away
For which the liberties of thousands pay,
Of thousands once as blest, & born as free,
And nurs'd with care, (tho' ot so soft,) as we
If in benevolence firm, we this can dare,
And in our brethrens sufferings hold no share,
In no small part their long-borne pangs will cease,
And we to souls unborn may whisper peace. (25.9–20, 146)

Whereas previous Abolitionist rhetoric referred to the bodily fluids as making sugar cane grow, here, Birkett describes the sugar itself as "blood-stained," bearing the physical evidence of the crime that produced it, and encourages women to push the sugar from their lips as if—and because—it is tainted with blood.

In addressing women readers and emphasizing the presence of bloodstained sugar in the important social and domestic space of the tea table, Birkett's poem emphasizes women's power

as consumers as well as their moral responsibility. As Julie Holcomb argues, the tea table was an important place in eighteenth-century Britain: a site of political and social exchange, a symbol of cultural and social class, and a site of performative gender: “The complex cultural and economic landscape of the tea table could signify wealth and gentility, or, conversely, luxury and dissipation, depending on the context” (611). Moreover, the tea table was closely associated with consumption, particularly the consumption of luxury goods. The increasing popularity of tea over the course of the eighteenth century led to a market for fashionable accessories such as tea tables, teapots, and teacups, as well as a 400% increase in sugar consumption (613–17). Recognizing the importance of the tea table and the consumer power it conveyed upon women, Birkett’s poem argues that women have political and economic power as well:

Say not that small’s the sphere in which we move
And our attempts would vain & fruitless prove;
Not so, we hold a most important share,
In all the evils – all the wrongs they bear,
And tho’ their woes entire, we cant remove,
We may the encreasing miseries which they prove
Push far away the plant for which they die,
And in this one small thing our taste deny; (30.1–8, 147)

In arguing that by “pushing away” sugar, women can effect political change, Birkett makes a statement about the power women hold as consumers as well as about the danger of luxury. In this way, she and other advocates for abstention from sugar “challenged men and women to

reconsider their relationship to the world of goods and to envision a national economy based on standards of humanity rather than profit and loss” (Holcomb 624).

The blood sugar trope made its greatest impact in William Fox’s pamphlet *An Address to the People of Great Britain, on the Propriety of Abstaining from West India Sugar and Rum*, also published in 1792. In contrast to Birkett’s appeal to moral responsibility, Fox uses horror and disgust—similar to that evoked in Gothic novels like *The Monk*—to convince readers to boycott the products of slavery and disrupt the economic system that produces it. Fox’s pamphlet was extremely popular, selling more than 250,000 copies in Britain and the United States and going through 20 editions in its first year of publication (Holcomb 619). Because of its wide circulation, the pamphlet strongly influenced the rhetoric and imagery of other Abolitionist writing (Sussman, “Women” 51). Fox’s argument is predicated on the idea that his readers, modern enlightened Britons, are hypocrites for allowing a barbaric practice to continue: we “have greatly surpassed, in brutality and injustice, the most ignorant and barbarous ages: and while we are pretending to the finest feelings of humanity, are exercising unprecedented cruelty” (Fox 3). In juxtaposing the “ignorant and barbarous ages” with modern Britain, Fox highlights that conflict between past and present which is so central to the Gothic, one that sees modern civilization grappling with its own historical identity. Similarly to Birkett, Fox uses language that evokes horrid novels to describe slavery, calling the slave trade “the horrid traffic” and “the dreadful traffic,” the production of sugar “a horrid practice,” and the consumption of it “the horrid association” (3, 16, 4, 13). If we do not abstain, Fox argues, knowing the conditions under which sugar and rum are produced, “in all its native horror,” then we should “at least have the candour to avow our conduct in its real deformity” (13). Fox’s rhetoric thus aligns the practice of

slavery and sugar production with the Gothic, and those who are complicit in them with the “moral deformity” of the gothic villain.

Fox also uses the blood sugar trope to argue that those who eat sugar are knowingly consuming food tainted with blood. He calls upon his readers to do voluntarily what the House of Commons would not force them to do, and regulate their own patterns of consumption: “[t]hey may hold it to our lips, steeped in the blood of our fellow creatures; but they cannot compel us to accept the loathsome potion,” he writes, and notes that “[a] French writer” declares “[t]hat he cannot look upon a piece of sugar, without conceiving it stained with spots of human blood” (4, 5).⁴⁷ These two examples of the blood sugar trope make clear its mechanism. Fox prompts his readers to imagine that the misery and injustice of slavery figured by the blood of the enslaved, as well as the literal blood shed in the process of producing sugar, permeates the goods they produce. The second example imagines, not only that the sugar is “steeped” in blood, but that the blood is actually visible on its white surface, rendered so by the consumer’s imagination and knowledge that it is, as Fox puts it, “the produce of robbery and murder” (3). Fox also argues against the idea that an individual’s culpability is so small in the overall system of slavery as to make abstention meaningless: “Were an hundred assassins to plunge their daggers into their victim, though each might plead, that without his assistance the crime would have been completed, and that his poniard neither occasioned nor accelerated the murder, yet every one of them would be guilty of the intire [sic] crime” (9). In this way, Fox associates the consumer of sugar with the Gothic trope of banditti.

Reading the blood sugar trope as Gothic situates it within a rich figurative field, a “symbolic glossary for evoking dread” (Frank 201). Because it has to do with the consumption of

⁴⁷ The blood sugar trope is so widely used that it is difficult to identify which writer is referred to here, but suggestions include Condorcet (Soo-Hoo) and Claude Adrien Helvétius (Pearson 753).

blood, the trope has affinities with the Romantic vampire, particularly when the vampire is understood as a figure of economic oppression and exploitation (as discussed in Chapter 4). As the consumption of part of the human body, it is also associated with cannibalism. Cannibalism is relatively rare in Romantic Gothic literature; the most memorable example is in one of Monçada's tales in Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), in which a starving man trapped in a dungeon with his lover feeds on her for survival (see Morin).⁴⁸ We might also draw a connection with Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, a play not as strongly associated with Romantic Gothic as *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*, but which has strong affinities with it through the violent rape and mutilation of Lavinia and, of course, the horrible ending in which Tamora, the Queen of the Goths, unknowingly eats a pie made from the flesh of her sons (Hutchings). Cannibalism is a more common trope in more modern works of horror, and we can thus situate the blood sugar trope within a tradition of Gothic consumption extending to modern horror films, which also depict the consumption of other abject substances such as rotten meat, feces, and other bodily secretions. In her discussion of the horror-film trope of the consumption of "abominable substances," Lorna Piatti-Farnell notes that the boundaries that define what is disgusting from what is palatable are culturally determined, distinguished again from that which is revolting—that which elicits a visceral reaction, such as gagging (51). The boundary around what is rotten is likewise unstable, since we commonly consume dead flesh in the form of meat and rotten foods that are more appetizingly called "fermented," as well as yogurt and cheese (51–52). Piatti-Farnell points to the consumption of maggots as a cinematic trope of putrefaction, "an exemplification of the rotten" (55). She cites the example of *The Lost Boys* (1987), in which a vampire enchants a victim into believing that the rice he is eating is actually maggots (Piatti-

⁴⁸ Ann Tracy lists three other Gothic novels that include cannibalism (197): James Norris Brewer's *A Winter's Tale* (1799), Joshua Pickersgill, Jr.'s *The Three Brothers* (1803), and Edward Ball's *The Black Robber* (1819).

Farnell 55). Similar instances of illusory maggot-eating occur in *Poltergeist* (1982) and *Ghost Ship* (2002), and the trope is parodied in *What We Do in the Shadows* (2014) (55). Notably, all of these examples of food horror involve supernatural interventions: vampires and ghosts make people believe they are eating maggots when they are not. The blood sugar trope, however, makes visible signs of contamination that are—literally and figuratively—really there. It is effective because, like Gothic fiction, it works to evoke an emotional reaction in the reader: a sense of horror and disgust that convinces readers not to consume sugar by making that which is sweet and palatable disgusting or revolting.

Whereas the blood contamination in Fox’s pamphlet and in the precursors to the blood sugar trope are figurative, an influential pamphlet by Andrew Burn, also published in 1792, emphasizes the literal contamination of the sugar. Burn explains that his pamphlet is designed to convince those who are not moved by “motives of humanity nor conscience” (Burn 3), the type of appeals that Fox makes:

how difficult [it is] to persuade some, that when they eat Sugar, they figuratively eat the Blood of the Negro. This talk I leave for others to accomplish; my business at present is, by plain matters of fact, of which I have frequently had ocular demonstration, to convince the inhabitants of Great Britain, who use Soft Sugar, either in Puddings, Pies, Tarts, Tea, or otherwise, that they literally, and most certainly in so doing, eat large quantities of that last mentioned Fluid, as it flows copiously from the Body of the laborious Slave, toiling under the scorching rays of a vertical sun, mixed with many other savory ingredients, which shall be hereafter mentioned. (7)

If Fox's pamphlet has affinities with the Radcliffean style of aestheticized terror and threatened violence, Burn's evokes a Lewis-esque aesthetic of horror and revulsion. Indeed, Burn's pamphlet reads not unlike a Gothic novel, with several variations on the trope of live burial. He recounts seeing a slave being whipped and put in the stocks to be eaten alive by maggots, which brings to mind the common Gothic trope of the encounter with a mouldering corpse, especially the refrain in Lewis's "Alonzo the Brave and Fair Imogene" in *The Monk*, published several years after Burn's pamphlet: "The worms they crept in, and the worms they crept out" (*Monk* 273).⁴⁹ The discovery he recounts of "the whole body of a roasted Negro" found in a cask of particularly good rum and his tale of the discovery of a cask of sugar containing "the Skeleton of a Child in the midst of it" bring to mind Poe's *The Cask of Amontillado* (1846). Burn's account of the labouring slaves being "obliged to dance a long and fatiguing Jig among the Sugar," meanwhile, evokes the dancing skeletons in "Grim, King of the Ghosts; or, The Dance of Death" (1801)⁵⁰ and images of the labouring slaves dancing on their own saccharine graves (4, 10, 12).

But the most revolting tale is the one Burn tells of the process of packing sugar into hogsheads. In addition to the "warm stream" of copious amounts of sweat generated by the men standing in the hogshead and stomping the sugar down, the sugar is tainted with lice that fall from their heads and which are uncomfortably similar to maggots. He also lists the "very disgusting fluid, of various colours"—that is, pus—that flows from the sores on their feet, including those from the Yaws (boils), the Jigger (a parasite), and other "scrophulus disorders" (7–9). He could, Burn says, add that the sugar is also tainted by

⁴⁹ This description also parallels a passage in *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782) in which the narrator/letter writer stumbles upon an enslaved man who has been caged and hung in a tree to die, and has been horribly mutilated by birds and preyed upon by insects, an important passage for early American Gothic and its engagement with race (Crèvecoeur).

⁵⁰ This poem appears in the collection *Tales of Terror; with an Introductory Dialogue* (1801), which was published anonymously but is often—incorrectly—attributed to Lewis (see Lewis, *Tales* 239–245).

that well-known, but offensive substance, usually lodged between the human toes, and under the nails; but from what has been just advanced, I make no doubt, but many of my Readers have already begun to call me ugly names; make wry faces; and nauseate the very idea of Sugar. (9)

Here, the horror of consuming maggots and other symbols of rotteness are made nauseatingly real. It is notable, though, that the contaminants are not nauseating because they come from the bodies of enslaved Black men. Indeed, Burn goes to some lengths to emphasize the commonalities between the bodies of the slaves and the bodies of the English sugar eaters. He notes that the lice that fall from the labouring slaves' heads are also common in "the flaxen locks of the European," and his reference to the "offensive substance" makes clear that it is familiar to Britons as well. Indeed, the rhetorical effect of his pamphlet depends upon readers' familiarity with the various bodily substances he describes.⁵¹

Reading the blood sugar trope as Gothic helps reveal its workings as well as its figurative significance. Both Charlotte Sussman and Morton are interested in the literary mechanism as well as the effect of the trope, pointing out that the figure of speech is more complex than it seems. In her analysis of Burn's pamphlet, Sussman notes that,

Although this pamphlet explicitly rejects metaphor in favor of concrete examples, it may also be said to reveal the workings of the metaphor it literalizes. That is, it assures its

⁵¹ Erin Pearson argues, however, that in emphasizing the horrors of the enslaved body in this way, the blood sugar trope risks emphasizing racial difference and further alienating the British reader from the enslaved African (743).

readers that the images of bodily contamination, which they thought might lie at the end of a chain of metonymic associations, are in fact literally true. (“Women” 55)

Similarly, in a discussion of Robert Southey’s sonnets against slavery, Morton writes,

The beverage [tea] is a fantasy object that shows colonial enjoyment to be predicated on cannibalistic consumption. What stands in a metonymic relation to others along a chain of commodities becomes metaphorically present in the sugar. Several mediating links of time and space are removed, collapsing the colonial body from East and West into the tea-cup. (102)

Both critics point to the collapsing function of blood sugar, its ability to bring together ideas—“metonymic associations”—and places—“the colonial body from East and West”—into an everyday object that retains its material and cultural meaning while also supporting this more abstracted symbolic function. Morton, for instance, describes it as “apocalyptic” and emphasizes its “decoding” function (176). Rather than reading the trope as a representation of the repressed underbelly of the Enlightenment, however, Laura Doyle argues for reading it as an expression of the tension between the colonial and the modern or, as she schematizes it, the “colonial/modern”: “a symbolic form generated by the slash that both divides and joins these two aspects of history” (516). Doyle’s study is primarily concerned with *Melmoth* as a critique of systemic colonial violence, including explicit references to the Irish Rebellion that emphasize that those tensions which the Gothic exposes and explores are found close to home as well as in the colonies.

The blood sugar trope can be and has been read as an example of the subaltern body—the enslaved Black body—refusing to stay in its “proper place” and, by contaminating the consumable luxury of sugar, transgressing the boundary of the White English subject (Botting, *Gothic* 10). Indeed, as Botting argues, it is this transgression that makes the Other monstrous, since “monstrosity marks a refusal to stay in an allotted place, a destabilization of power relations” (10). The issue of agency is important to consider, though. Botting reminds us that alterity is not a natural condition, but rather “involves structural relationships: the maintenance of orders based on patterns of exclusion” (10). Unlike a vampire or other monster that Botting describes, whose transgression is a “refusal” of the place allotted them, the enslaved body does not choose to bleed. Reading the blood sugar trope in the context of the Gothic, then, and specifically through an economic lens, another reading emerges in which the monstrosity is relocated from the slave to the slave owner, who transgresses the boundaries of social mores, morality, and even humanity in his pursuit of profit. Abolitionist poetry emphasizes the inhumanity of the slave owners and the helplessness of the enslaved: the blame for the contamination rests firmly with the hand that whips rather than the man who bleeds. The rhetorical purpose of the blood sugar trope is to create revulsion against the good, outrage against the producer, and sympathy for the enslaved, emotional responses that convince the consumer not to consume.

In prompting consumers of sugar to envision it as spotted with blood, the blood sugar trope makes visible the hidden horrors of its production. Although colonialism and slavery were no secret to British consumers, for most of them it was something that happened an ocean away, far removed from the tea table and other domestic spaces in which the products of colonial exploitation were consumed. As several critics have argued, the blood sugar trope worked by

manifesting the conditions of sugar's production in the product itself, through the imagination, creating what Erin Pearson calls "a direct chain of relation between consumers and slaves an ocean apart" (742; Coleman 348). In Samuel Taylor Coleridge's lecture "On the Slave Trade," he wishes he had to the power to make sugar's conditions of production visible: "Then with our fleshly eye should we behold what even now Imagination ought to pain to us; instead of conserves, tears and blood, and for music, groanings and the loud peals of the lash" (qtd on Pearson 745). Pearson argues that this imagery is "dismantling" what Karl Marx would later term the commodity fetish, the illusion that a commodity's value is inherent to it, rather than a function of the labour necessary to produce it (745). The blood sugar trope accomplishes what Coleridge wishes he could do, drawing on the hyperbolic and highly imaginative mode of the Gothic to enable readers to see the labour—the blood—necessary for the production of sugar. Through the Gothic trope of blood sugar, then, Abolitionist literature finds a way to express an idea central to the modern economy that Marx articulated decades later. By collapsing the distance between the consumer and the production of a commodity by drawing on Gothic horror, the trope also provided a way for consumers to conceptualize their place in the modern political economic system, and to use their power as consumers to correct what Thomas Clarkson called "Parliament's failure of moral nerve" (Holcomb 612). The protest was undeniably effective, with hundreds of thousands of consumers taking part, and in 1791, Clarkson claimed that government revenues from sugar had fallen by £200,000 (Coleman 344).

Mary Shelley's "Transformation" and the Fungible Body

The blood sugar trope uses the aesthetics of Gothic discourse to make visible—and abhorrent—the human suffering involved in the production of a luxury good, as well as the consumer's

complicity in it. Shelley's Gothic tale "Transformation," published in the literary annual *The Keepsake* for 1831, similarly examines the dangers of luxurious consumption, and particularly the danger of treating bodies as commodities. Whereas the blood sugar trope dissuades consumers from participating in the inhuman cruelty of the West Indian sugar plantation, the tale's depiction of supernatural body switching literalizes the idea of the body as commodity and the dehumanizing effects of excessive, luxurious consumption on the individual.

The tale is narrated by its protagonist, Guido, and recounts an incident from his youth, around the turn of the fifteenth century in Italy. Guido describes the dissipation that led to the depletion of his family fortune, recounting his spending habits in some detail. After inheriting his father's fortune, Guido travels to Paris, where Charles VI's mental instability has produced a culture of debauchery: Guido describes him as "now sane, now mad, now a monarch, now an abject slave, [he] was the very mockery of humanity" (Shelley 122). In order to support a luxurious Parisian lifestyle, however, Guido must sell what is left of his family property. He says, "[a]cre after acre, estate after estate, I sold. My dress, my jewels, my horses and their caparisons, were almost unrivalled in gorgeous Paris, while the lands of my inheritance passed into possession of others" (123). His enumeration of the things he sells, and the repetition of "acre" and "estate," emphasize the extent of the fortune he is squandering. Guido's retrospective lament about his youthful spending focuses on his exchange of land—of a source of real wealth—for the mere signs of it. When the political climate in Paris forces him to suspend his pleasures, he returns to Genoa, where he believes he can easily rebuild his fortune. "My last act," he says, "was to dispose of my remaining estate near Albaro for half its worth, for ready money. Then I despatched all kinds of artificers, arras, furniture of regal splendor, to fit up the last relic of my inheritance, my palace in Genoa" (123). Guido's spending in this case is an attempt to

impress his prospective father-in-law, Torella, so that he can finalize his marriage with Torella's daughter Juliet, his childhood companion. Here again, however, Guido sells his inherited property in order to buy luxuries, yet more symbols of wealth that no longer belongs to him. Here, he reveals that he is willing to accept half the value of his estate because what he really values is the liquidity of cash: its ability to be easily exchanged or spent.

Guido's desire to spend is closely linked with his immoral behaviour, particularly his debauchery in Paris. The money he gains by selling his land funds a lifestyle that is immoral and sexually luxurious, one that includes "nightly orgies" and "sleepless, riotous nights" (124). His spending is dangerously out of control. Like Reginald St. Leon in William Godwin's *St Leon* (1799), much of Guido's spending is driven by his love of display, which in his case is combined with a stubborn rejection of control. He says of his time in Paris, "[m]y character still followed me. I was arrogant and self-willed; I loved display, and above all, I threw all control far from me. Who could control me in Paris?" (123). Torella is "a second parent" (122), but even his paternal influence has no effect. By setting Guido's debauchery in Paris and emphasizing his selfish refusal to be advised by Torella, Shelley aligns Guido with the prototypical Gothic villain. The political instability created by Charles VI's mental instability is echoed in Guido's profligate and uncontrolled behaviour, and suggests a connection with the state of England in Shelley's youth, under the rule of another "mad king," George III. The only thing that effectively controls Guido's spending is the lack of something to spend. He repeats, "[w]ho could control me? Not the letters and advice of Torella—only strong necessity visiting me in the abhorred shape of an empty purse" (123). The empty purse signifies Guido's desire to spend, the state of "strong necessity," or want. Its "abhorred shape" outlines and thus makes visible the lack of money within.

Guido's uncontrolled spending results in the annulment of his engagement to Juliet, whose role within the tale is of a possession to be exchanged. Juliet and Guido grew up together, and from a young age, Guido attempted to possess her. He describes an incident from his childhood in which an older cousin became enraptured with Juliet: "he called her his bride, and asked her to marry him. She refused, and he insisted, drawing her unwillingly towards him" (122). Juliet is equally unable to resist Guido's jealous claim of her as his sole property. Guido says, "[o]n that night I led Juliet to the chapel of our house: I made her touch the sacred relics—I harrowed her child's heart, and profaned her child's lips with an oath, that she would be mine, and mine only" (122). Guido calls his feeling love, but his language suggests the willingness, perhaps the desire, to possess Juliet by force if necessary. He says he "made" her touch relics, "harrowed" her heart, and "profaned" her lips, words suggestive of coercion, violence, and corruption. His repetition of "mine," too, emphasizes the fixedness of Juliet in the marketplace of the story; he becomes jealous of her in a way he does not about his possessions. When Guido sells his land, he laments that what once was his has "passed into possession of others" (123), but believes that he can recover them. The idea of "possession" takes on sexual connotations in relation to Juliet, though: once she has belonged to another, such as the older cousin, she can never belong to Guido. Because Juliet is a scarce commodity, one that cannot be circulated like others, her value is high, following Adam Smith's principle of supply and demand: he notes that the "wealth and wanton luxury of the competitors" of a given commodity also affects its price (Smith 23).

Guido's desperate desire to possess Juliet drives him to reckless violence. In the altercation with the older cousin, he "strove to draw his [the cousin's] sword" (Shelley 122), that is, he was willing to risk death rather than let the cousin have her. Guido's jealousy of Juliet

when his desire to possess her in marriage is thwarted also becomes violent. When he first returns from Paris, Torella forgives him and honours the engagement. Guido describes Juliet here again as his possession: “[a]dmiration first possessed me; she is mine! was the second proud emotion, and my lips curled with haughty triumph” (124). His initial feeling of admiration, of love, is supplanted with ominous jealousy, signaled by his curling lips. When Guido fully depletes his fortune, though, Torella denies Guido access to Juliet, declaring their engagement void because Guido can no longer support her. Guido once again attempts to “harrow her heart,” but when persuasion fails, he kidnaps her—twice—but she is recovered both times.

Guido’s spending dispossesses him of his identity as well as his fortune. His inherited property effectively defines who he is: it is passed down through his bloodline and is attached to his family name, and it determines his place in society as well as his physical place in the world. By squandering his inheritance, Guido dispossesses himself of all this. By voiding his marriage contract with Juliet, his profligacy means that he cannot father legitimate heirs to carry on his bloodline, even if he still had property for them to inherit. His drive to consume luxuries—to exchange his property for empty symbols of wealth—seems insatiable. Guido describes his state of mind during this frenzy of consumption in terms of self-division, saying of his time in Paris, for example, that “[m]y character still followed me” (123), as if it were separate from himself. Similarly, on his return home to Genoa, Guido remembers, “my proud step was no interpreter of my heart, for I deeply felt that, though surrounded by every luxury, I was a beggar” (123). Here, his step, the sign of his physical presence, is at odds with his “deeply felt” indigence.

Guido’s state of extreme want catalyzes the tale’s shift from the realm of the real to the realm of the supernatural. The empty purse, for instance, representing Guido’s inability to spend, is described as “abhorrent,” indicating the tale’s Gothicization of want. After he is arrested for

kidnapping and then released from prison, Guido wanders along the shore, and the landscape mirrors his disturbed state of mind, “full of grim-visaged ideas.” “Now subdued almost to tears,” he says, “now raving in my agony, still I wandered along the rocky shore, which grew at each step wilder and more desolate.” The landscape he describes is characteristically Gothic, with “[h]anging rocks and hoar precipices” and “black caverns” that “yawned.” Guido’s identity has been depleted through his luxurious spending to the point of nonexistence, as he wanders the beach “alone—friendless; with nor sword at my side, nor ducat in my purse” (126). In this state of crisis, Guido is distracted from his self-abstraction by a ship being driven onto the rocks by the wind, which he witnesses with horror and awe. “There I stood in safety;” he says, “and there were my fellow creatures battling, now hopelessly, for annihilation. Methought I saw them struggling—too truly did I hear their shrieks, conquering the barking surges in their shrill agony” (127). Guido’s juxtaposition of himself and the sailors emphasizes the pathetic fallacy of the scene, as well as the sense that he, like the doomed sailors, is subject to forces that he cannot control. This incident also echoes the tale’s epigraph,⁵² a passage from Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” and that tale’s becalmed ship and account of the curse that can only be broken through penance (121).⁵³

Out of this shipwreck appears a mysterious creature, whom Guido initially assumes to be a sailor who miraculously survived the wreck. From his first sight of the creature floating towards the shore, however, Guido describes his form as strange, and uncannily inhuman:

⁵² Shelley misquotes from the 1817 version of Coleridge’s poem from *Sibylline Leaves*, substituting “set me free” for “left me free” in the fourth line (Shelley 121; Coleridge, “Rime” 37).

⁵³ This reference to a shipwreck might also allude, of course, to Percy Bysshe Shelley’s death by drowning and to the Romantic motifs of shipwrecks and castaways, such as William Cowper’s “The Castaway” (1799) and Théodore Géricault’s painting *The Raft of the Medusa* (1819).

Was that a human form?—It grew more distinct; and at last a mighty wave, lifting the whole freight, lodged it upon a rock. A human being bestriding a sea-chest!—A human being!—Yet was it one? Surely never such had existed before—a misshapen dwarf, with squinting eyes, distorted features, and body deformed, till it became a horror to behold.

(127)

Guido quickly realizes that, whatever the creature is, it is not human. In addition to offering prayers to “St. Beelzebub,” the creature exhibits the power of controlling the weather, calming the storm by extending his “two long lank arms, that looked like spider’s claws,” and taking credit for creating it in the first place (127). Although Guido knows he should flee from the creature, he stays and converses with it: “[a]we, curiosity, a clinging fascination, drew me towards him” (128). The creature wins Guido over by promising to help him, to “allay the tempest of your fortunes as I did my own,” even though, as Guido says, “[t]he voice of the wretch was screeching and horrid, and his contortions as he spoke were frightful to behold” (128). Guido is particularly drawn in by the creature’s exhortations that he should take revenge upon Torella, to “set thy foot on the old man’s neck, and possess thyself of his daughter” (128). When Guido laments that he does not have the fortune necessary to effect such a revenge, the creature shows him the contents of the chest: a collection of jewels, gold, and silver that inspires a “mad desire” in Guido (129). The creature then proposes an exchange that would enable Guido to enact his revenge:

‘Some things I possess which you may covet; but I would give them all for a small share, or even a loan of what is yours.’

‘My possessions are at your service,’ I replied, bitterly—‘my poverty, my exile, my disgrace—I make a free gift of them all.’

‘Good! I thank you. Add one other thing to your gift, and my treasure is yours.’

‘As nothing is my sole inheritance, what besides nothing would you have?’

‘Your comely face and well-made limbs.’

[...] ‘I ask for a loan, not a gift,’ said the frightful thing: ‘lend me your body for three days—you shall have mine to cage your soul the while, and, in payment, my chest. What say you to the bargain? Three short days.’ (129)

As if he were renting a suit of clothes, the creature thus offers to exchange bodies, and Guido, enchanted by the idea of possessing the treasure—and with it, of possessing Juliet—agrees. After a ritual that includes the exchange of blood, Guido wakes up in the creature’s body.

This exchange between Guido and the creature echoes other supernatural deals, such as those in *St. Leon*, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s *Faust* (1808), *Melmoth*, and even the secret contract in *Otranto* (discussed in Chapter 1). What distinguishes this example, though, is the way in which it literalizes the idea of the body as a possession. In one of the few studies that analyze the tale, Sussman reads “Transformation” as one of several of Shelley’s short fictions that thematize the exchange of identities, usually through cross-dressing, focusing particularly on how women’s bodies are commodities to be exchanged through marriage. In Shelley’s short fiction, “all exchange is a kind of economic transformation: all substances—lands, goods, money, and bodies—fungible” (“Stories” 169). In Shelley’s other stories, though, this exchange of identities is figurative. Moreover, “Transformation” presents this exchange in explicitly

economic terms, as if Guido's body were like the other inherited possessions that he has carelessly exchanged for ready cash.

As one might expect, the creature does not fulfill his side of the bargain and does not return after three days. During his absence, Guido experiences a literal self-division that echoes the moral self-division he experienced during his stay in Paris and return to Genoa as a pauper. Upon awakening in the creature's body, he says, "I knew not my own shadow as it fell from me" (Shelley 129–30). Guido describes his efforts learn to control the body as well, noting that "[a]t first I could hardly walk, so strange and out of joint were all my limbs; and my voice—it was that of a fiend" (130). The voice in particular is unfamiliar: when he realizes that the creature has stolen his body, he says, "I laughed—the dwarf's yell burst from my lips" (131). Guido's revulsion toward his new body awakens him to the folly of his actions. Whereas before he "abhorred" his empty purse, after realizing that the creature has stolen his body, this feeling transfers from the empty purse to the chest full of treasure: "[t]he jewels and the gold" he says, "—oh, how I abhorred them!" (130). After dreaming about the creature wooing Juliet in his usurped body, Guido realizes that it has taken not only his body but his identity as well, so he pursues it to Genoa to win them back. Seeing himself as a literal monster, Guido realizes the monstrosity of all his prior actions: that he has been exchanging things of real value—his land, his social status, and his body—for things that are mere symbols of it. In this way, the creature's ability to make bodies fungible is a hyperbolic expression of Guido's excessive consumption, a literalization of his self-dispossession. Just as he felt self-divided wearing symbols of a fortune and status that he no longer possessed, wearing the creature's body drives home the point that his outward appearance does not determine his inherent value as a human being.

Even later in life, when he tells his tale, Guido is unable to pin down what the creature was, mirroring the reader's inability to come to a definitive interpretation of the creature who, like that in *Frankenstein*, remains unnamed. Paul Cantor, for example, reads the tale as a feminist rewriting of Byron's unfinished drama *The Deformed Transformed*, which Shelley transcribed in 1822–23 and greatly admired ("Mary" 89). Cantor's analysis of the story is peripheral to his discussion of Byron, but he emphasizes Guido's narcissism and the "purgative" function of the creature, which he reads as a manifestation of Guido's pride and violence, things that "have come to be crystallized and externalized in this hideous form" (103–04). The facts that the creature seems not to know Guido at first, however, and that it has a story and motivations of his own, challenges this reading of the creature as Guido's dark double. Sussman similarly reads the creature as a fiend, calling him "demonic and untrustworthy" ("Stories" 168). Although that is true, the creature does more good than harm after stealing Guido's body, acting as Guido should have acted upon his return from Paris: he makes amends with Torella, regrets his profligate ways, and woos Juliet courteously at her window. Moreover, when Guido attacks the creature at Juliet's window and they fight, the creature encourages Guido to strike a fatal blow to his (Guido's) body but assures him that he will survive. "Do!—strike home!" he says, "destroy this body—you will still live: may your life be long and merry!" (Shelley 134). At first, these words seem to mock Guido, especially since the dwarf draws his sword during Guido's hesitation upon hearing them, but Guido decides to risk killing himself rather than let the creature live in his body, and throws himself (in the creature's body) onto his own sword, at the same time stabbing his own body (inhabited by the creature) with his dagger.

We do not learn what happens to the creature, but Guido awakens in his own body, and in spite of the wound in his side, he lives a long and happy life with Juliet. Guido never fully

recovers from the encounter: he says, “I have never, indeed, wholly recovered my strength—my cheek is paler since—my person a little bent” (135). But he cannot regret the wound since, without it, “never had I called her mine” (135). Although the creature is demonstrably demonic, Guido believes that it was sent by a “guardian angel, to show me the folly and misery of pride, and was “a good rather than an evil spirit” (135). Whatever the creature’s true motivation, the effect of Guido’s encounter with him, and the experience of having his body transformed into a commodity, is that it forces him to realize the danger of luxurious consumption: of self-dispossession. It forces him to see the trappings of wealth as empty symbols and to appreciate the value of having his “step” aligned with his “heart” (123–24). Furthermore, it makes Guido appreciate the value of something else. “[N]o one,” he says, “better knows than I the value of his own body; no one, probably, except myself, ever having had it stolen from him” (134–35).

Conclusion

The blood sugar trope used in Abolitionist literature that argued for abstention from sugar draws on the Gothic’s capacity for literalization to prompt readers and consumers to see a truth about the global economy of which they are part that is otherwise hidden from view: to make the unthinkable “become thinkable” (Clavin 29). In confirming that the spectral or figurative spots of blood staining the sugar are in fact real, Fox’s pamphlet takes the trope from the realm of Gothic terror, in which a safe distance is maintained between the reader and the object of fear, to the realm of Gothic horror, where that distance is collapsed. Indeed, this rhetorical use of Gothic horror is effective because the intent of the literature of the sugar abstention movement was to affect the behaviour of readers, to evoke an imagined image so aversive that it affected their patterns of consumption. It does this, not only by evoking disgust, but by drawing on the Gothic

trope of blood as evidence of violent crime in order to provoke a moral aversion to buying sugar and thereby being complicit in the inhumanity and moral monstrosity necessary for its production.

Just as the blood sugar trope draws on the Gothic to emphasize the dehumanizing effect of consuming sugar, “Transformation” draws upon the Gothic’s power of literalization to critique the dehumanizing effect of commercial society itself. Although, as is typical of Gothic fiction, the tale’s historical setting distances it from the context of its own historical moment, Guido’s obsession with consuming, and particularly conspicuous consumption, situates the tale within the world of commercial society. The supernatural elements of the tale enable Shelley to articulate the idea that, in the modern age, not only social relationships, but human subjectivity itself is imagined as part of an economic system, something able to be bought and sold. This examination of the blood sugar trope and “Transformation” demonstrates some ways in which Gothic discourse facilitates and enables thinking through the dangers of consumption, particularly luxurious, excessive consumption, highlighting the problem of defining the boundaries of self-interest and the dangers of transforming humans into commodities.

Conclusion: Post-Romantic Gothic Economics

Romantic Gothic literature was written in the midst of—and in response to—the commercial age. Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) engendered a new way of understanding and imagining history, commercial society, and the monster it created: the “imaginary machine” of the modern economy. *The Wealth of Nations* signals a shift toward thinking of society itself as an economic system, one in which self-interest is not only morally justified, but essential. It is part of a cultural movement that includes the recognition of a modern, self-conscious sense of history. Smith and other Enlightenment-era thinkers who imagined history as stadial understood commercial society as the pinnacle of human social development, something that, as Kathryn Sutherland points out, “comes dangerously close [...] to assuming the shape of a closed narrative, as Europe, with Britain at its head, enters the final glorious phase, history’s happy ending” (xvi). Bookending the Romantic era and this study, though, is another work of economic discourse that reimagined relationships between people and commodities. Written some seventy years after *The Wealth of Nations*, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels’ *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) calls for a revolution to usher in a post-commercial age. Drawing upon the discursive possibilities of the Gothic, the *Manifesto* articulates a view of the fallen world of mid-nineteenth-century England, the apotheosis of the system Smith envisioned in which social relationships are reduced to economic transactions and individuals are spectral cogs in this imaginary machine.

Marx and Engels' *The Communist Manifesto* and the Spectral Proletariat

Though largely neglected at first, *The Communist Manifesto* has become one of the most influential writings of the modern era, a “touchstone” for twentieth- and twenty-first century social, political, literary and economic theory and practice (Isaac 1). It was published in London in 1848, in German, and was published in English for the first time in the journal *The Red Republican* in November 1850, in a translation by Scottish journalist Helen Macfarlane (Usher 110).⁵⁴

As an articulation of the economic and political relations that Marx and Engels observed structuring European society, the *Manifesto* signals a shift in how society was imagined—a shift in the modern social imaginary (Taylor). Both *The Wealth of Nations* and the *Manifesto* are cultural milestones in part because they articulate ideas that were still in flux, for which language did not yet exist. Writing as commercial society was still emerging, Smith uses the Gothic metaphor of the invisible hand to capture the idea of a modern economic system that transforms self-interest into common good. By the time Marx and Engels write the *Manifesto*, commercial society had crystalized to the extent that they were able to observe and articulate the consequences of this new way of imagining society as an economic system, and to perceive the age of commercial society as transitioning into something new. And, like Smith, Marx turns to the Gothic for the language in which to express these ideas. The literary qualities of Marx's writing in *Capital* is widely recognized, particularly his use of Gothic imagery (Kornbluh; Neocleous; Policante); his description of capitalism as “vampire-like” looks back to eighteenth-

⁵⁴ Samuel Moore's 1888 translation, one approved by Engels, remains the standard English version of the *Manifesto*. Here, in this analysis of the *Manifesto*'s use of Gothic metaphor, I refer primarily to Moore's 1888 translation, largely because it draws out some of the imagery that Macfarlane's more literal translation does not; to resolve this anachronism, I read the relevant passages against both Macfarlane's translation and the original German.

century conceptions of the vampire as an economic predator (Marx, *Capital* 342).⁵⁵ Marx and Engels draw upon the Gothic in the *Manifesto* as well, though, through the figures of a spectre and a sorcerer and through describing humans transformed into commodities.

Just as Gothic fiction tends to stage conflict between individuals and society against a backdrop of historical change, primarily the tension between the past and present, ancient and modern, feudal and commercial society, the *Manifesto* likewise views the conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat against the backdrop of history. Marx and Engels disavow the idea that their manifesto is an ideology, claiming instead that it is merely describing “things as they are, [...] actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes” (*Communist* 85). Like *The Wealth of Nations*, the *Manifesto* takes a stadial view of history, and displays a modern awareness of history and one’s place within it. Indeed, it situates the revolution it envisions in the context of the French Revolution and its abolition of feudal, landed property in favour of more mobile forms of bourgeois property (85). But whereas Smith’s stadial model holds commercial society to be the apex of social-economic history, the *Manifesto* predicts a new stage, one in which all private property is abolished (85). Evoking the idea of mortmain, in which the “dead hand of the past” maintains a controlling grip on the present (discussed in Chapter 1), the *Manifesto* describes the new age as post-historical: “In bourgeois society, therefore, the past dominates the present; in Communist society, the present dominates the past” (86). Indeed, the *Manifesto* argues that the revolution that enabled the rise of the bourgeoisie broke bonds with history by rewriting the history of development, and because of this, the age is defined by constant and unstoppable—and therefore unstable—revolution:

⁵⁵ For more about Marx’s Gothic imagery in *Capital*, see Jerrold Hogle’s “The Gothic-Theory Conversation: An Introduction” (6).

The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form, was, on the contrary, the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes. Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind. (77)

The *Manifesto*'s vision of the "bourgeois epoch" as a continual apocalyptic revolution evokes Ann Mellor's notion of Romantic irony: the attempt to grasp something solid in an ontological desert of shifting sand (Mellor). The destabilizing effect of this continual revolution is most clearly expressed in the last sentence of this passage. Not only does the image "[a]ll that is solid melts into air"⁵⁶ evoke Hamlet's nihilistic lament "O, that this too too solid flesh would melt" (1.2.129, 162); it also imagines modern bourgeois society and radical alienation from the historical past within a fallen, topsy turvy world, echoing the vision of Gothic world described by Ann Tracy and discussed in the Introduction (3).

⁵⁶ "Alles Ständische und Stehende" (Everything standing and stationary/stagnant) in German (Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*); "Everything fixed and stable vanishes," in the 1850 translation (Marx and Engels, "Manifesto" 162).

The clearest evocation of the Gothic in the *Manifesto* is its opening sentence: “A spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of communism.” The *Manifesto*’s engagement with the spectral is complex: at first, it identifies communism as a ghost, a supernatural entity that inspires terror and dread and must be “exorcise[d],” only to dismiss the ghost as a “nursery tale” (73). The spectre metaphor is clear in the German, which refers to communism as “Ein Gespenst [a ghost]” (Marx and Engels, *Manifest*), but the 1850 translation emphasizes the “nursery tale” idea by referring to it as a “frightful hobgoblin” as well as a “ghost,” and to “silly fables about the bugbear of Communism” (Marx and Engels, “Manifesto” 161). In Chapter 1, I argue that the ghosts that haunt Gothic castles tend to be the spirits of a property’s rightful owners, who have often been unjustly dispossessed. Reading the *Manifesto* alongside those novels, we can imagine the ghost it conjures to be that of the dispossessed workers, the spirit of the proletariat, whose labour has created and enriched property that has been usurped from them. Reading the *Manifesto*’s ghost this way allows a revisioning of the social, political, and economic institution of Europe as a kind of haunted castle and explains why the “spectre of communism” is so threatening. The *Manifesto* notes that this “nursery tale” has been employed as a tool of political power, a ghost story used to frighten people for political ends: “Where is the party in opposition that has not been decried as communistic by its opponents in power?” (73). Complicating the *Manifesto*’s use of this Gothic rhetoric, though, is the fact that it says explicitly that the goal of communism is the “[a]bolition of private property” (85).

the *Manifesto*’s characterization of bourgeois society as a “sorcerer” also invokes the Gothic. It describing the recurring process by which mechanisms of production outgrow the social–economic system that created them: “the feudal relations of property became no longer compatible with the already developed productive forces; they became so many fetters. They had

to be burst asunder; they were burst asunder” (78). What happened with feudalism, Marx and Engels argue, will also happen to bourgeois society, but because the scale of production has been increased so vastly, the bursting of its fetters will be proportionately more revolutionary:

Modern bourgeois society, with its relations of production, of exchange and of property, a society that has conjured up such gigantic means of production and of exchange, is like the sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells. (78–79)

In describing bourgeois society as a “sorcerer”,⁵⁷ the *Manifesto* employs a supernatural metaphor to express the scale of the “gigantic means of production and exchange” that it has “conjured up.” This reference is a clear allusion to the tale of the Sorcerer’s Apprentice, published in ballad form by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in 1797 as *Der Zauberlehrling* (Kalitan 94; see also Policante). Although the influence of Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774), *The Bride of Corinth* (1797), and *Faust* (1808) on English Gothic literature is widely recognized (see, for example, Denton), that of *The Sorcerer’s Apprentice* is not. Yet that tale’s theme of overreaching relates closely to *Faust*, and its depiction of an overreacher who summons a power that he cannot control has close ties with Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818).⁵⁸ By employing this metaphor, then, the *Manifesto* draws upon Gothic discourse to express the idea that the bourgeois society has overreached—it has created “too much civilization, too much means of

⁵⁷ In German “Hexenmeister (sorcerer, warlock, or wizard)”; in the 1850 translation “wizard” (Marx and Engels, *Manifest*; Marx and Engels, “Manifesto” 162).

⁵⁸ Although Marx does not refer to Shelley’s novel in his works, he does refer to its creature in a way that suggests he is familiar with the novel: in a letter to Engels in which he discusses his dermatological condition, he refers to one of his troublesome boils as “this second Frankenstein on my back” (“Marx” 503).

subsistence, too much industry, too much commerce” (79). In doing so, like both the sorcerer’s apprentice and Victor Frankenstein, it has also created the thing that will destroy it: it has “forged the weapons that bring death to itself; it has also called into existence the men who are to wield those weapons—the modern working class—the proletarians” (79).

Finally, the *Manifesto* engages with the Gothic through its depiction of the dehumanizing effects of bourgeois society: the transformation of humans into commodities. The proletariat is a necessary corollary to the bourgeoisie, comprising labourers whose humanity has been squeezed out. In the course of its own revolution, the *Manifesto* argues, the bourgeoisie has transformed the relationships that define who we are, including social, religious, political, and familial relationships into economic ones: “It has pitilessly torn asunder” these relationships “and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous ‘cash payment’” (76). Not only have human relationships been emptied of any meaning beyond the economic, but individuals themselves have ceased to have any meaning other than their labour value: the proletariat is

a class of labourers, who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labour increases capital. These labourers, who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce, and are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market. (79).

Marx and Engels’ description of the commodification of the proletariat echoes the plight of the victims of the transatlantic slave trade, who were sold as chattel (discussed in Chapter 5). The Gothic novels and other texts discussed in this study imagine also characters as commodities to a

certain extent, such as imagining women as commodities on the marriage market or, in the case of Shelley's "Transformation," literalizing the idea that the human body itself is fungible (also discussed in Chapter 5). Like Guido, who divests himself of his inheritance and eventually his body, piece by piece, the proletariat divests themselves of their bodies "piecemeal," through their labour. In the *Manifesto*, the commodification of the human that Gothic fiction imagines has now become fully realized; members of the proletariat are embodied labour, without natural rights, and their value resides solely in their ability to produce capital for others. "All that we want to do away with," the *Manifesto* claims, "is the miserable character of this appropriation, under which the labourer lives merely to increase capital, and is allowed to live only in so far as the interest of the ruling class requires it" (86). The horrors of dehumanization that Gothic novels imagine as the consequence of commercial society *in extremis* are here reimagined as political economic theory.

The Frankenstein Economy

Marx and Engels were not alone in drawing on *Frankenstein* as a source of metaphor for imagining and expressing economic ideas. In March 1848, the same year that the *Communist Manifesto* was first published, an article in *The Economist* refers to the French economy after the February Revolution as a "Frankenstein," one that "is gaining strength and growing apace" ("Financial"). By 1848, Shelley's novel had already become something of a cultural touchstone, having been adapted for the stage several times and revised for a second edition in 1831, published as part of Richard Bentley's Standard Novels series.⁵⁹ Many of the references to

⁵⁹ Richard Brinsley Peake's 1823 adaptation *Presumption; or, the Fate of Frankenstein*, was very popular, and inspired several other stage adaptations (Hoeveler 176).

“Frankenstein” in the press in the first few decades of the nineteenth century are to the novel and its stage adaptations, but others suggest that the novel was already being drawn upon for metaphors about overreaching. One of the earliest of these references is in *The Watchman* (1835–1884) for April 15, 1835.⁶⁰ In a section referring to “the situation of the Whigs,” who had taken power after their alliance with Daniel O’Connell’s Irish Repeal Party successfully defeated Robert Peel’s government. The article states that “[t]he ‘faction’ are in the position of Frankenstein—they have made a monster in the shape of a coalition, and they now see their unnatural work threatening them with destruction” (“Funds”).

Although writers have drawn upon Shelley’s novel for metaphors to express economic concepts almost since its first publication, *Frankenstein*’s influence upon economic thought remains unexamined in both economics and literary studies. The analysis that follows traces how *Frankenstein* has been invoked in various imaginings of the economy over the past two hundred years. This will be achieved through an examination of the historical archive of *The Economist* (1843–), the first periodical dedicated to political economy and one that continues to have a strong voice in economic discourse today. *Frankenstein* emerges as an important site of exchange between the discourses of Gothic literature and economic thought because it provides a metaphor for conceptualizing the modern economy, an entity that, like Victor Frankenstein’s creature, is dangerous because it is of human creation but is not under human control. In this way, *Frankenstein* metaphors are examples of how Gothic literature and economic thought worked as sites of discursive and imaginative exchange since their inception in late eighteenth-century Britain and indeed continue to do so to this day.

⁶⁰ *The Watchman* (1835–1884) was a religious newspaper, also known as *The Watchman and Wesleyan Advertiser* (“The Watchman”).

Romantic-era economic discourse in Britain was diverse and diffuse. Because genres were somewhat fluid (see Poovey, *Genres*), discussions of economic ideas and practices were often embedded in texts not usually considered to be economic writing, including imaginative literature. *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (1817–1980) and *The Edinburgh Review* (1802–1929) were two of the most important voices in debates about economic matters, but both were also miscellanies, publishing not only political satire, essays, and reviews, but also literature, specifically poetry. Although some journalistic coverage of the market began to appear in London newspapers in the 1820s, *The Economist* entered the field in 1843 as a weekly newspaper dedicated to economics and business (32–33). Modern readers are probably familiar with *The Economist* in its present incarnation, as a weekly magazine concerned with British and international business and politics, as well as the arts and sciences. Its founding editor was John Wilson, a Scottish politician, banker, textile manufacturer and hatmaker, who launched the newspaper to advocate against the Corn Laws, controversial tariffs established in 1815 on imported grain that greatly increased the price of food and threatened widespread starvation (“About”), though *The Economist* has long outlived their 1846 repeal. Wilson was influenced by Smith’s economic views, and *The Economist* continues to be driven by principles of what it calls “classic liberalism,” including laissez-faire economics—especially its founding value of free trade—and “individual freedoms” (“About”; Poovey, *Genres* 33). In 1861, Wilson’s son-in-law, Walter Bagehot, took over as the newspaper’s editor (Hamburger). Like Wilson, Bagehot was a businessman and journalist, but he was also a literary critic alongside such prominent contemporaries as George Henry Lewes, Leslie Stephen, and George Saintsbury (Orel). The Frankenstein metaphor’s appearance in *The Economist* is significant because it was—and perhaps still is—the most important periodical dedicated to economics and commerce. Bagehot

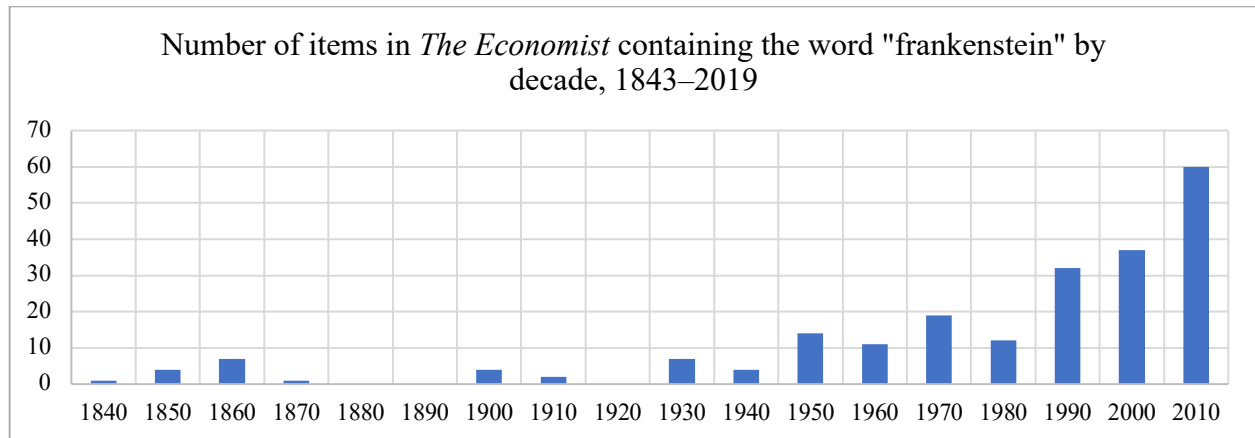
called the magazine's launch in 1843 the beginning of "the economic age," arguing that it functioned as a "belief-producer" that helped establish a community of economic thinkers (qtd in Poovey, *Genres* 33–34). Through its use of the Frankenstein metaphor, then, *The Economist* helped disseminate the image of the economy as a thing of human creation that has escaped human control.

In order to analyze when and how *Frankenstein* is used in *The Economist* as a source of economic metaphor, I conducted a n-gram analysis using both Gale's *The Economist Historical Archive (EHA)*, from 1843 to 2015 and *The Economist* website.⁶¹ This search yielded a corpus of 215 items published in *The Economist* that contain the word "frankenstein." Figure 3 shows the frequency with which the word is used by decade, between 1843 and 2019.

When interpreting this data, a few points should be kept in mind. First, its accuracy is dependent on the quality of the scanned images and the searchable text generated from them using optical character recognition (OCR). Although the accuracy of the *EHA* appears quite high, it is possible that there are other instances of "frankenstein" that are missing from this dataset. It should also be noted that, unlike the example from *The Watchman* discussed above, *The Economist* almost always uses the word "frankenstein" to refer to the creature rather than to its creator. Finally, the word's appearance is not notable because of its frequency—it is used only several times each year, if at all. What is significant in this analysis is the fact that it *is* used as an economic metaphor, and that this usage persists over time, indicating that economic discourse continues to draw upon Shelley's Gothic novel in a meaningful way.

⁶¹ To gather this data, I conducted an n-gram (keyword) search for "frankenstein" across the full EHA, dating from 1843–2015. This generated a list of 161 items. I also searched the archive of back issues available on *The Economist* website, which dates from 2005 to the present day, and includes items published online only. This yielded an additional 54 items, for a total of 215. I entered data about each item into a spreadsheet that includes bibliographic metadata about each article, including the date of publication, the title, the author (when listed), and the link to the article in the EHA. I also categorized each use of "frankenstein" by type: personal name, reference to the novel or an adaptation, and type of metaphor (arts, economic, linguistic, political, sports, technological).

Figure 3 A bar graph showing the number of items *The Economist* that contain the word “frankenstein” by decade from 1843 to 2019

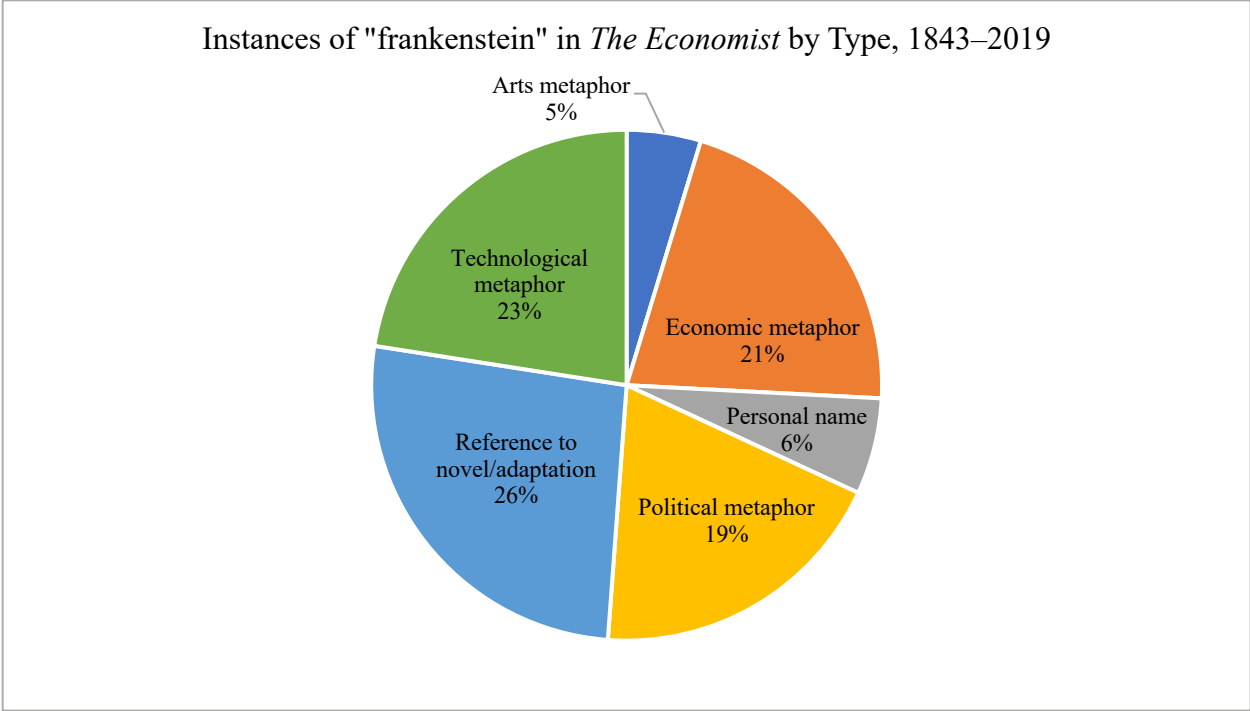


Source: Data from *The Economist Historical Archive* and *The Economist* website
(www.economist.com)

The graph in Figure 3 shows some usage of “frankenstein” in the 1840s to the 1860s and the 1900s to 1910s, with entire decades when it is not used at all. Starting in the 1930s, though, the word is used more regularly and, since the 1990s, with increasing frequency.

All references to “frankenstein” in *The Economist* are examples of political economic discourse, but not all of them use the novel as a source of economic metaphor. Figure 4 shows the various types of references as a percentage of the total.

Figure 4 A pie graph showing instances of the word “frankenstein” in *The Economist* between 1843 and 2019, categorized by type



Source: Data from *The Economist Historical Archive* and *The Economist* website (www.economist.com)

As the chart shows, references to Shelley’s novel itself or to stage, film, and literary adaptations of it, are the most common type of reference (26%), and account for many of the references from 1958 onwards. These include, for example, a publication notice from July 1856 of a collection of tales that includes *Frankenstein*, which *The Economist* describes as “remarkably powerful and startling” (“Parlour”), and a story about Danny Boyle’s theatrical adaptation at the National Theatre from 2011 (“Of Monsters”). Some are references to personal names, such as notices of bankruptcies (6%). The rest are examples of the creature (or his creator, or the novel as a whole)

being used as a metaphor (or, in a few cases, a simile). The miscellaneous category includes one usage as a sports metaphor—an article from 1962 titled “Frankenstein of Football”—and one usage as a linguistic metaphor (1%). It is used several times (3%) in reference to the arts, such as in an article that describes the 2017 film *Ghost in the Shell* as “a kind of Frankenstein’s monster” (“Controversial”). More common, though, are political metaphors (19%), technological metaphors (22%), and economic metaphors (21%). The use of “frankenstein” as a political metaphor is fairly consistent over time and varies widely in context, referring, for example, to the Sepoy army in India in 1860 (“Mr Wilson’s”), the European Union in 1963 (“What Price”), and Obamacare in 2012 (M. S.). *The Economist’s* use of Frankenstein as a technological metaphor, in contrast, is concentrated in the 1990s, the 2000s and 2010s, although it appears first in 1875 in reference to steam ships: “[t]hese monster floating masses of iron, lumbering through the water under steam, are very Frankensteins” (“Loss”). In the last three decades, most of these references are to genetically modified “Frankenstein foods,” biotechnology more generally, and artificial intelligence (see, for example, “Potato-Heads”; “Playing”; “Frankenstein’s”). What nearly all of these references have in common, though, is that they draw on Shelley’s novel in order to articulate the idea of a creation that cannot be controlled and that eventually turns upon its creator.

The economic Frankenstein metaphors that appear in *The Economist* follow this pattern, refer to economic creations specifically. Some examples include a reference to the Post Office Savings Bank in 1905 (“Savings”), the Italian economy (“Economic”), international banking institutions (“France”), and the British colonies (“Oil”). One interesting exception is from an article from 1913, in which the monster is not an out-of-control economy but “the so-called ‘economic man’” described in economic theory, “that Frankenstein directed solely by the desire

for material good, actuated simply by economic motives” (“British”). The first use of “frankenstein” as an economic metaphor occurs, as mentioned above, in *The Economist* of March 18, 1848, in an article about the February Revolution in France, which occurred just a few weeks before on February 24. The article uses the creature in Shelley’s novel as a metaphor for France’s post-revolution economic state:⁶²

But the Frankenstein to which the 24th of February gave birth, is gaining strength and growing apace on the elements which surround him. The provisional government undertook to find full employment and good wages for *thirty-five millions of people*, and to sell bread at something less than one-half its real cost. The public granaries in Paris are rapidly becoming exhausted of corn, the treasury of money, and the obligations of the government (*the three per cent. rentes*) have fallen from 76 to 46. (“Financial” 309, emphasis in original)

The article does not refer to Shelley or to the novel directly, letting the phrase “the Frankenstein” stand alone. It thus assumes that its readers are familiar enough with the novel for the reference to have rhetorical weight. It evokes the creature through the distinctive name and by using the imagery of birth, imagining the revolution—“the 24th of February”—as the Victor figure and the economic state of the country—“the Frankenstein”—as the creature itself. Even without knowing very much about the details of the February Revolution or its consequences, the rhetorical aim of

⁶² Amidst an economic crisis and violent rioting in Paris, Louis-Philippe abdicated the French throne on February 24, 1848 and fled to England. A republican Provisional Government was installed led by the author Alphonse de Lamartine. Economic problems continued, though, including high unemployment, low prices on agricultural goods, and a series of bankruptcies and bank failures due to widespread lack of economic confidence. This passage refers to the Provisional Government’s attempts to secure full employment through National Workshops and reduce food scarcity, and the falling value of government investments, the “three per cent. rentes” (see Fortescue chapter 3).

the metaphor is clear from this passage: by interfering in the natural workings of the economy—ensuring work and “good wages” for more people than would usually have them, and artificially lowering the price of bread—the government has created a monster that threatens to destroy that which created it. France’s economy has been revived through the provisional government’s intervention, and as a result it is on the verge of collapse and the people at risk of starvation. The Frankenstein metaphor here reveals the fears of economic instability that are made explicit later in the article, in reference to the seemingly unavoidable chain of events that will result from the economic forces unleashed by the government’s actions:

The universal feeling is—the first loss is the least:—nor is there much chance of a restoration of confidence from any steps that must be taken, as long as the impracticable course is persevered into which the executive has plunged, and which will become more and more unmanageable every day that it lasts, until the monster turns upon those who have created it. (309)

This economic monster, like the creature in *Frankenstein*, is dangerous because it is “unmanageable” and has the potential to “turn[...] upon” its creators, an event that seems an inevitable consequence of tampering with a natural system. Moreover, the metaphor imagines the French economy as a living thing, a creature created by government intervention that has the desire and capability to turn upon its creators. In this extension of the metaphor, the allusion to Shelley’s novel is again unmistakable. The very implicitness of this first reference to a Frankenstein economy in *The Economist* is meaningful, suggesting *The Economist*’s community of readers shared a certain interpretation of the novel, one that places the blame on Victor for his

unnatural interference in the natural cycle of life and death. In the context of *The Economist*, this metaphor is doubly revealing, providing evidence for how Shelley's novel was understood and interpreted by its early readers and for how those readers understood—and how we continue to understand—the economy as a monster of our own creation that we cannot control.

The influence of the Gothic is still evident in contemporary economic discourse, particularly the metaphor of the Frankenstein economy. Along with voodoo and zombie economics,⁶³ this metaphor has continued to haunt modern economic discourse, such as in an influential article in *The Economist* from 1995 called “The Frankenstein Economy” about state intervention in South Korea's chaebol (industrial conglomerates), featuring a still from the 1931 Boris Karloff *Frankenstein* film with the caption “What's big and strong, but a nightmare to control?” (17). The metaphor gains new life in the discourse surrounding the global financial crisis of 2008, particularly its aftermath.⁶⁴ The title of one article in *The New York Times* from March 2008, for instance, written just after the Federal Reserve bailed out Bear Stearns, asks, “What Created This Monster?” In 2013, a piece in *The Bull* analyzing how the crisis occurred and what would happen next begins by describing the economy as a natural system, with a life cycle analogous to that of a living creature: “there is a natural cycle to the economy. Periods of expansion are followed by periods of contraction.” He then evokes *Frankenstein*, stating that

⁶³ George H. W. Bush coined the term “Voodoo economics” in the 1980s to discredit supply-side economics, the idea that cutting taxes for the wealthy leads to widespread economic growth. This policy has been described as “a classic example of a zombie doctrine: a view that should have been killed by the evidence long ago, but just keeps shambling along, eating politicians' brains” (Krugman). John Quiggin's *Zombie Economics: How Dead Ideas Still Walk Among Us* (2010) plays with the idea of Gothic economics with a cover that mimics that of a horror comic, featuring a zombie hand bursting out of a grave, clutching a handful of money. The rest of the cover is emblazoned with the captions “Privatized Social Security!” over an image of a zombified Wall Street type, “Trickle-Down Economics!” over an image of dripping blood, and “Efficient Financial Markets!” over an image of a neoclassical bank façade in ruins. Referring to Krugman's notion of the “zombie” doctrine, Quiggin notes that “ideas are very hard to kill. Even after the evidence seems to have killed them, they keep on coming back. These ideas are neither alive nor dead; rather, [...] they are undead, or zombie, ideas” (1).

⁶⁴ A Google search for “frankenstein economy” yields numerous instances of the phrase in recent economic analysis, but the term is absent from economic reference works, including *The Language of Law and Economics*, the *New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics*, and *Oxford Reference*.

“from the great recession of 2008 has emerged Dr. Frankenstein, in the person of Dr. Bernanke,” then Chair of the US Federal Reserve:

Like Victor, the good Doctor in the novel, Dr. Bernanke took it upon himself to resuscitate the economy with the unnatural injection of monetary easing. The effects were similar; the economy came back from the dead but without a soul. So weak that it limps along, barely escaping recession year after year. (“Frankenstein”)

Setting aside its spurious reading of *Frankenstein*—the creature does arguably have a soul, as well as superhuman strength and agility—the Frankenstein metaphor does the same rhetorical work here that it did in *The Economist* 170 years earlier, suggesting that the effect of government interference is to make the economy monstrous: something that came back from the dead but, as is Gothic tradition, came back wrong.

The degree to which *Frankenstein* is not explicitly concerned with economic issues is surprising, perhaps, given Shelley’s preoccupation with finances in the wake of her husband Percy Bysshe Shelley’s death and the prevalence of discussions of economic issues in the novels of her contemporaries. As this analysis shows, though, Shelley’s novel has had a significant and lasting impact on economic discourse and, crucially, on the way we imagine the economy to be. The Frankenstein metaphor lets us imagine the economy as a creature of human creation that is both subject to and working outside of the laws of nature and that is vulnerable to human interference. Thus, the Frankenstein metaphor enables *The Economist* and economic discourses as a whole to harness the rhetorical possibilities of the Gothic to express and explore the idea that the economy is a monster of our own creation.

Gothic Economics Revisited

In 1979, Poovey published the first modern critical examination of Gothic economics, analyzing an Ann Radcliffe novel: “Ideology and ‘The Mysteries of Udolpho.’” She concludes that the novel proposes the sensibility of its heroine, Emily St. Aubert, as an antidote for the villainous self-interest embodied in Montoni, its villain, but that sensibility is simply not sufficient to counter this form of tyranny. She notes that the “aura of fantasy that enchants” the novel’s ending, in which Montoni dies an ignominious death and Emily gains a loving husband and her rightful inheritance, “suggests that it does not constitute a convincing solution to the problem” (328). Following Poovey, and drawing upon Ellen Malenas Ledoux’s argument about the Gothic as an agent of social change, I have argued that, although individual acts of sensibility and humanity may not be enough to defeat the monster of uncontrolled avarice that we have created, Gothic fiction shows us that individual actions can have a positive effect. Over and over again, Gothic heroines (and heroes) stay true to their values of kindness and compassion and preserve their sense of humanity at great danger and cost, refusing to exploit others or allow them to be exploited. In most cases, they are rewarded for their humanity, winning (in the case of the heroines) the love and protection (physical and legal) of virtuous and decent men, and creating families and communities of friends who share their beliefs. This mode of resistance to the status quo promises change that is incremental, reformatory rather than revolutionary; but it is the only possible mode of resistance against the “imaginary machine” of commercial society (Adam Smith, “Essays” 66), the Frankenstein that we have created and have come to believe that we cannot control.

As this study argues, reading the Gothic in the context of the emergence of modern commercial society enables important insights into how those ideas were first imagined and how

they were worked through by the “imagined community” of the Romantic reading nation (B. Anderson; St. Clair). Romantic Gothic literature provided an imaginative space and the discursive tools necessary for thinking through the new economic ideas that, to a great extent, came to define the modern age and continue to do so in our own post-modern, late-capitalist historical moment. The Gothic novels studied here present visions of commercial society *in extremis* in order to think through the consequences of the moral justification of self-interest, examining the conflict between the pursuit of happiness and the pursuit of wealth, for instance, or the value of wealth versus natural rights or even human life. By imagining commercial society within the fallen world of the Gothic, these works of literature expose and explore what it means to be a human subject living within an economic system that values self-interest over sensibility and profits over people. And, although the Romantic century may seem like the distant past and its literature the product of a different age, we are the inheritors of its Gothic economics.

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