The Gothic Flip: Using the Supernatural to Fight for Morality

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Preface

Today the original intention of the Gothic novel has been lacking, leaving many titles by the wayside or misunderstood despite a few titles’ popularity. To truly understand the form, one must explore the role of the supernatural, for it is the key to understanding what is evil. Gothic novels enabled the “Gothic flip,” which at first introduces the supernatural as a fearsome evil, but concludes that the evil is within humanity instead. This flip allows authors to grasp at morality, which at the time of the Gothic novel’s birth, was beginning to lose a foundation on which to stand.

This paper will reevaluate the Gothic novel using the Gothic flip, starting from the beginning with Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*, which introduced the genre as a discussion of evil in the midst of a rational world. Realism had taken away what Walpole called “fancy” from the novel, and he intended to reclaim it with the use of the supernatural, and ultimately rescue morality.

The most popular Gothic novelist of the eighteenth century is arguably Ann Radcliffe, who therefore often comes up in literary criticism. Her signature rational explanations of the supernatural make her questionably Gothic to some. She is in fact the truest follower of Locke and Burke as far as her language is concerned, yet as seen in *The Italian*, also insists on an abstract morality that Empiricism lacks. For this Radcliffe leans heavily on the form of the Gothic novel borrowing from the Medieval romance, since her enemy lies in Rationalism which is separating from the church and for her holds no morality.
With the influence of Romanticism, the Victorian period continued the debate, though Rationalism had long gone out of style. Instead, the nineteenth century found evil in the influence of Empiricism often at the expense of religion. William Harrison Ainsworth’s *Windsor Castle* finds the culprit in the modern idea that the church has no authority compared to man, a concept that gained ground since the Renaissance when the church began to lose power.
The Gothic as the New Genre: Defending Morality

The Gothic novel strangely appears with its dark castles and terrifying ghosts in the mid-eighteenth century surrounded by the Age of Reason. Literature containing fear and dread, or “sublime” as it was called in the eighteenth century, predates the Gothic novel, as seen in the poems of the Graveyard School. These poems, such as Robert Blair’s “The Grave,” revolve around the brevity of life with the reassurance of the Christian faith, using the sublime to confirm the reader of divine justice, much like the Gothic novel.

In *A Philosophical Enquiry* Edmund Burke explores the sublime as that which instills terror\(^1\) and briefly attributes it to God’s power, which creates a healthy fear of the divine.

“It is on this principle that true religion has, and must have, so large a mixture of salutary fear; and that false religions have nothing else but fear to support them.”\(^2\)

While Burke’s premise assumes a divine power, his theory is actually based on Empiricism, a philosophy that can extricate religion altogether from the understanding of the world. Burke’s point here is not that the divine exists, but that it is the source of the sublime, ironically using religion to support an atheistic theory. Indeed, Burke’s mention of religion as the source of divine fear is kept brief, for the eighteenth century refused to accept any explanation besides a rational one.

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\(^2\) Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry* (Oxford University Press, 2008) 64.
Less than a decade later, Walpole published *The Castle of Otranto*, in essence a response to the increasingly empirical and rational world around him. Since religion can no longer support morality, Walpole, as Burke predicted, must use “salutary fear” instead. This fear must be based on some sort of abstract truth in order to be of use, and therefore have a sense of justice. The sublime in the Gothic genre is created by the supernatural or mysterious on the shallow level. In depth, the sublime is actually caused by the numinous, or the divine fear displaced by the rationalization of religion.

Richard Geary appropriately asks how such “supernatural elements” became so popular in an increasingly secular society pulling away from its religious roots. Geary shows the Graveyard poetry and the resulting novels as continuously romanticizing the church, albeit in an unflattering form at times. His conclusion is that the novels were then solely a result of the secularization of the church and not of the philosophy of the time as other scholars have claimed. However, this equally oversimplifies the origins of the genre, for it is the Rationalist philosophy of the century that discourages the church from continuing to present the supernatural as factual.

The debate centers on the numinous, that feeling of awe present in the divine that when extracted from religion becomes a fearful force beyond explanation in the rational world. The numinous, separated from the church, is present in the Gothic novel through supernatural elements that inspire fearful suspense in the reader. Where Gothic cathedrals’ pointed arches once inspired
man to look upwards towards God\textsuperscript{3}, in the Gothic they inspire a fear of the supernatural hidden in the dark, decaying ruins of an ancient abbey. The awe of God without religion becomes origin of divine fear, or the numinous.

Devandra Varma argues that the reconnection with the emotional in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth centuries reclaims the numinous from the dilapidated state it was in during Deism’s reign. Geary criticizes Varma’s attribution of the appearance of the numinous as a reaction to the “strict concept of reason that banished the emotional aura of religion and reduced to the Deity to a clockwork Prime Mover of the Universe” as missing the religious element.

Geary instead logically follows out the three possible options for the numinous in the event that rationalism should influence the church to expel it. First, the numinous could be lost completely. Second, the church could emphasize the power of the deity in comparison to the unworthiness of man, a point that can be seen in Burke.

> “But whilst we contemplate so vast an object, under the arm, as it were, of almighty power, and invested upon every side with omnipresence, we shrink into minuteness of our own nature, and are, in a manner, annihilated before him.”\textsuperscript{4}

Third, the numinous could “return to its most primitive form, that of demonic dread.” While the church did begin to refocus the awe of God upon the greatness of the divine rather than the supernatural, the numinous also found itself reinvented in the form of the Gothic. Varma’s theory of the numinous being taken

\textsuperscript{3} Pugin, A.W.N. \textit{Contrasts} (Leicester University Press, 1969).
\textsuperscript{4} Burke, Edmund. \textit{A Philosophical Enquiry} (Oxford University Press, 2008) 63.
up by the Gothic after Deism abandoned it is accurate. Rationalism’s effects on the church not only cleansed it of the numinous, but also led to Deism. This situation is exactly what Geary describes, and naturally the numinous found a home in the Gothic.

While Geary was right that the numinous did revert back to its pre-religious state, it also maintained some elements of its religious history. Since its inception the Gothic novel has had a fascination with the Italy, churches, Gothic architecture, the Medieval period or the Renaissance, and the sublime or sensation caused by the numinous, all leading to the point in history in which Christianity was the ruling force or just recently being questioned. Varma’s point of the Gothic novel being a reaction to Rationalism can be extended to discuss the philosophy behind the genre, that it is a calling out for some sense of truth found in the numinous, last experienced in the age of the Roman Catholic Church. That truth is the basis of morality, which Rationalism, as much as it tries, cannot strongly defend without a supernatural force. As Dostoyevsky said, “without God all things are permissible.”

The Gothic is the defining of what is truth, specifically what is evil. With the paranormal acting as an instigator of fear, the novel form uses a “Gothic flip” in which it highlights what is evil in the world as separate from the supernatural. Since Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*, the genre typically opens with an irrational mystery, in this case a giant helmet falling on the prince. The presence of a giant is the initial fear in the text, though as the reader is to discover by the end, the evil is found in Manfred who usurped the throne, clearly pointing
towards the Rationalist ideals of fighting overpowered monarchies and promoting social reform. Some novels substitute the supernatural with a frightening character, such as in Collins’s *The Woman in White*, in which Anne Catherick adds a sensationalist thrill without being a threat. Even with this rationalization of the genre, the Gothic flip remains functional, drawing out the contrast of what is feared with what is evil.

In some cases, Gothic novels use a secondary kind of Gothic flip, or a character flip, following a decently good character into the depths of evil. William Godwin’s *Caleb Williams* has led to a discussion over what is Gothic, since the novel has no aspect of the supernatural. Instead, it employs the character flip as the reader watches Squire Falkland fall from a reputable landlord in the cottage industry to a murderer of his own tenants. If the Gothic novel asks, “What is evil?” by juxtaposing the numinous with true evil, then *Caleb Williams* strangely enough fits the description.

Some Gothic novels, such as Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk*, still use the supernatural within the plot, and allow the character flip to step away from an unreasonable cause evil. The book is filled with supernatural stories such as the Bleeding Nun, but the focus of evil within humanity is never questioned since the novel follows a character flip. Even Satan himself is not the source of evil but rather it the human flaws in Ambrosio, the once devout monk disintegrates into an incestuous rapist and murderer, which are at fault.

The Gothic believes the root of evil is within man, and it must be corrected by divine guidance. Divine justice functions by purging evil from the
world. It is interesting to note that Gothic evildoers are punished not by the supernatural, or the numinious, but rather by a human hand. *The Castle of Otranto*’s Manfred is a tyrant who abominably misuses his family to usurp a throne. In the end, he is punished by his own murderous act, accidentally stabbing his own daughter.

“Now tyrant! Behold the completion of woe fulfilled on thy impious and devoted head! The blood of Alfonso cried to heaven for vengeance; and heaven has permitted its altar to be polluted by assassination, that thou mightest shed thy own blood at the foot of that prince’s sepulcher!”

Manfred’s retribution is an act of heaven, albeit a bloody one, that both “pollutes” the world with its bloodshed and cleanses it of the human evil embodied in the oppressor.

This can be compared to the ideals of the Age of Reason fighting against tyranny for the sake of justice and social reform; however, it must be concluded that Walpole’s new genre needs to rely on some divine order on which to base morality. Not wanting to use theology, Walpole’s allusions to the church are enough to couple with the numinous in order to create a supernatural system in which good will triumph.

This attraction to the Catholic Church is balanced by the criticism of the medieval beliefs. It is the numinous the Gothic is after, not the theology. The numinous without the church is a double-edged sword, which in one sweep both creates the sublime in an eerie fashion and criticizes from whence it came.

Originally in *The Castle of Otranto*, the church was considered a holy place where

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a distraught maiden could find solace and help. As the Gothic genre developed, it complicates its relationship with the church. Ann Radcliffe took pains to expose its connection with torture and conspiracy. As authors desired to step away from the church, the Gothic architecture so awesome in cathedrals was reabsorbed into the other buildings such as castles. By the nineteenth century, all that remained was the frightening supernatural element that the church originally inspired, but this alone was still enough to convey the discussion of evil.

Walpole may not have intended to create a philosophical text in which to battle Rationalism, but the genre did spawn out of the constant rationalization of the church and the displacement of the numinous. Such a time desperately needed to have a moral foundation, which Rationalism struggled to do but ultimately failed. Eventually John Locke would replace the search for moral truth with Empiricism, drawing from Rationalism all of its logical qualities, but discarding the ideals of morality. As that Empiricism slowly strengthened, the need for the Gothic novel remained the last language of the numinous.

The reason for the numinous as an explanation of morality can be considered accidental, but could have been predicted through Walpole’s original experiment with form. As he wrote in his preface, the Gothic novel was intended to combine ancient and modern forms, the romance and the novel.

“It was an attempt to blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern…But in the latter species Nature has cramped imagination, she
did but take her revenge, having been totally excluded from old romances."

Walpole attempts to recreate a new genre with the “fancy” of the romance and the realism of the novel. Just as the genre was attracted to the church, so it was attracted to the Medieval period when the church was in power. The literary form of the romance reiterated the ideal of mankind seeking the Lord allegorized by the quest for the Holy Grail and eventually a chaste maiden. The romance assumes the existence of a higher truth in order to function.

When God fell away from the philosophy of the people, the novel emerged to express the dissociation between man and God, as Georg Lukačs explains “for the novel is, like no other, an expression of transcendental homelessness.” The eighteenth century English novel conveyed the individualistic beliefs of the age, beliefs that tore God, and therefore the basis of morality, from civilization. It is this that Walpole insists on changing. A world with no god is barren and while Walpole cannot leave it, he wishes to unify it with the Medieval in an attempt to give morality to a godless world.

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Radcliffe’s Call Against Rationalism

The Gothic flip will switch the reader’s idea of evil from the supernatural element to that of a secular source. Ann Radcliffe, known for her empirically explained plots, follows the same pattern of flipping the fear from the paranormal to the human. While she is criticized for not having the true elements of Gothicism in her fiction, it is this exact trait that allows her to keep the numinous plotlines truly evil, without which she would be forced to have the evil come from a separate human source.

Her famous explanations have given Radcliffe the reputation of being a Rationalist who allows no unnecessary folklore to invade her novels. Robert Geary points out that Radcliffe’s novels were some of the most popular, and could reflect what the masses believed. If this were true, then she could use superstition to appeal to the public but not actually succumb to the reputation of being irrational. While this could explain why her works were so accepted, it does not hold up to Radcliffe’s attack on reason, the basis of morality at the time.

Ironically, it is Radcliffe herself who is fighting Rationalism. She does not criticize the ideals of social reform; she attacks the extent of the Rationalists’ actions. In The Italian, her plot revolves around the amoral conditions that man calls civilization, placing blame on reason, what she considers an excuse for wickedness.

“Can man, who calls himself endowed with reason, and immeasurably superior to every other created being, argue himself into the commission

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of such horrible folly, such inveterate cruelty, that exceeds all the acts of such irrational and ferocious brute. Brutes do not deliberately slaughter their species; it remains for man only, man, proud of his prerogative reason, and boasting of his sense of justice, to unite the terrible extremes of folly and wickedness!“⁹

By comparing them to brutes and animals, she demoralizes the core of Rationalism claiming it offers no basis of morality and therefore no true civilization. If Radcliffe disapproves of Rationalism, and even claims reason is the cause of war, then she must have another motivation for rationalizing her supernatural elements.

Radcliffe insists on staying within the rational world, but chooses to use the language of Empiricism. As far as Radcliffe was concerned, Rationalism’s optimistic belief that man’s innate morality applied with reason could create a better society realistically led only to revolutions and chaos. Empiricism on the other hand distanced itself from morality completely, while keeping the same essence of rational thought, which offered Radcliffe the language in which to battle Rationalism on its own grounds.

Using Locke’s theory that mankind understands the world through the five senses, Radcliffe describes the information her characters are interpreting through exactly what they are sensing. Whenever a faux supernatural element appears, the characters either “sense” or “hear” the object move. The only description the reader is given of the nocturnal appearances is what is empirically experienced by the protagonist. Radcliffe’s use of “imagination” evokes Edmund Burke’s

definition of inspired creativity, and is used in an empirical context for the reader to understand as lacking factual evidence, but is rather composed of a combination of experiences.\(^\text{10}\)

“‘The opinions you avowed were rational,’ said Schedoni, ‘but the ardor of your imagination was apparent; and what ardent imagination ever was contented to trust to plain reasoning, or to the evidence of the senses?’”\(^\text{11}\)

Schedoni’s attack of on imagination notes the weakness in the Rationalist argument that without a God there is no basis for morality, and therefore the logical end must be Empiricism, a philosophy without a claim to the divine. It must be remembered that these words come from the antagonist, and while his Empirical explanation is accepted by both reader and author alike, he is not the final voice on Radcliffe’s philosophy.

Initially in the conversation Schedoni had claimed Vivaldi was superstitious to which he responded, “What! does a monk call superstition a weakness!”\(^\text{12}\) This sentence is a rather ambiguous one, and can be read as an insult to the church for ever believing in the supernatural or as a reproof since a monk should be the first to believe in it. Considering Radcliffe’s rebuking of imagination throughout the text, she could very well mean the former, in which case the numinous itself is considered nonexistent. Still, it is this rational monk who lacks morality, a concern Empiricism refuses to confront. While separating herself from Rationalism by using Empirical language, Radcliffe refuses to

\(^{10}\) Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry* (Oxford University Press, 2008) 16.
commit herself to either philosophy since neither offers a solid foundation for morality. Instead, she lets the Gothic do that for her.

It is true Radcliffe’s work regressed from Walpole’s idea of fancy and imagination since her supernatural elements fell victim to the Realism of the day. Her work, however, did embody the higher truth of the medieval romance. Geary is disappointed with her modernization of the genre, claiming her later works including *The Italian* “abandon features prominent in the romance of her predecessors” by her contemporary setting and explanations of the numinous.  

His point that the more contemporary settings need to solve the crises with coincidence rather than the supernatural is true, however, *The Castle of Otranto* relied upon coincidence just as heavily. Despite removing her story from a medieval time frame, Radcliffe’s *The Italian* still takes place amongst abandoned Gothic arches, churches, nunneries, and monasteries calling on the ancient Catholic tradition just as much as her predecessors, and in essence brings the form of the romance to the eighteenth century setting.

Radcliffe emphasizes the medieval ideology in chivalry, which would later become an essential point in the Victorian novel against Empiricism. Already suspected as an evil influence, Schedoni says to Vivaldi, “‘You are a knight of chivalry, who would go about the earth fighting with everybody, by way of proving your right to do good; it is unfortunate you are born somewhat too late.’”  

Clearly Radcliffe wishes to correlate her protagonist with the medieval worldview. Schedoni, embodying the corrupt church, is the evil in the world

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while Vivaldi is truly following the abstract Christian concept of morality. His adventure models the romantic quest for \textit{agape} present in the chaste maiden. Schedoni’s patronization of Vivaldi’s ideals as quixotic mirrors the eighteenth century church’s lack of morality.

For all her contempt of the church, Radcliffe is far from atheistic which would explain why she’s attracted to Gothicism’s combination of the romance and novel. Geary notices that \textit{The Italian} “maintained the practice of attributing surprising events to the handiwork of the deity” for it assumes a latitudinarian God allows the righteous to win\textsuperscript{15}. Radcliffe attempts to avoid religious commentary, purposely uses the term “deity” rather than “God” since she must ultimately attribute the providence to some divine form. However, if the term divine justice were used instead of providence, then the understanding of it is less latitudinarian.

As described in Geary’s work, the numinous extracted from the church becomes the Gothic, but as a result, it is also the numinous that is the remnant of divine justice. Geary’s considers Radcliffe’s modernization of the Gothic novel ruining the form since providence evades a truly supernatural story. Instead the supernatural, whether real or explained, is a sign of a morally just world. The numinous is essentially the presence of morality beyond mankind’s law. Without divine justice, the Gothic novel would hardly incorporate the romance.

If the numinous is that fearful ingredient which Rationalism pushed out of the church, then it is the same aspect of God which makes him terrifying. As

\footnote{15 Geary, Robert F. \textit{The Supernatural in Gothic Fiction: Horror, Belief, and Change.} (Edwin Mellen Press, 1992) 54.}
Geary notes on *The Castle of Otranto*, “the supernatural is at once part eighteenth century providential conventions, part pseudo-Catholic medievalism, part Old Testament angry God – an incoherent jumble.”\(^{16}\) This should not be claimed as a shortcoming but rather a fantastic description of the numinous extracted from the church which confirms the supernatural is not entirely positive. The numinous in *The Castle of Otranto* provides its own rules of justice, specifically the children paying for the sins of the father, of which the reader may disapprove but there is no denying. There is a natural law, a moral system beyond mankind’s civilization, and it will be enforced by the supernatural, albeit through human devices.

*The Italian* follows the same idea of a natural law that Walpole proposed: the natural law will be followed via the folly of mankind. When Schedoni reflects that “by a singular retribution, his own crimes had recoiled upon himself” the reader realizes that the coincidences in the novel are not haphazard, but rather a form of justice by the powers that be.\(^{17}\) Schedoni winds up killing his partner and himself, his suicidal punishment ironically worse than what his soul would have suffered under the Inquisition. As in *The Castle of Otranto*, the humanly evil commits the execution of the natural law and not the supernatural.

Radcliffe’s twist is that the numinous in her novel is indeed provided by the evil character. Ordinarily the Gothic flip results in the reader’s understanding of the supernatural to switch from evil to sympathetic; Radcliffe switches the supernatural from being understood as paranormally evil to humanly evil. Both deny the supernatural as the cause of fear and describe the source of evil within

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humanity. The Gothic elements still are not the cause of unjustified crime. Though Radcliffe insists on remaining in a rational world, she still attacks Rationalism as the cause of losing morality, especially since Schedoni is the product of the rationalization of the church. It is never the good protagonist who kills the evil antagonist. Vivaldi, instead of killing Schedoni, sympathizes with the monk’s pain, an irrational feeling that can only be attributed to chivalric ideals. It is not the role of morality to taint itself with blood. Rather it is that morality operates with the presence of divine justice in place.

Divine justice has its appeal to religious readers, but Geary’s analysis of Radcliffe as “another step in a long process by which many in England sought both to accommodate science and also to avoid sectarian strife by fastening upon what they considered to be common denominator elements in religion” reads Radcliffe’s providence too literally.\(^\text{18}\) The numinous will always be similar to its origins in religion, but they need not be equated. The idea of the numinous is that there is a very real entity that should be feared, as opposed to Burke’s idea of the sublime which is purely to evoke feeling. Any description of the numinous will then sound like Geary’s idea of providence, but in fact have a more fearsome power of divine justice.

The church itself was under Radcliffe’s attack, especially its usurped power and corruption. Her scenes of the Inquisition, kidnapping, and imprisonment in the nunnery all point to a religious tyranny that abused mankind.

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and refused true justice. Vivaldi’s observations of Schedoni’s cell contain all the implements that Radcliffe associates with the church.

“The chamber contained little more than a mattress, a chair, a table, and a crucifix; some books of devotion were upon the table, one or two of which were written in unknown characters; several instruments of torture lay beside them.”\(^\text{19}\)

Radcliffe’s physical juxtaposition of the devotional and the torturous makes the reader question the validity of the former.

If both Rationalism and the Roman Catholic Church, which in *The Italian* represents all Christianity since any other denominations are absent, are under dispute then the work must mean to look towards the basis of morality from a third perspective. This can be answered by what Feuerbach would later label the search for an abstract truth as the separation of Religion and Theology, Religion being in closer to the truth of the people before the trappings of Theology take over. Radcliffe uses this Religion in the sense of the spirituality without the Christian dogma.\(^\text{20}\) While Geary’s label of latitudinarianism comes close, it makes the mistake of needing to label Radcliffe’s work as Christian since Radcliffe opposes theology itself on every level.

There is, however, clearly a sense of the divine in the novel which comes through in religious circumstances. When Ellena hears choral music she is comforted by some sense of holiness.

“Her sorrow did not allow her to join the choral symphonies of the nuns, but their sacred solemnity was soothing to her spirits, and the tears she shed while she listened to the lengthening notes, assuaged the force of grief.”21

The “sacred solemnity” is the softer side of the numinous. It is not that the church contains the transcendent truth; it is that those who search for it are attracted to the church. In the Medieval period, the church was the primary commissioner of the arts, and therefore the two are often seen united before the Renaissance. Ellena’s yearning at the sound of the choral music communicates Radcliffe’s thoughts on the whereabouts of truth, a conclusion that predicts Romanticism. The church once housed the numinous, and the truth can be separated from the church through art.

It is this spirituality that Feuerbach labels Religion which he contrasts with Theology. Those characters who appreciate this spiritual side of the numinous become the bearers of truth in Romantic and Victorian literature. Here Radcliffe uses the same tactic to imply to the reader that Ellena understands the divine, even while masked in Theology, by producing it through art.

Ellena’s recognition of transcendence being expressed in music is repeated on a grander scale in her recognition of true spirituality of the abbess at Santa della Pietà.

“Her religion was neither gloomy, nor bigotted; it was the sentiment of a grateful heart offering itself up to the Deity, who delights in the happiness

of his creatures; and she conformed to the customs of the Roman church, without supposing a faith in all of them to be necessary to salvation.”

This is the closest Radcliffe comes to praising the church, and even within the sentence she begins to attack its dogma. This is what Geary calls latitudinarian, but instead this is Feuerbach’s Religion in its truest form. Though to clarify, Feuerbach’s theory expresses that Religion is essentially humanistic in its origins, and Radcliffe instead points to a nature as the source.

During Ellena’s captivity in the convent, she often looks out upon a window overlooking the mountains. The narrator’s report of Ellena’s observations are the closest Radcliffe comes to preaching on the divine quality of nature and her intentions she carries out in the Gothic novel.

“Here, gazing upon the stupendous imagery around her, looking, as it were, beyond the awful veil which obscures the features of the Deity, and conceals Him from the eyes of his creatures; dwelling as with a present God in the midst of his sublime works; with a mind thus elevated, how insignificant would appear to her the transactions, and the sufferings of this world!”

The power behind the sublime is found in the majestic mountains that are described as sublime. Ellena’s reaction comes as rather peaceful given Burke’s definition of the sublime, indicating her understanding includes both the sublime and the beautiful aspects of the numinous. She is fully aware that her fear stems from an alternate source.

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Ellena reflects that the Deity is “veiled,” a poignant image considering how much of the plot revolves around a nun’s habit and veil. Radcliffe’s separation from her belief in some divine force in nature from the dogma of the church echoes Feuerbach. Radcliffe wants to make clear that despite this divine justice ever-present in the Gothic genre, it must be separated from theology, and the deity can only be found “in the midst of his sublime works.” It is interesting to note that this quote offers a support to Geary’s examination of the numinous under rationalist attack. Indeed, the numinous within a belief without the support of the supernatural must depend on the gap between God and man.

The Gothic often calls upon nature as a sign of divine justice. Burke notes that, “In the scripture, wherever God is represented as appearing or speaking, every thing terrible in nature is called up to heighten the awe and solemnity of the divine presence.”24 Many periods used nature as an indication of good or evil in the world, but Radcliffe calls upon the religious idea of solemnity within nature, pulling away from a purely terrific source for the divine, and pushing it towards a power capable of justice. Geary claims Radcliffe dilutes religion to a “vague pious emotion,”25 but Ellena’s attitude towards the sublime is more recognition of truth than piety. The numinous for Radcliffe is the transcendent truth supporting morality, not the scraps of Theology.

Geary asks if the trend of a rationalized Gothic novel was a reaction to the Enlightenment or aligned with it, and concludes that it had less to do with the Enlightenment than it had to do with unifying the church under a vague spiritual

appeal. Instead, Radcliffe combats the Enlightenment head on using rational language found not in Rationalism itself but in Empiricism. The evil for the Gothic is always found in humanity, and for Radcliffe it is the irrational and amoral acts of which the Rationalists prove themselves capable. Murder, torture, deceit, and malice are found in Schedoni, and at first glance the reader may blame the supernatural and then the Catholic Church, but ultimately it is his Rationalism that creates the evil within him.

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Bridging Radcliffe and Ainsworth’s works is Mary Shelley’s iconic *Frankenstein*. Walpole’s genre inherently demands morality, and it was Mary Shelley who insisted on discussing Romantic philosophy openly within the new genre, introducing the Gothic novel to the same level of philosophy as the Victorian novel. By the nineteenth century, Empiricism had already begun influencing England, and it found its main opponent in the Romantics who clung to the idea of transcendent truth and morality.27

Sympathetic to the Romantic ideals, William Harrison Ainsworth needed to reconnect this modern world with the transcendent truth the Romantics sought, a truth effectively found beyond the senses in the religious past of England, both Christian and pagan. In his *Windsor Castle*, Ainsworth addresses the philosophical crisis of nineteenth century England by taking his contemporaries back to its origin, Henry VIII, whom he designates the first genuinely modern king of England and therefore responsible for disconnecting England from transcendent truth.

To link modern England with its past ability to reach truth, Ainsworth went to the earliest modern king, the first to accept the same tempting influences found in Empiricism that allow man to question the authority of truth. History speaks of Henry torn between Catholicism and his own moral misgivings about his marriage with Catherine of Aragon, but Ainsworth simplifies the story by leaving him with no qualms about the divorce. Here Ainsworth intentionally sets

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Henry’s story up as the anti-hero of a medieval romance evident in the novel’s full title, *Windsor Castle: An Historical Romance*. The valiant knight who seeks allegorical maiden of divine love is the familiar form of King Arthur, the foundation of England’s throne. England’s claim to transcendent truth is deeply intertwined with Catholicism, and following the Arthurian legend, it is the manipulation of love into lust that becomes the downfall of the idyllic state. Ainsworth crafts King Henry in such a way as to contradict Arthur himself, making him the tyrant who breaks that divine love of Catherine for the lusty Anne Boleyn. Just as Lancelot’s lust brought down the Arthurian idyll, so Henry crumbles England from its Catholic access to transcendent truth, communion with the divine through the pope.

In its very name, Henry’s Anglican Church transformed England’s identity, not the least of which was the rearrangement of power manifesting the humanist philosophy that man could dictate God. While not truly Empiricist, this understanding denied a transcendent truth that man must obey, replacing it with the idea that man created his own truth, nothing more than subjective law. Henry introduces England to the Renaissance, when the medieval belief system is overturned for the secular and individualist thought that separates man from the divine. With this Ainsworth sets up the first modern king, one who denies spirituality and accepts the convenience of an amoral world. He is blind to the transcendent truth and leads England down a path that is devoid of any access to it by turning away from the Rome.
In order to link the first modern king back to the transcendent truth, Ainsworth chooses not to reconnect England back to Catholicism, but instead chooses an earlier route through the old folktale of Herne the Hunter. The term “folk” in its simplistic definition is the resident culture of a land that can be identified through its language and tales; however, in the Romantics’ use of the word it means the true essence of a people. Each folk had its own stories illuminating an ineffable truth, mapping out a mythic language that explained their understanding of morality. This myth was the access to transcendent truth. Romanticism claims that the folktale is a remnant of a folk’s original myth, and contains some element of connection between man and truth. Myth is transcendent truth personified, an expression of the ineffable. Ainsworth connects the Druid myth with the English folktale, strengthening Herne’s access to transcendent truth.

Herne’s legend predates the country of England, as noted in the description of the wedding altar as a “Druid pile of stones,” identifying his anthropological background as far back as King Arthur. In case this connection was too distant to identify with the contemporary Empirical English reader, Herne receives a chapter on his royal English legend attaching him to Richard II, the last legitimate king before Henry IV usurped the throne. Echoing his master in this ancient political struggle is Herne, who is rightfully the link between the people of England and transcendent truth, a position quickly becoming obliterated by the modernism of King Henry VIII.

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Herne’s connection with the ancient people of the land and the identity with England strengthened his tie with the folk. The Romantics idealized man close to his natural state, away from urban environments. The setting for Henry is never earthy. He is most commonly in his castle, or otherwise being transported in lavish style. When he does go out to hunt, it is only with the assistance of his foresters who emphasize to the reader that Henry is not in his natural state within the forest, unlike Herne who himself was a forester.

Wearing deer skin and antlers, Herne’s true self is as close to nature as the beasts.\textsuperscript{29} Henry VIII, meanwhile, wears jewels and luxurious clothing drenched in royal symbolism of red and ermine as is described in detail upon his entrance into the novel\textsuperscript{30}. The concept of luxury sabotaging the true need of the folk is picked up by Wagner in 1849, after which it becomes part of the nineteenth century discourse of the folk. But here Ainsworth is juxtaposing the earthy and lavish dress in order to magnify Henry’s disconnect from nature, and therefore the Romantic idea of truth.

Extensive underground tunnels prove Herne’s fluidity with the land, and are mirrored in the passageways and secret doors of Windsor Castle, itself a personality sympathetic to the folk. While Henry resides in its walls, it never acts hostile towards him, and therefore all he sees is a historic building similar to the lengthy depiction found in the third book “The History of the Castle.” The castle’s section of the book opens with a nostalgic memory of Arthur and a regret of losing the folk to the Empirical understanding of the building.

\textsuperscript{29} Ainsworth, William Harrison. \textit{Windsor Castle} (George Routledge and Sons, 1883) 7.
\textsuperscript{30} Ainsworth, William Harrison. \textit{Windsor Castle} (George Routledge and Sons, 1883) 28.
“Amid the gloom hovering over the early history of Windsor Castle appear the mighty phantoms of the renowned King Arthur and his knights, for whom, it is said, Merlin reared a magic fortress upon its heights, in a great hall whereof, decorated with trophies of war and of the chase, was placed the Round Table. But if the antique tale is now worn out, and no longer part of our faith, it is pleasant at least to record it, and surrendering ourselves for awhile to the sway of fancy, to conjure up the old enchanted castle on the hill, to people its courts with warlike and lovely forms, its forests with fays and giants, and its stream with beauteous and benignant sprites.”

The romantic description of Windsor’s grounds full of characters from folktales and nature pull out truths only found in fantasy. Drawing again upon the Arthurian romance, Ainsworth’s depiction of the castle embodies the ideal folk and the imposed history, Herne and Henry combined. Windsor Castle is where the modern England can meet again with its past, retracing the steps where it lost the connection with the land and truth and became merely an Empirical country.

Herne’s legend builds a character supernaturally fused with nature through the oak tree where he committed suicide. In this last unnatural act, Herne ties a gateway between the English people and their land through a twisted pastoral landscape. Printed with the novel were illustrations by Cruikshank, Johannot, and Delamotte, all with the approval of Ainsworth. The illustration of Herne’s Oak, representative of the folk, is a gnarly tree with mostly lifeless limbs and only a

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31 Ainsworth, William Harrison. *Windsor Castle* (George Routledge and Sons, 1883) 134.
few leaves grasping at its tips, barely clinging on to life as Windsor Castle stands bright behind it.\textsuperscript{32}

While frightening, the tree has a sublime appeal that escapes the strong and glorious nature of Henry in the distance. Ainsworth introduces us to the oak in the opening chapter, when Lord Surrey pauses at this “large, lightening-scathed and solitary oak, standing a little distance from him, attracted his attention,” immediately focusing on the last vestige of Romantic truth England has left and its unfortunate evil reputation.\textsuperscript{33}

Ainsworth highlights the numinous in Herne’s legend as a connection to transcendent truth. Ainsworth specifically uses the numinous to create a path to divine truth through Herne’s ghost. Just as Frankenstein’s monster is feared as evil, Herne is considered the source of evil in \textit{Windsor Castle}. His ghost haunts the grounds near where he committed suicide, sure signs of sin in the Christian faith. Ainsworth comments that society sees the folk as untrue in an Empirical

\textsuperscript{32} Ainsworth, William Harrison. \textit{Windsor Castle} (George Routledge and Sons, 1883) 7.
\textsuperscript{33} Ainsworth, William Harrison. \textit{Windsor Castle} (George Routledge and Sons, 1883) 7.
world, offering no access to true scientific fact, but containing the sublime which inexplicably invokes terror.

After spending pages on Herne’s legend, Ainsworth strangely changes it in a mere paragraph for his own narrative purposes, arranging Herne’s motivations for selling his soul not for his hunting skills but for the love of a mistress, making him a foil for Henry. History is enough to dictate Henry’s failing in Ainsworth’s novel, but it is interesting to note that the focus on the unlawful divorce for the conquest of a woman shadows the Catholic dogma dictating Adam and Eve’s original sin was intercourse.

Herne’s actions in the book, however, point towards that of justice, never committing murder. Henry, however, begins as a decent ruler with intentions of expunging the land of evil, but by the end hangs not only Herne’s men but beheads Anne Boleyn. In Cruikshank’s illustration “The Signal,” Herne, constantly having been called demonic throughout the text, points towards Windsor Castle as the seat of evil. Henry rides a white horse while Herne’s figure and steed are dark, Cruikshank toying with the stereotypes of good and evil.
By the end of the novel, the folk’s name is cleared through Herne by the realization that he is not the murderer in the text. His spiritual form frightens the reader, but his motives are against the evil in the physical world. Evil no longer is the folk which contains the unexplainable. It is instead the Empirical world, which has broken off form transcendent knowledge with Henry’s divorce and killed morality with Anne’s beheading.

While the folk does access transcendent truth, Ainsworth accepts that there is more than one bridge to spirituality, including the Christian faith, but that those bridges eventually fail. The nineteenth century discovered that while religion had elements of truth, it could become so dogmatic that it loses them. Theology, in its philosophical study of religion, becomes too systematic and loses its communion with truth. Christianity in its earliest and purest form was mythic and joined with the people just as folk once was, but theologians disconnected them with the authority of the church. Ainsworth uses Cardinal Wolsey’s infamous corruption as an understanding of the division of theology from religion. This separation keeps Wolsey from seeing the purely spiritual which can be found in his own daughter.

Mabel Lyndwood comes from the elemental woods, an orphan, deserted by her theological father. Her humble origins as a woodsman’s granddaughter embody the idea of spirituality, religion in its purest form, close to nature and the people. Feuerbach’s *Essence of Christianity* explains how religion in its truest form originates from man in his earliest form of self-knowledge. God is an object,
a projection, of man’s true essential self. Therefore the closer man is to his natural state; the closer he can be with the objection of himself or God.

The closest to nature in the novel are the woodsmen, and Mabel introduces herself as a daughter of a forest keeper who had a similar stag injury as Herne suffered. This misidentification is equally important than her true parentage. Mabel’s beauty seems to stem from her natural self, as her physical form is so pure it captures that projection of true religion. Wolsey, well aware he is Mabel’s father after a few words with her, declares, “You are the fairest maid of low degree I ever beheld.” His intended irony on her class becomes dramatic irony as the reader comes to understand her beauty has nothing to do with her rightful lineage but rather that spark of truth and divinity within her.

The relationship between Mabel and her legitimate father is first denied, a significant detail since the church had lost its spirituality. Henry’s favor is best won by satisfying his lustful desires, and Wolsey offers Mabel as a political strategy, placing man’s authority above God. If Henry is responsible as a modern king for creating a gap between the people and truth, then theology is equally guilty for failing as a bridge to God. Wolsey’s secularism denies him the sense to recognize Mabel as an incarnation of the divine element.

Though her father does not recognize that spark of truth in Mabel, Herne does. His identity with the folk is attracted to the truth, and if England were still in its primal state, the two could have been happily married. However Herne’s reign was over when Mabel’s predecessor passed away. When Mabel asks if Herne’s love is dead he replies, “Dead!...Thrice fifty years have flown since she dwelt...”

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upon the earth. The acorn which was then shed in the forest has grown into a lusty oak, while trees at that time in their pride have fallen and decayed away.”

Ever attached to nature, Herne admits his own loss of power with the generations of the trees. Herne’s reign being over, Mabel’s romantic destiny does not lie in the folk of the past, but rather one of the present.

The Romantics argued that England had moved on to a different time when myth needed to be recreated. The chaotic world needs myth to describe transcendent truth, and while expressed in previous generations through folk and religion, the nineteenth century could use art. Romantics focused on poiesis, or “making” of the world, as the root of poetry. Friedrich Schlegel described poetry as having the potential to remake the world through a new mythology.

“But the highest beauty, indeed the highest order is yet only that of chaos, namely of such a one that waits only for the touch of love to unfold as a harmonious world, of such a chaos as the ancient mythology and poetry were. For mythology and poetry are one and inseparable.”

Schlegel believed the poetry of the nineteenth century lacked a focal point, or a language in which to communicate the truth. If poetry were to write a new mythology, then the poems could “join one to the other” and form an infinite poem which makes order among chaos, accessing transcendent truth as the ancients did.

By writing Henry and Cardinal Wolsey as transgressors of religion, Ainsworth sympathizes with the idea that the modern world has lost its focal

35 Ainsworth, William Harrison. *Windsor Castle* (George Routledge and Sons, 1883) 263.
point. Poetry is Romanticism’s hope for forming that world again, and it would take the essence of poetry itself to harness Mabel’s truth. Our introduction to the novel is set in the pastoral grounds surrounding the castle, mimicking a Romantic poem itself, while a young man scribbles lines of poetry. Captain Bouchier approaches and asks, “What! Composing a vesper hymn, my Lord of Surrey?...You will rival Master Skelton, the poet-laureate, and your friend Sir Thomas Wyat, too, ere long,” immediately connecting religion and poetry. The line foreshadows the novel’s true hero, Wyat, as Henry and Herne offer no solution to the philosophical crisis Ainsworth is combating. Shelly in *A Defense of Poetry* writes,

> “Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present; the words which express what they understand not…Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.”

Wyat holds Shelly’s ideal within him and has the power to harmonize the chaotic world; he just needs to find a muse. At first he is distracted by Anne Boleyn, leaving the reader no faith in his poetic wisdom, but later corrects his affections with Mabel who soon receives the same due from Wyat as the Holy Grail did from King Arthur’s knights. This hierogamy, or spiritual marriage, is the hope for Ainsworth’s England. Wyat’s poetry could attempt the Schlegel’s call for a new mythology if he had Mabel at his side.

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When Wyat needs to escape Herne’s ground, it is Mabel who helps him escape, flipping the pattern of Herne’s constant deal-making with prisoners, elbowing her way into power. Upon the point of safety, Mabel’s narrow escape is interrupted by Henry upon under his disguise Dacre, meaning “demon.” With one devil coming at Mabel from the forest and another from within the castle, Mabel has no hope for uniting with Wyat. There’s no physical place for them to go.

Mabel’s body found “entangled among those water-weeds” alludes perhaps to Ophelia found drowned amidst the willow branches, calling on the loss of hope. Tristram insists on Mabel receiving a decent burial right before committing suicide himself, a topic much debated after the discovery of Ophelia due to the complications involving the sin of suicide. The Shakespearean imagery evokes a sense of deep sorrow which is appropriate in that the tragedy of the world has been set in the death of this young woman. Ainsworth’s bleak views are frightening on the philosophical level, leaving the world in a desolate place at the loss of such treasure as Mabel. While her relationship with Wyat had a chance to hold off the modern world, inevitably the divine spark within her is lost and the last we hear of her poet is in scandal.

It is in this moment that the philosophical crisis for Ainsworth occurs. Henry can be blamed for his modern monarchy which took over the church, and it is ultimately his lack of morality that banishes the hope of England reconnecting with the spiritual realm. Henry stands apart while his love is being beheaded on his command as Herne points towards Windsor Castle, placing the authority on Henry. Outlining the folk, religion, and poetry as access to transcendent truth,

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Ainsworth blames this modern Empirical idea that the physical world can dictate our actions as ultimately failing the Arthurian romance.

Victorian England battled Empiricism with German Romantic ideals, pushing the arts and appreciating the folk. In fact when Herne’s Oak burned down in the nineteenth century, Queen Victoria had it an oak replanted in his name, having herself been educated in Romanticism from Prince Albert. Ainsworth saw the attempt was failing, though his sympathies lied deeply with the Romantics. The novel ends with one final picture: the Royal Standard, only flown when the monarch resides in the castle, falls crumpled on the bottom of its flagpole. The Lion Rampant, symbol of royalty and valor, points downwards.
Conclusion

The Gothic has been called a sub-genre, a collection of chilling narratives under the form of the novel. Instead, it is its own form. From its inception, the Gothic novel combined the Medieval Romance and the novel. The essence of the novel is enigmatic, and Lukács’ theory of “transcendental homelessness” truly captures it. Existing in the post-Medieval world revolving around man rather than truth, Walpole chose to create a new literature that could embody the truth once known to man. He could not deny the reality of modern thought, and instead created the Gothic, embodying the modern dilemma of “transcendental homelessness” with the Medieval exploration for divine knowledge.

Walpole set up a system of divine justice, separated from religion. Feuerbach later wrote of separating Religion, the organized church that would constantly be under attack for corruption, from Theology, the idea of a personal spirituality which seeks the truth. Walpole separated Religion from divine justice, proposing that a system of morality existed beyond human explanation, one which should be feared, a strong contrast with the eighteenth century’s opinion of the church.

To do this, the Gothic novel had to express the numinous. Where Burke once studied the effects of the sublime, Walpole considered the cause. What man feared was the awe of God that the church once personified. Now embodied in the supernatural, the numinous created the divine justice so desperately lacking in a humanistic society. Rational thought could explain the modern world, but it could
not explain morality, therefore an element beyond rational explanation, the
supernatural, was necessary to communicate the numinous.

The Gothic proved versatile in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,
allowing the popular philosophies to be attacked for separating man from
morality. Radcliffe’s target against Rationalism attacked the very philosophy
Walpole did with deadly precision. The foundation of Rationalism, that man can
improve his society through the superiority of his own reason, is a tempting vice
that cannot support morality. As Radcliffe points out, it is reason which enables
the horror of war and corruption. Since this philosophy was replaced by
Empiricism which took Rationalism a step further, erasing the need for social
reform, the Gothic novel was once again a battleground for rebuttal as in
Frankenstein.

It was Ainsworth who so clearly depicted the core of the problem, that the
loss of truth came with the egotism of modern man who claimed he could replace
God. The battleground of the Gothic will supply a place for the numinous until
divine justice wins a victory over modern philosophy.
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