The Gothic Wanderer:
From Transgression to Redemption

Gothic Literature from 1794—present

Tyler R. Tichelaar, Ph.D.

Foreword by Marie Mulvey-Roberts

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To all those in this modern age who wander, feeling lost:
My fellow wanderers,
May you find your reward and your rest.

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To my parents and brother, who did not understand but permitted my early desire to have a dusty bedroom so it would feel like a haunted house, my wearing plastic vampire teeth, or my constantly quoting lines from my record *A Story of Dracula, The Wolfman, and Frankenstein.*

Finally, to my literary ancestors, the great writers of the Gothic, especially:

Mrs. Radcliffe, Fanny Burney, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, and Bram Stoker

My early and best teachers of what makes good writing.

Foreword

The classic Gothic novel is stocked with villains, swooning heroines, rescuing heroes and banditti, but there is no character quite as compelling as that of the eternal wanderer. The idea of an individual outliving generations and witnessing important events throughout history has always been intriguing. Ranging even further than Woody Allen's Zelig, who keeps popping up at key historical moments during the twentieth century, he can boast with the best and the worst of them: "I was there." Just like the wanderer, this book takes a chronological path to span centuries, step by step, chapter by chapter. Having entered Gothic literature in the form of the Wandering Jew in Matthew Lewis's *The Monk*, this figure, as Tyler R. Tichelaar shows, continues to wander into other novels in various guises from the Rosicrucian sage, through the Female Everywoman, to those of Bram Stoker and Stephenie Meyers' vampires.

As a not-so-distant relative of Dr. Faustus, these Gothic characters invariably choose to become monsters by consenting to the gift of bodily eternal life, though some have immortality thrust upon them. The Romantics cast their wanderers as relatively benign figures, but here we see the way in which they wander out of the trammels of Romantic convention into Gothic spaces. In common with the captain of the ghost ship, *The Flying Dutchman*, another famous wanderer whose voyages circumnavigate the globe, the entire earth becomes the terrain of such wanderings, as well as the stage for an eternity of suffering, a microcosm of the human condition.

The Gothic wanderer occupies a perplexing domain in space and time. As a being outside nature whose protracted existence is an aberration, his timelessness seems to cut him off from history, in the sense that he remains always outside it. Marked out in some way, he has become the ultimate embodiment of the other, whose destiny is to walk alone. His very monstrosity is a symptom of his rejection. This state of exile means that the wanderer is always on the edge and at the edge, a monster of the in-between and as such, the supreme outsider. Indeed, he reflects back to the Gothic, its own fascination with borders and transgression.

This book delves into the subjectivity of the Gothic wanderer in flight from self, on an endless trajectory of looking towards the end, even though his unnatural existence is validated by those, including the reader, who must look backwards into his past. Part of the mortal immortal's teleological quest lies in mending the fractured self. Within this refreshing

study, Tichelaar adroitly plots the rocky road from transgression to transcendence, rocky as when, for example, the redemptive treatment characterizing versions of the legend meted out by Victorian novelists meets resistance at the fin de siècle.

The wanderer is a repository of history, a storehouse of memory for the human race, and yet, he carries the burden of being blasted by the divine. The punishment for transgression is to be denied what Derrida calls, the gift of death. But as *The Gothic Wanderer* reveals, not all peripatetic immortals regard eternal life as a curse. By tracing the footprints of the Gothic wanderer, from those of the transgressor to the coveted moments of redemption and beyond to the more modern status of super-hero, Tichelaar demonstrates the power of the Gothic wanderer as an allegorical figure, with whom everyone can identify. This perennial and uncanny Everyman undoubtedly deserves the time and space which this invaluable book-length study has accorded him.

Marie Mulvey-Roberts
Bristol, UK
Author of *Gothic Immortals*

Introduction

Our Long Love Affair with the Gothic

While yet a boy I sought for ghosts, and sped
Through many a listening chamber, cave and ruin,
And starlight wood, with fearful steps pursuing
Hopes of high talk with the departed dead.
I called on poisonous names with which our youth is fed;
I was not heard—I saw them not—
When musing deeply on the lot
Of life, at that sweet time when winds are wooing
All vital things that wake to bring
News of birds and blossoming,—
Sudden, thy shadow fell on me;
I shrieked, and clasped my hands in ecstasy!
— Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty"

I love the Gothic. Most of us do, even if we don't know exactly what the term "Gothic" means. It may mean different things to all of us, yet those things are closely related. Some of us might think of the Goth look where teenagers wear all black. Others might think of Gothic cathedrals. And a smaller percentage of us might think about classic Gothic literature—the great eighteenth and nineteenth century novels of Mrs. Radcliffe, Mary Shelley, Bram Stoker, and several others.

We love the Gothic partly because we have a fascination with being scared. I love to be scared—I don't go for the gory horror films of today, but I love suspense and the greatest Gothic literature builds up such suspense. But more importantly, Gothic literature reveals much about who we are, what we fear, and to what we aspire.

I was always fascinated with the Gothic—commonly called horror, or simply, when I was growing up in the 1970s and 1980s, what was "scary." I didn't know the term Gothic and wouldn't know it until well into high school, but I knew the Munsters, the Addams Family, Casper the Friendly Ghost, Broom-Hilda the Witch, and countless other characters in popular culture from that time who were often watered down children's versions of the Gothic.

I remember the "Creature Feature" film being shown Saturday afternoons on TV50 from Detroit, and I loved *Love at First Bite* (1979) starring George Hamilton as Dracula—when it was broadcast on TV for the first time, my brother and I had a big fight over the TV (we only had one in the house in those days) because it was aired opposite *Yogi's First Christmas*, which he wanted to watch.

I was the proud owner of the Weebles Haunted House complete with Weebles that "wobble but they don't fall down"—including the witch with a removable pointy hat, a glow-in-the dark ghost, two Weeble children to be scared, secret panels, trapped doors, and a treasure chest with bats inside. All of it scary but wonderful!

In fourth grade, I was Dracula for Halloween—I remember still the thrill of running so my cape would flap in the wind, and I can still taste the plastic vampire teeth. Nor did I ever miss going through a Haunted House at the fair, and my friends and I commonly played haunted house, turning our bedrooms or the family room into a mansion of monsters and ghosts. Again, I was always Dracula.

And perhaps best of all, I owned the wonderfully dramatic record *The Story of Dracula, the Wolfman and Frankenstein* from Power Records. This fabulous 33-$^{1/3}$ record came with a read along book in graphic novel form (we called them comic books back then) and it combined into one dramatic tale the stories of its title characters. I played this record over and over again and still have my copy today. I constantly quoted it to others, including the pivotal scene when the werewolf (oddly not the Wolfman but Vincent von Frankenstein's girlfriend Erika—Wolfwoman, I guess) attacks the Count, causing him to become enraged and reveal himself by declaring, "You dare!! You dare lay your paws on me! On me?! Low beast, you'll die for this, die at the hands of the Prince of Darkness…FOR I AM DRACULA!" Recently, when I was working on this introduction, I dug out the record to engage in nostalgia and left it on my coffee table. My brother came over to visit and saw the record there and rolled his eyes. When I asked whether he wanted to listen to it, he said, "No, I never want to have to listen to that record again." Apparently, I played it one—or maybe fifty—too many times.

But all these details could be dismissed as children's games and just good fun (despite the fanatics who would ban *The Wizard of Oz*, or more recently, the *Harry Potter* books and films because they contain depictions of witchcraft). Only, I think on some innocent level that I could not have articulated when I was ten years old, I was even then searching for meaning—to understand the mystery of life, even if it were only the simplified notion of good and evil. I was a very religious child who had read the entire Bible by fifth grade, loved to play at being various characters from the Bible—mostly Moses or Jacob—and wanted to grow up to be a priest. So if I were such a "religious nut"—as one friend called me—how do I explain my fascination with horror and the supernatural?

And how explain my curiosity over an activity that countless children have attempted over the years? Yes, I am one of those many children who locked himself in the bathroom in the dark, stared into the bathroom mirror, and then tried to find out whether it was true that if I could say, "Bloody Murder!" one hundred times without blinking, the devil would appear in the mirror. But I was never able not to blink before I could say it one hundred times, or I would inevitably lose count.

Still, the quest for forbidden knowledge was strong in me at an early age. The fascination with Good and Evil thrilled me like it does many children, but I wanted proof that the supernatural forces of Good and Evil truly existed. Years later, when I discovered Percy Shelley's lines quoted above, I was stunned by how perfectly he captured what I felt, his experiences matching mine of nearly two centuries later. And like Shelley, I eventually grew to love Intellectual Beauty.

As I reached my teen years, I discovered literature, having always loved to read, and soon novels like *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* and the works of Charles Dickens and Jane Austen became my primary fascination. It would be Jane Austen who really converted me into being a disciple of the Gothic. When I was about sixteen, I listened to an audio book version of *Northanger Abbey* with an introduction that explained the novel's purpose as a satire of the Gothic novels, particularly of Mrs. Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). Of course, I had to read Mrs. Radcliffe. Her novel had to be special ordered from the bookstore and although it was well over 600 pages, I devoured it in a week, reading it every free minute before and after school. The prose was beautiful, the suspense fabulous, the Gothic world frighteningly fascinating. I went on to read the rest of Radcliffe's novels while I was still a teenager as well as reading other Gothic classics like Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786). *Dracula* (1897) and *Frankenstein* (1818) followed, and in college when I discovered the Romantic poets, I could put all these books into context.

What was it about these books that thrilled me so much? Why did *The Mysteries of Udolpho* seem like such a wonderfully pleasant book to read, as well as a suspenseful page-turner? What about *Dracula* made me afraid to go to sleep, yet want to read it again—and enjoy the original novel so much more than the film versions of it—save for Coppola's fabulous *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992)? I don't know that I asked myself that question until the late 1990s when my fascination with literature and my desire to be a novelist led me to being a Ph.D. candidate in the literature program at Western Michigan University. The result would be my writing a dissertation titled *The Gothic Wanderer: From Transgression to Redemption*, which has now been expanded into this book. And I wasn't the only enthusiastic student of the Gothic—at least two of my fellow doctoral candidates at the time also wrote about the Gothic in their dissertations.

Of all the subjects a person could write a dissertation on, why did I choose nineteenth century Gothic novels? I also loved Dickens, the Arthurian legend, Anthony Trollope, eighteenth century epistolary novels—why choose the Gothic over one of these topics? The reason was because I could relate to the Gothic; it resonated with me in ways those other great literary works did not at that time in my life. And I wanted to write about why it resonated with me, why I thought the Gothic mattered so much to people—I wanted to write what was called a "reader-response" dissertation, but I was dissuaded from it by my professors—told it would not be good for my academic career.

Now that I have long since left academia behind, I can straightforwardly say that academics too often forget that while they are the keepers of the culture, in order to pass that culture on, they have to show people why that culture matters—how it still relates to them. While at Western Michigan University, I had the opportunity to co-teach a class on the British Survey of Literature with Dr. Stephanie Gauper. During that class, she commented to me about my teaching, "The students like you because you make them understand how the literature is relevant to their lives. Most teachers don't do that." I always felt that was one of the greatest compliments I ever received. And while, in my dissertation, I made the mistake not to explain why the Gothic mattered and was still relevant to our lives, in this book, written for a wider audience, I wish to remedy that by stating that the Gothic is very relevant to our lives, that it speaks to us today, two hundred years after the great Gothic novels were written because what the people in the decades following the French Revolution and during the Victorian period dreamt, feared, longed for, and sought, is still what we dream, fear, long for, and seek today. The Gothic is perhaps the most relevant piece of literature for the twenty-first century, and its continuation in the novels of Stephen King and Anne Rice, the popular books and films of the *Twilight* series, and the countless vampire books, films, and television series being produced each year, testify to this fact.

But how does it speak to us? Why is it still relevant to us? Let me give one more example from my own history to make my point.

In the fall of 1995, I moved to Kalamazoo, Michigan, in the same state as my hometown of Marquette, but nearly five hundred miles from home—in fact on a different peninsula—I might as well have been in another state, in some ways, in another country. I had culture shock in Kalamazoo—it was the big city compared to what I was used to—I didn't know the people, the city streets, the weather, the mindset of those people. I was isolated, lonely, and downright miserable in Kalamazoo, wondering why I had ever made the decision to leave my hometown, but realizing the job market in Upper Michigan offered nothing for me, so I would have to go on to finish my degree, to become an English professor, and to take a job wherever one might exist—meaning I would never get to return home.

I felt even more depressed and despairing when I looked at the future. If not for good friends and family and a telephone to talk to them on, I never would have gotten through those years. I would have defined these feelings as homesickness if I had not discovered a better word for it. That word I learned that first semester at Western Michigan University while taking a course on the Brontë sisters.

I decided in that class to write my final paper on the theme of colonialism in the Brontës' novels. In my research, I came across the term "displacement" to describe the African character in one of the Brontës' juvenilia. Instantly, I understood that word as perfectly describing my own feelings and experience. I was displaced. I was convinced that while I loved teaching and studying literature, I would never get to go home—I felt depressed when not terrorized by the thought. The job market in academia was such that it was unlikely I would ever find a tenure-track job at Northern Michigan University in Marquette. I foresaw myself moving from one university to another, always separated from my family and friends.

I stuck it out to finish my Ph.D. but my feelings of displacement did not get better. The job market—academia itself—was largely a nightmare—the MLA convention like a massive haunted house of pale young men in black suits, looking like blood-drained humans, fearful of interviewers yet hoping to be hired for tenure-track jobs. When I did find a job, it was a lowly one-year instructor position at Clemson University where I was given the equally "blood-draining" task of teaching up to 107 students per semester in a variety of composition and British literature survey courses (one literature and three composition sections). I had, consequently, upwards of five hundred papers per semester to grade and was paid $24,000 a year. And I had to do it in a hellishly hot climate I hated, while again feeling displaced. I have no doubt many people love Kalamazoo and South Carolina and I do not wish to disparage those places—my point is that I was unhappy and felt like a Gothic wanderer in them. Equally, we are all shaped by our individual preferences, likes and dislikes, and we all have different levels of tolerance. Here in Marquette, Michigan, I'm sure many people find our long winters and 200+ inches of snow per winter equally hellish, as roads between six foot snowbanks become like Gothic labyrinths, and bone-chilling temperatures seem like undeserving torture. Any place can be interpreted as "Gothic" if we so choose because Hell is in the mind—and the Gothic is nothing if not an exploration of human psychology and what we fear, as well as how we choose to let guilt and fear color our perspectives—one man's transgression may be another man's freedom.

And while my personal example may not seem nightmarish to most, it was like torture to me at the time, and it was in the midst of that nightmare that I began my doctoral dissertation. I chose to write about the Gothic wanderer because I felt myself to be like a Gothic wanderer,

displaced and wandering through the mysterious maze of academia and the academic job market. In the chapters that follow, while I will discuss the Gothic novels themselves without commentary on how their themes relate to our lives today—something I don't doubt my readers can figure out for themselves, let me here briefly list a few examples of how these Gothic wanderer figures speak to who we—men and women, young and old, rich and poor, from all races and religions—are today, and who we have always been.

The Gothic's popularity arose at the time of the French Revolution as people questioned the legitimacy of their government—the monarchy—as well as the governments that replaced it, and the entire social order and its institutions, especially organized religion. Paranoia and conspiracy theories were common—our political concerns have not changed much today and continue to be reflected in our fiction. Just as the early Gothic novels theorized that certain secret societies were manipulating the French Revolution, today, we are no less fascinated by conspiracy theories—whether it be Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* with its alleged revelation of the Catholic Church's cover-up of the lost bloodline of Christ's children via Mary Magdalene (the Gothic has always loved to pick on the Catholic Church), or beliefs that the government is withholding information from us about everything from terrorists to UFOs. In the twenty-first century, the U.S. Government has even been accused by some of staging the 9/11 terrorist attacks as an excuse to invade Iraq.

Concerns about the patriarchal system, legitimate children, and the sanctity of the family were common in early Gothic novels—how much more today when divorce is prevalent and children are frequently born outside of marriage, mothers take men to court and have DNA paternity tests given to verify who a child's father may be, while in politics we hear about the need to return to "family values."

The Wandering Jew is one of the key figures in the Gothic, and although we may not be cursed to wander like him, our jobs and the economy often force us to move to unfamiliar places, to find employment in sectors we feel uncomfortable with, to experience displacement. At the same time, the Wandering Jew is a metaphor for the plight of the Jewish people. The effects of the Holocaust—a horror the nineteenth century Gothic novelists never could have imagined—still haunt us, and the Jewish people still struggle with prejudice and violence directed against them, even after having a homeland established in Israel.

The Rosicrucian Gothic wanderer is obsessed with finding the secret to eternal life. Are we any less obsessed with it today when we value youthfulness, and when studies predict that half of Americans born in the late twentieth century will live to see age one hundred? The Gothic fascination with life-extension continues for us today.

The Gothic concern with gambling is no less relevant today. Gambling in Gothic literature is viewed as a transgression, a way to achieve wealth

to advance oneself in society, and consequently, it usually results in destruction for the gambler and his family. Today, gambling is an even bigger problem than it was two centuries ago. We constantly hear tales of lottery winners who waste their millions, only to become bankrupts. We know of people who invest in the stock market, or worse, get taken advantage of in Ponzi schemes, only to lose everything. We continually worry about the economy, and most of us continue to have financial difficulties or an unhealthy relationship with money, while longing for wealth that we falsely believe will solve all our problems.

Working conditions became a Gothic concern with the rise of the Industrial Revolution. In Dickens' day, horrendous working conditions were being fought against. In the early twentieth century, the rise of unions helped to solve many of those problems, establishing an eight-hour work day and the weekend. But how many of us today find ourselves working long hours? What industry did to the Victorians, modern technology has done to us, making us connected 24/7 and perhaps improving communication but also resulting in expectations to work constantly.

Perhaps no novelist in all of literature has been more visionary or speaks more to our time than the Gothic novelist Mary Shelley. The issues in *Frankenstein* are the very issues of stem cell research, cloning, and the other quandaries of science we continue to argue over today. The need for responsible science is now more important than ever. In *The Last Man*, Shelley introduced the fear of a worldwide plague which today remains a terrifying possibility. Shelley's vision of the future is frighteningly accurate in many ways. In recent decades, the scare of AIDS and the bird and swine flu have made people fear worldwide human extinction as a possibility. The possibility of nuclear war and biological warfare has made it possible that man could someday be responsible for his own extinction, unintentionally, or intentionally. The recent film *Contagion* (2011) is just one of many works that speak to these fears.

In the Victorian period, a religious crisis arose with the introduction of theories of evolution. Organized religion began slowly to lose its hold over people. Those shifts have only continued to the present day. The understanding that we are spiritual beings having a human experience has become a mantra in recent decades. More and more people have quit subscribing to organized religion but come to describe themselves as spiritual, and this desire to connect with our spiritual (supernatural) selves has led many down less traditional Western paths, including to eastern religions, beliefs in reincarnation, listening to entities who channel their messages through humans, an emphasis upon "the Goddess," and the creation of new religions such as Scientology. In many cases, a general move away from institutional Christianity has not led to atheism but what might be termed a spiritual reawakening that allows humanity, if not the

autonomy from God that Milton's Satan sought, then at least the "faith, hope, and self-esteem" that Percy Shelley dreamt of for humanity.

The vampire is the nineteenth century Gothic wanderer figure who has remained most popular in the twenty-first century and continues to be reinvented. Despite his "evil" nature, he has become glamorous and attractive; the lines between good and evil have been blurred; we now have dark heroes and sympathetic villains. The continuing popularity of the vampire two centuries after he was first introduced to English readers speaks to how much the Gothic still influences our lives today.

While the bulk of this study will cover nineteenth century British Gothic fiction, I will offer in the epilogue some insight into how the themes of that period's Gothic literature have continued and been transformed in twentieth and twenty-first century literature, some still noticeably Gothic, such as Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series and Anne Rice's vampire novels, while other influences are hard-pressed to be termed "Gothic" but still have Gothic elements or owe a debt to the Gothic, including such popular figures as Tarzan and Batman.

The Gothic wanderer is still with us today; he has lost a lot of his angst over the centuries, but the figure still fascinates us. This study will hopefully help to explain a little of why we love the Gothic—because we discover in the Gothic wanderer our very selves.

Tyler R. Tichelaar, Ph.D. and Gothic Wanderer
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Marquette, Michigan